Tanya Domi:
Hello, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project recorded at the CUNY Graduate Center. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating groundbreaking research, assisting New Yorkers and informing the world. The Venezuelan Columbia migrant crisis refers to a diplomatic and humanitarian crisis that occurred in mid 2015, following the shooting of three Venezuelan soldiers on the Venezuelan Colombian border that left them injured. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's response declaring a state of emergency closing the border to Columbia indefinitely and deporting thousands of Colombians who live near the border struck fear in thousands of other Colombians living within Venezuela, resulting in mass immigration from the country, and creating a crisis involving separated families and Colombians who sought emergency shelter and food. Decisions and actions carried out by President Maduro were questioned by human rights groups, the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States.
Because of a growing economic crisis during the Maduro government, it developed into a recession creating shortages that worsened, and the inflation rate rose to the highest in Venezuelan history, exceeding 100%. Lawlessness dominated near the border, and smugglers were able to traffic commodities out of the country. But Colombians did not play a major role in this phenomenon, rather as reported by the Washington Post at the time, it was the policies of the Maduro government and its corrupted army officers. Today's guest is PhD student Andres Besserer Reyes has become completely immersed in this contemporary history through a research project led by Graduate Center sociologist Robert Courtney Smith, along with several other co-authors here at the Graduate Center and on the ground in Columbia. Andres Besserer Reyes is pursuing his PhD in political science at the CUNY Graduate Center. His dissertation research focuses on a comparative study of Colombian and US immigration regimes and the effects that distinct forms of regulation have on immigrant life trajectories.
He has published research on COVID-19's impact on immigrant communities in the United States, Mexican overseas, enfranchisement, and the importance of legal driving for immigrants in New York State among other research. Andres was a graduate teaching fellow at City College where he taught world politics, politics of immigration and political systems of Latin America. He holds a master's degree in democracy and comparative politics from University College London, and a bachelor's in international relations from El Colegio de México. Before graduate school, Andres worked as a policy research advisor in Mexico's National Electoral Institute. He currently co-host The Ballot Box, a podcast covering elections around the world. Welcome to The Thought Project, Andres Besserer Reyes.

Andres Besserer:
Hi. Thanks for the invitation.

Tanya Domi:
You have been involved in research and advocacy in your PhD project, and I want our listeners to know it's a little long the title, however it is entitled, Canceled Citizenship, Stolen Rights, Multi-Dimensional and Preventable Harm Caused by Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality Through the Annulment of Civil Registry and the Cancellation of Citizen Identity Cards in Columbia, the Country. How did you become interested in developing this into a PhD research project? And you have several co-authors, including our esteemed colleague, Robert Courtney Smith, who's also a really good friend and has been on this program, and through your work with him, applied not only his analysis and he also served as an advisor, but you used the principles and methods of public sociology. Who else joined in this project?

Andres Besserer:
Okay, so thank you for the question. This project is actually, it's a a spinoff from my dissertation project. So the dissertation, it's a comparison between Columbian and US immigration regimes. Essentially how both countries both document and undocument their immigrant population. It's a study of how Colombia, which received about 5% of its population over five years, created one of the most interesting world experiments in basically providing a route to documentation for all of the Venezuelans who arrived in its territory, while the United States has blocked access to documentation except for a narrow portion of immigrants who are already here. Within that larger project, as I was doing pre-dissertation field work in Columbia and working with five Colombian legal nonprofits who specialize in the human rights protection of people in mobility or in transit, so migrants, I discovered that there was a curious case of 40,000 binational Venezuelan Colombians who had been suddenly stripped of their citizenship without them knowing about it.

And these lawyers were following several of the cases, and they were actively trying to begin strategic litigation both at the regional and at the court level. So I met them through my fieldwork, and I realized that there was an opportunity to employ the tools of public sociology and some of the theoretical methodological tools that I had learned through my PhD program here at the Graduate Center that could assist the lawyers and the nonprofits in their strategic litigation.

