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IDENTIFYING THE PERSON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Abstract

Identifying the 'North American' Person: The Security and Prosperity Partnership and New ID Cards in Canada, Mexico and the USA

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Until 9/11 persons wishing to cross the border into the USA needed only a drivers' licence (Canada) or passport (Mexico) to do so. However, the *9/11 Commission Report* prompted the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative which led in turn to the 'Security and Prosperity Partnership' (SPP) that mandated the development of secure travel documents, with biometrics and RFID, that would be interoperable between the three countries. As a result, each country has developed its own response, within the terms of the SPP. The REAL ID Act, that aims to integrate state driver's licence system in the USA (2005) was followed by initiatives to create 'Enhanced Driver's Licences' in some Canadian provinces. In 2008, Mexico announced that it too would comply, in this case building on the National Registration Number (CURP and CRIP). But how is this 'North American' person constructed by new ID processes? It is argued that creating the North American identification involves a new dynamic -- the 'card cartel' -- working with a bifurcated process (USA-Canada and USA-Mexico). The three systems are described, analyzed and evaluated in terms of political sociology, political economy and citizenship ethics. For a number of reasons -- unwieldy databases, limitations of biometrics, fraudulent use and political opposition, for example -- they are unlikely to achieve their stated aims. However, the new IDs will at the same time have other likely consequences that, so far from enhancing 'North American' citizenship, will deepen some already existing social, economic and political divisions. Only the most narrowly defined 'security and prosperity' will characterize those identified as 'North American.'

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