

Talking to non-immigrants about immigration

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The Cross Border Network

Overview

- What do we know about immigration?
- What do we hear about immigrants?
- Some common myths
 - Immigrants should do it legally
 - Most immigrants cross the border illegally
 - Immigrants cost us a fortune and don't pay taxes
 - They take jobs and cause lower wages
 - They're criminals

Immigrants can do it “the legal way” if they really want to

- **FACT:** Most people (especially those with desperate economic needs) have very **limited options** to enter the U.S. legally or to stay legally.
- Many don't qualify for visitor visas.
- Employment-based visas are few and hard to get.
- Many do not qualify for family-based immigrant visas.



Why don't they do it the legal way?

- Legalization processes are **long, complex, and expensive**.
 - The spouse and minor children (from Mexico) of a Lawful Permanent Resident must wait 6 or 7 years to legalize.
 - The legalization process may cost as much as \$2,680 (for people who pay a \$1,000 penalty for residing here illegally), or may require immigrants to return to their home countries and wait many months to reenter the U.S.
 - Immigrants must have a sponsor who meets certain income requirements and agrees to be financially responsible for them for 10 years.
- People have **immediate needs** to be here—they may be hungry and poor and/or have family members they are separated from.

April 2008 Visa Bulletin (from State Dept.)

	ALL	CHINA	INDIA	MEX.	PHIL.
1 st	2-22-02	2-22-02	2-22-02	8-8-92	3-1-93
2 nd A	5-8-03	5-8-03	5-8-03	5-1-02	5-8-03
2 nd B	3-22-99	3-22-99	3-22-99	4-1-92	2-1-97
3 rd	5-22-00	5-22-00	5-22-00	7-22-92	4-1-91
4 th	7-22-97	12-15-96	11-22-96	12-1-94	2-22-86

Most immigrants cross the border illegally

- **FACTS:**
- As much as 45% of the total undocumented migrant population entered the U.S. on temporary visas and stayed past their expiration date
- Due to arbitrary numerical limits, lengthy delays in the processing of visa and immigration applications, and time-consuming bureaucratic requirements, documented immigrants can become "undocumented"



Myth: Immigrants cost us a fortune and don't pay taxes

- **FACT:** Most legal immigrants must have legal status for at least five years before they can be eligible for TANF, Food Stamps, SSI, and most other public benefits
- **FACT:** The only public benefits all other immigrants can get are emergency medical care, K-12 education, disaster relief, and some English programs and unauthorized immigrants are barred from college financial aid
- **FACT:** Studies show that immigrant families use benefits at lower rates than citizen families AND that benefits are not a factor in decisions to migrate to the U.S.

Immigrants don't pay taxes

- **FACT:** Overall, immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes
- **FACT:** Missouri undocumented immigrants contribute between \$29 million and \$57 million in taxes
- **FACT:** Undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers), which grew by \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998

Source: http://www.immigrationforum.org/about/articles/tax_study.htm

Myth: Immigrants take jobs from Americans

- **FACT:** Immigrants create more jobs than they fill. They do so directly by starting new businesses and indirectly through their consumption. Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers
- **FACT:** The U.S. has a need for labor because the workforce is growing steadily older while the economy continuously demands workers at both ends of the occupational spectrum.
- **There is some evidence that new immigrants displace low-wage African Americans and other immigrants. Some get pushed up. Others get pushed out.**

□ Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2005 Revision, Highlights*, February 24, 2005, p.71

Myth: Immigrants lower wages

- **FACT:** There is no evidence that immigration affects overall wages
- **FACT:** U.S. Mexican border communities: increased border enforcement did not lead to higher wages for low educated native men along the U.S. border.
- **There is some evidence of industry-specific wage impacts where employers have used immigrant labor to force down wages.**
- **FACT:** Immigrants don't set wages—employers set wages.

Myth: Undocumented (“illegal”) immigrants are criminals

FACTS:

- Entering the United States without permission from the federal government is a **misdemeanor**, with a maximum sentence of six months in jail and/or \$250. People are prosecuted for this only if they are caught in the act or admit to it.
- Living or working in the U.S. without permission from the federal government--regardless of how you entered--is just a **civil infraction**, not a crime. “While some local officials try to claim such ‘illegal presence’ is like trespassing, it’s more comparable under the law to a ticket for jaywalking.”

Source: Jane Guskin and David L. Wilson, *The Politics of Immigration: Questions and Answers* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007), 40.

Myth: Immigrants increase the crime rate

FACTS:

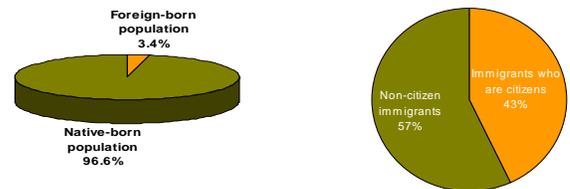
- Recent research has shown that immigrant communities do not increase the crime rate and that **immigrants commit fewer crimes** than native-born Americans.
- While the undocumented immigrant population doubled from 1994 to 2005, violent crime dropped by 34% and property crimes decreased by 32%.
- Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson has found that first generation immigrants are 45% less likely to commit violent crimes than Americanized, third generation immigrants.