Tanya Domi:
So you saw that and you acted on that.

Andres Besserer:
That's right. Yeah.

Tanya Domi:
And not everybody would act, I just want to say that. So I compliment you because we're talking about the lives of a lot of people who've just been completely turned upside down.

Andres Besserer:
Yeah, that's right. Thank you. So Seawright Mills, the famous American sociologist, talks about the sociological imagination, which is the way that people in the field or researchers who are looking at individual cases of injustice or inequality can abstract to more systemic understanding of what's going on. And I think people who are educated in field work and in ethnography and who have a ethos of the use of knowledge for the public good in the field-

Tanya Domi:
Exactly.

Andres Besserer:
... might notice that there's actually an intervention that can be done using social sciences in order to improve people's lives.

Tanya Domi:
Well, this is a great example, and we are going to promote this a great deal, and I think the sociology and political science programs should be very pleased with the work that you've done here. But this became a group project. So tell me about some of your colleagues that joined.
Andres Besserer:
Sure. So I was working with the legal nonprofits in Columbia to understand processes of documentation and undocumentation in that country. In my conversation with them, I learned about the case of people being stripped of their citizenship, and I first started collaborating with the lawyer at the Universidad del Rosario, which is a pretty large university in Bogota. She used to run the legal clinic for, it was a free legal clinic for people who had migration issues. And then she invited some of her colleagues, people who were running other legal clinics, and I reached out to a couple of other organizations in Bogota to see if they also had cases of people who had been stripped of their citizenship, and they did. So these are a group of quite young, really motivated, incredibly brilliant and committed human rights lawyers in Columbia.

Tanya Domi:
And they're in Columbia.

Andres Besserer:
They're all in Columbia, they're all in Bogota. One of the interesting things about a country like Columbia, which is partially why I'm studying it for my PhD dissertation, is that it only had 50,000 registered foreigners in 2015, and it now has over 2.7 million foreigners. So it didn't really have much of a corpus of laws and practices around immigration law. So the lawyers I cooperated with are in a way at the forefront of creating the legal infrastructure that will govern immigration.

Tanya Domi:
And probably this will produce jurisprudence that's going to shape the future of migration.

Andres Besserer:
Correct. That's our hope that eventually courts in Columbia will make it much harder for people to be stripped of their citizenship, especially that they won't get stripped in the way that they were in this case.

Tanya Domi:
So just for our listeners to know, and I read your executive summary, obviously, that there were 980,000 people from Columbia that had returned from Venezuela, and they had been living in Venezuela, and as you said in your opening remarks that 40,000 people were denationalized, correct?

Andres Besserer:
Correct.

Tanya Domi:
So I think this is a really good point where you should explain to our listeners, explain the context of why so many Colombians were living in Venezuela, and this phenomenon of, in particular as your report indicates that these binational couples were really targeted by the Colombian government through their register and denationalizing them.

Andres Besserer:
So Columbia is traditionally a country of emigration. So far more Colombians have left the territory for other countries than foreigners have gone to live into Columbia. It's gone through a really interesting transformation where now it's a country of immigration as well, and not only a country of emigration. So it shares a long border with Venezuela. And Venezuela was one of the most prosperous countries in South America while Columbia lived through a very extended period of very bloody civil conflict and economic decline. And so since around the end of the second World War to the 1990s, and even into the early 2000s, many Colombians left, most of them forcibly displaced by violence or by dire economic need, to many countries in the world chief among which was Venezuela, it was a relatively prosperous country. Colombians settled in Venezuela. There was long or medium term migration of Colombians into Venezuela, and either them or their children who are Colombian citizens by the Colombian constitution and have full rights as Colombian citizens. Many of them then began to return from Venezuela to Columbia as Venezuela experienced multi-level crisis, both economic-

Tanya Domi:
And political.

Andres Besserer:
... Political-

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Andres Besserer:
... in terms of security. So many Venezuelans have moved out of Venezuela. There's around seven million immigrants of Venezuelan nationality.

Tanya Domi:
Nationality. Wow.

Andres Besserer:
One million of which were dual nationals of Columbia and Venezuela, or they had a claim to that.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah, very close. Yes.

Andres Besserer:
Exactly. So since 2016, about, as you said, about close to a million binational have returned to Columbia and have either gotten their citizenship papers or they already had them when they were there. Now the national registrar, it's an independent agency. It doesn't depend on any of the three classical powers of the executive, the legislative or the judicial branch.

Tanya Domi:
It's an administrative agency.
Andres Besserer:
Correct.

Tanya Domi:
But that has legal force, obviously.

Andres Besserer:
It does. It does. It's a very powerful-

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Andres Besserer:
... agency, and it's in charge of civil registries and also of the upkeeping of the national identity card in Columbia, which is a really important document. Unlike the United States, Columbia has a unified identity policy, so everyone over the age of 16 gets an identity card.

Tanya Domi:
Gets a card.

Andres Besserer:
Correct.

Tanya Domi:
That's right. This is similarly practiced in Europe, in many European countries.

Andres Besserer:
That's right. Yeah. It's very similar to other European countries'.

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Andres Besserer:
... identity policy.

Tanya Domi:
Yes.

Andres Besserer:
And if you're a Colombian citizen, you can obtain that card. One of the interesting things about the Columbia state in general is that it adapted to receiving a lot of immigrants from Venezuela, and it's made several of the bureaucratic red tape slightly more flexible for them. Among these decisions was the registrar's decision to allow for people to apply or to activate their Colombian citizenship through
the presentation of two witnesses instead of getting a notarized birth certificate. So Colombian citizens who were born in Venezuela or who had resided there for a long time in Colombia could present their birth certificate and two witnesses, and that was completely legal. Although that policy ended in 2021.

Tanya Domi:
When this return happened.

Andres Besserer:
The return had already happened, and that was the measure-

Tanya Domi:
And the processing.

Andres Besserer:
Exactly.

Tanya Domi:
Processing.

Andres Besserer:
Then the registrar began a very odd policy of reviewing people who had sought Columbian citizenship, or who had registered for Columbia citizenship at least 30 days after they were born. So these are technically called extemporaneous naturalization processes, these are called extemporaneous registration. So basically that you weren't registered at the time of your birth, and that could happen because you were born in another country-

Tanya Domi:
In a third country. In a third country.

Andres Besserer:
... of Colombian parents. But obviously what this did was it would actually put in the registrar's crosshairs people who were part of this return migration, this wave of return migration. Now, there were several legal flaws to the ways in which the registrar then proceeded to strip people of their nationality, to deprive them of their nationality in such a way that in the report we characterize it, along with other civil society who studied this in Columbia, as an arbitrary form of deprivation of nationality, which is a really serious process.

Tanya Domi:
So indeed, your report found that there were a number of legal violations including due process, and that's what you're pointing out right now.

Andres Besserer:
Correct. That's it. That's the most egregious of all the faults-
Tanya Domi:
And these are quite arbitrary. And they ignored, many of the people that presented two witnesses, and they stopped acknowledging that criteria and they just ignored it. They dismissed it. Correct?

Andres Besserer:
That's right. So one of the main issues is that the legal document on which people lost their nationality was not individualized. So due process rights would require for the administrative authority to issue a written statement per person who lost their nationality so that they could detail the reasons why that person had some issue with the registrar.

Tanya Domi:
And your report found that these were very large files, like up to 400 people would be in a single case. That is crazy.

Andres Besserer:
It's absolutely wrong that, that would happen.

Tanya Domi:
And it's legally incorrect.

Andres Besserer:
Absolutely, totally. Because it disempowers citizens from understanding what was wrong with their file, if anything was actually wrong with it to begin with. That was one of the major flaws. The other one was that citizens didn't receive notifications of the beginning of this procedure. They weren't even aware that there was something apparently wrong with the filing of their citizenship papers.

Tanya Domi:
They were just doing what they thought they should do.

Andres Besserer:
Exactly. They were going about their lives, and in fact, through the research for the report, what we found is a lot of people learned that they had issues in the worst way possible, which is when they had a rudinary interaction with the police. The police took their identity card, scanned the number or the barcode, and then took them to prison for identity-

Tanya Domi:
They flagged them. They flagged them.

Andres Besserer:
They were flagged-

Tanya Domi:
In the system.
Andres Besserer:
They were flagged for identity fraud, and they spent up to 36 hours in jail awaiting a judge that in all of the cases where we interviewed people, the judge never showed up. So they were let go after 36 hours, which is in compliance with Columbian law. The interviews they're really shocking because it felt really like Kafkaesque was live in Bogota in the 21st century. People go about their day, they don't think anything's wrong with them, and then a very normal interaction with the police, because in Colombia there's weird practice where especially men get stopped by the police. It's like stop and frisk. It's still going on.

Tanya Domi:
Columbia style.

Andres Besserer:
Columbia style.

Tanya Domi:
So I just want to ask you, we'll get into these cases, but I wanted to ask you, it's very clear that the government was targeting these binational couples. Why do you think they did this? Because they had an opportunity to keep people out, or they chose to target the binational people because they didn't want them? And you point out how it became so arbitrary, but clearly somebody in the government made a decision that we're going to do this.

Andres Besserer:
First of all, I would say it was not the executive branch. So the president at the time, and his advisors and his ministries weren't involved in this. It was the registrar and the registrar's office who-

Tanya Domi:
They acted independently of the government?

Andres Besserer:
They have a degree of independence from the government, which is-

Tanya Domi:
That's significant.

Andres Besserer:
Yeah. Yeah.

Tanya Domi:
It's quite significant.

Andres Besserer:
Yeah. It's an administrative structure. It's a legal structure that should isolate the registrar from political motivations, but should also make it more accountable. The ironic thing here was that it was made less
accountable because of this autonomy that it has within the Columbian constitutional structure. We're not sure why-

Tanya Domi:
Why they decide.

Andres Besserer:
... what went on behind this decision. There were a few reports and a few very unfortunate public statements by the registrar and his office suggesting that the registrar had knowledge of fraud having been committed in the filing for a Columbia citizenship at a large scale. But these claims were actually not based on evidence or on a study or on a report. They seem to have been based on hearsay that then somehow reached the registrar's office, and at least that was the public motivation in some statements. It's yet to fully understand what the decision process was and what the motivation was. But from the point of view of people who we interviewed who lost their citizenship, they definitely feel themselves to be the target of xenophobia and of discrimination, and it'll be very hard to convince people who underwent this travesty to the contrary. It adds on to a degree of xenophobia that Venezuelans face in Colombia. I wouldn't say it's-

Tanya Domi:
Every day.

Andres Besserer:
... Every day. Exactly. Yeah.

Tanya Domi:
So what's interesting is as you point out, these arbitrary actions by the registrar really opened the door to legal action after lawyers began talking to people. And in your methods of developing case studies, which I'm interested in, and that comes out of public sociology, these individuals that you all interviewed, and you also interviewed five lawyers representing some of them, can you describe the case of Ignacio, which your report flags? This may be a good example of how annulment of citizenship harmed individuals and that this harm happened in multi-dimensional ways. So could you tell Ignacio's story?

Andres Besserer:
Sure. Ignacio is someone I interviewed for the report. Ignacio, by the way, not his real name, it's a pseudonym.

Tanya Domi:
Sure. Of course.

Andres Besserer:
We use pseudonym throughout the report in order to-
That makes sense.

Andres Besserer:
... to protect their identity and-

Tanya Domi:
Of course.

Andres Besserer:
... their wellbeing. So Ignacio was going to work one day in January of 2022 when he was stopped by the police in a very routine stop, as I told you, there's this unfortunate stop and frisk policy that has passed constitutional tests in Columbia. For some reason, it's still there. It's normal that this has happened many, many times. There had never been any issue, but this time the police told him that he had committed identity fraud, that he had been flagged for identity fraud and was in the system. He was totally puzzled by this, scared, he wasn't sure what was going on. He was taken to a prison where he was handcuffed for 36 hours without proper food and water. He was also the victim of xenophobic harassment in prison. When a police officer said, oh, you Venezuelans, you only come here to commit crimes. Although he had committed no crime, and he's a binational Venezuelan Colombian. His father had actually left Columbia because of the violence that the father had experienced. Then after 36 hours of being handcuffed, he was let go because the judge never showed up. And a few weeks later, his boss called him in to tell him that he had an issue, which is that he no longer appeared in the social security roll because again, he had been flagged because of this process.

Tanya Domi:
So they removed him from Social Security?

Andres Besserer:
They removed him from social Security, he lost his health insurance, and then a few days later, his boss told him that he could no longer work there. He lost his job. He still wasn't sure why, what was going on. He started to have to use his savings in order to pay for food and rent for him and his family. He describes undergoing food insecurity, and both his partner and their daughter also underwent food insecurity because there wasn't enough money to put enough calories on the table. He would eventually reach one of the legal nonprofits and discover his citizenship had been stripped-

Tanya Domi:
Revoked.

Andres Besserer:
His nationality had been, correct, yeah, had been revoked. He couldn't vote in that year's elections, and it was a lengthy process, but he would eventually recover his nationality because the lawyers submitted a protection of rights to a judge, which is basically a procedure where an individual can demonstrate that their human rights have been violated. This process doesn't have what's called [foreign language 00:23:19] effects, so it doesn't, even cases that are identical to this one cannot be resolved by this ruling. It's an individual ruling. So he-
Tanya Domi:
So it doesn't apply across the board to individuals that may have experienced similar consequences and outcomes.

Andres Besserer:
That's right. Exactly. The legal nonprofit, which was the University of del Rosario, which is a co-author of the report, eventually helped him recover his nationality, and once he recovered it, it took him a while to get a job again, but he eventually did manage to get a job. He remains very scared of the police and interactions with the authority. It's fair to say that there was a degree of trauma in his interaction.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah. So we're talking about perhaps PTSD.

Andres Besserer:
And very clear feelings of disempowerment. He felt totally disempowered, powerless, and he described a sense of incredible insecurity after having lost one's nationality. Sometimes, while doing this report, I came to think of nationality and citizenship as something that we, as a non-American who's come to the United States, I don't take it for granted, but it's easy to take lots of these rights for granted.

Tanya Domi:
And not think about it.

Andres Besserer:
And not think about it. But when they're gone, it's like someone has pulled the floor beneath your feet. You're in a sort of free fall state in terms of rights and your relationship to authority, your capacity to do so many things gets stymied. Even renting an apartment, apartment would become impossible without an identity card that worked.

Tanya Domi:
That's right. So this is all headed to the Columbian courts and even further afield to the Inner American Commission on Human Rights. Why don't you tell us about where some of these cases are and what the legal strategy is here overall?

Andres Besserer:
So the participant organizations realized that they could continue the strategy of protecting individual people who have been deprived of their nationality, but that would never reach the 40,000 people whom we know have been stripped of their citizenship. So in order to write this wrong, they needed to scale it up to a strategic litigation strategy whereby either regionally and, or nationally there would be a decision that could revert the stripping of citizenship

Tanya Domi:
And make these people whole.

Andres Besserer:
Correct. Exactly right. They've asked the Inter-American Human Rights Commission for-

Tanya Domi:
A decision?

Andres Besserer:
[foreign language 00:25:53], which in English is a hearing.

Tanya Domi:
A hearing. Of course, a hearing., So there hasn't been a hearing yet?

Andres Besserer:
There's already been a hearing.

Tanya Domi:
Okay.

Andres Besserer:
The report was used to demonstrate the harms that-

Tanya Domi:
Your report-

Andres Besserer:
This report.

Tanya Domi:
... was used as evidence in this hearing?

Andres Besserer:
Correct. That's right.

Tanya Domi:
Bravo.

Andres Besserer:
Thank you.

Tanya Domi:
Bravo. Congratulations.

Andres Besserer:
Thank you. Thank you.
Tanya Domi:
That is really, really a credit to all of you.

Andres Besserer:
Thank you. And it's going to be used in the constitutional court, which is the equivalent of the Supreme Court in Columbia. At least two cases that have now been selected from among many cases that could be selected for a ruling. This ruling might not be definitive. It depends on whether or not the Supreme Court connects these dots. So if it's not, in this case, maybe in subsequent cases that the legal nonprofits have already submitted to the Supreme Court.

Tanya Domi:
And they're making the case for a connection?

Andres Besserer:
They're making a case for the connection.

Tanya Domi:
So they have to convince the court of the merits of their argument, obviously.

Andres Besserer:
Correct. That's right, and one of the wonderful things about the process of crafting this report was that I learned the relative strengths that social scientists have when it comes to making legal arguments and assisting human rights organizations. The lawyers who were trained in law could identify due process violations and faulty due process- 

Tanya Domi:
Practices.

Andres Besserer:
... Thank you, practices.

Tanya Domi:
Sure.

Andres Besserer:
Very easily that's what they were trained to do, and it came naturally to them. What they did not see was that this was not only an issue of the legal process whereby people were stripped of citizenship. It was also about the effects that this had on-

Tanya Domi:
And yes.

Andres Besserer:
... individuals and families.

Tanya Domi:
And their lives. So tell our audience what you did find and how people were harm in all the ways that you describe in the report.

Andres Besserer:
Sure. I ended up coming up with the concept of multidimensional and preventable harm in order to encapsulate all of the effects that losing one's nationality has when one loses it suddenly. Why multidimensional? Because it affected individual people on multiple levels, economic, psychological, in their relationship to authority. It also had spillover effects, so it affected not only the individual, but also their family, their underage dependence, their children, and their spouses, their partners. And it was preventable because we know that had the registrar followed its own rules, that should force it to follow due process procedures, probably most, if not, all of these people would never have lost their Colombian nationality, so it's totally preventable. It was a harm that didn't serve any purpose. What are the dimensions of this harm? So one of them is a harm to their right to an identity. So they no longer had a gateway right, which is your capacity to identify yourself-

Tanya Domi:
Yeah. They're essentially undocumented at that point.

Andres Besserer:
Exactly. And where did this show up? People could not vote in elections, which is at terrible violation of political rights. People could not access their bank accounts because they had no way of proving that they were themselves.

Tanya Domi:
That they were a citizen.

Andres Besserer:
They couldn't travel, so a lot of people were either scared or were denied, for example, using planes. So that's a huge issue.

Tanya Domi:
Because they couldn't get on a plane.

Andres Besserer:
They were turned immobile through having had their identity card canceled. There was economic harm because people lost jobs. They especially lost jobs with benefits because they were expelled into the informal labor market in Columbia, which as you might know, has no health benefits, no vacations, oftentimes no weekends. They're paid much less. They had to dip into savings, which then for many people involved canceling plans. We have the case of Francisco who was saving up to start a bakery so that he could work less hours at his job, spend more time with his family, have a little family business. His wife is a very talented baker, but they had to dip into those savings once he lost his nationality and
then his job and those plans were ruined, he lost that, basically all of the savings that he had accumulated over five years in order to start a bakery.

There was a psychological harm. People were, especially those who had interactions with the police for identity fraud, but also, for example, the case of Adriana and her husband. Her husband was taken to the emergency room with what seemed like a heart attack, but was then diagnosed as just a lot of stress because of the shock of having lost one’s nationality.

Tanya Domi:
That kind of stress leads to, yields to lots of different kinds of illnesses.

Andres Besserer:
Absolutely. Absolutely.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah.

Andres Besserer:
I also used some of the theoretical lenses that I developed over my dissertation project and that have been developed by others, great social scientists such as Manquiad and La Enríquez, to talk about legal violence, which is disempowerment of the individual, vis-a-vis the system. This feeling that first, the confusion that surrounds losing one's status unexpectedly so, and then also the notion of spillover effects and multi-generational punishment. So a lot of our interviewees felt that they were being punished simply from having returned from Venezuela into Colombia. They feel like second class citizens in lots of ways. And that harms their capacity for integration and-

Tanya Domi:
Back into society.

Andres Besserer:
Correct. Correct.

Tanya Domi:
Yes. As you said, multi-dimensional, but also really it's like the registrar had a sledgehammer and every single person returning was a nail. And really, really terrible outcomes for these people. Would it be beyond the Colombian courts to order remuneration, reparative justice here?

Andres Besserer:
That's a really good question. In the reports recommendations, we do recommend that the constitutional court seek reparations for the people who were unfairly stripped of their nationality. I'm not sure if that is something that the Inter-American Human Rights Commission or the court could do, the Inter-American Human Rights court, but it might be. Sadly, this is not the only case of arbitrary and mass deprivation of nationality in the Americas. I think maybe some listeners might be familiar with the case of Dominican Republic, whereby descendants of Haitians were retrospectively stripped of their nationality on mass by having been Dominicans for many generations. And in there the inter-American
human rights system was activated and was very effective. It was crucial for the protection of those people in Dominican Republic.

Tanya Domi:
Well, that certainly can be an example in the human rights system that might apply given their previous decision on the Haitians.

Andres Besserer:
Yeah.

Tanya Domi:
Very interesting. Great project. Great leverage of public research and for the public good. On the behalf of yourself and Professor Smith and the people here at the Graduate Center and with your colleagues on the ground in Columbia, we are so grateful to have you here today.

Andres Besserer:
Well, thank you so much for the opportunity to talk about this report and it's crafting. This is definitely, I think I'm a product of the Graduate Center and of the CUNY system of two departments of the Department of Political Science, where I learned so much and where I have very close relationships, and also the Department of Sociology through the work with Robert Smith.

Tanya Domi:
Right. With Robert Smith.

Andres Besserer:
I was reminded of the Graduate Center's call and CUNY's call for knowledge for the public good repeatedly throughout the crafting of the report, and it's an ethos that I hold very dear. It was a privilege to be able to make use of it in a real world situation.

Tanya Domi:
Well, that's really wonderful. And I would add to just as an American that, yes, we have definite problems in the United States on immigration. All kinds of terrible things have gone on at the border. People are talking about this crisis, which I think is really trumped up, excuse that expression, but I think it's trumped up, and now we are hearing about what's happened in Columbia and Venezuela, and I'm sure most Americans have no clue about what has transpired there, and that there are a lot of immigration problems south of the border.

Andres Besserer:
Yes. But there's also an incredible example to be had. So even though the case of 40,000 people who were stripped of their citizenship in Columbia is awful, and we need to focus on the negative aspects of that decision, Columbia overall also provides a positive example of what can be done in a larger sense, because it allowed for the documentation of most all Venezuelans in their territory. Columbia has been able to integrate many, many immigrants into it, its formal economy.
Many different countries. I want to thank you so much, Andres Besserer Reyes for joining us today at The Thought Project.

Andres Besserer:
Thank you for the opportunity. It was amazing.

Tanya Domi:
Thanks for tuning into The Thought Project, and thanks to our guest, Andres Besserer Reyes, a PhD student in political science at the CUNY Graduate Center. The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering and technical assistant by audio engineer Kevin Wolf and CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.