Reframing as a labor issue and understanding the political economy

- Is there a crisis?
- What's wrong with the economy for workers?
 - Why are immigrants coming? The push.
 - Who is pulling immigrants in and do immigrants ruin jobs?
- What's the solution?

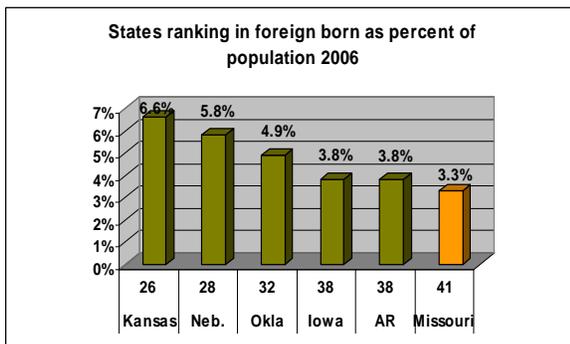
Is there an immigration crisis in Missouri?

ONLY 3.4% OF MISSOURI POPULATION IS FOREIGN BORN



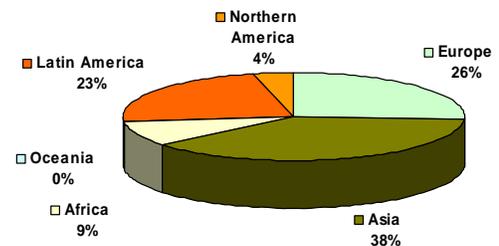
So about 1.9% of the Missouri population are non-citizen immigrants.

Missouri ranks 41 in immigrants



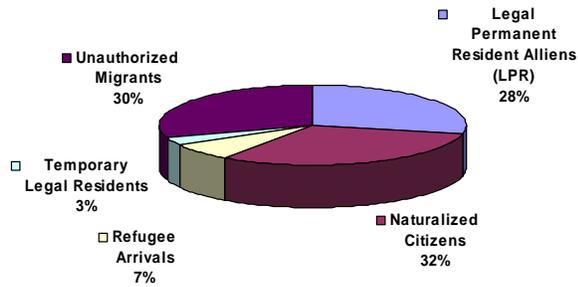
2006 American Community Survey <http://factfinder.census.gov>

Missouri Immigrants: Where Do They Come From?



Estimate from American Community Survey

Legal Status of 37 Million Foreign Born in 2005



Source: Jeffrey Passel, Pew Hispanic Research Center

Is it a crisis?

Less than 1% of MO population is undocumented - 58,000

Compared to other problems in Missouri:

18% or 1,034,160 children live in poverty

12.4% or 706,968 people have no healthcare ^[1]

21.7% of students fail to complete high school

7.1 occupational deaths per thousand - Missouri ranks 33rd

Yet 16 House bills and 9 Senate bills were introduced this year to deal with the immigration "problem"

[1] America's Health Rankings 2006 <http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/ahr2006/states/Missouri.html> and OSEDA - Missouri Office of Social & Economic Data Analysis.

It's a crisis!

"Unless the stream of these people can be turned away . . . they will soon outnumber us so that we will not be able to save our language or our government."

Benjamin Franklin, 1755

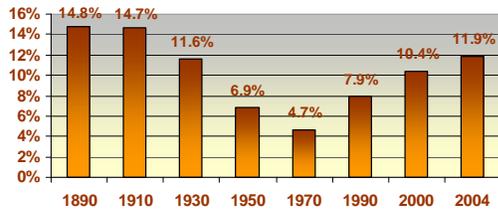
Talking about German indentured servants

What kind of a crisis is it?

A crisis of Xenophobia



Foreign Born Population As a Percent of Total U.S. Population



source: US Census

“Never have so many aliens swarmed illegally into the United States – millions, moving across the nation.

*US News & World Report
January, 1972*



Why do they come?

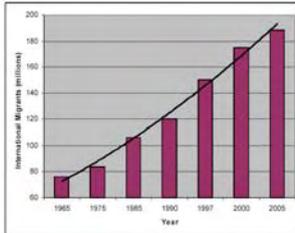
What's pushing people out of Mexico and Central America?

Increased migration is a clear result of globalization.

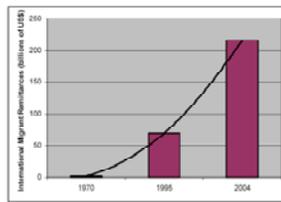
- There are 190 million people in the world who work outside their country of birth, up from 155 million in 1990.
- Globalization has displaced hundreds of millions of agricultural people all over the world who work in Middle East oil, Asian export processing zones, and in the West.

Source: United Nations

Total International Migration 1965-2005



Growth in Total International Migrant Remittances 1970-2005



Source: J. Edward Taylor, International Symposium on International Migration & Development, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, Turin, Italy, 28-30 June 2006
http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/turin/Symposium_Turin_files/PO9_SYMP_Taylor.pdf

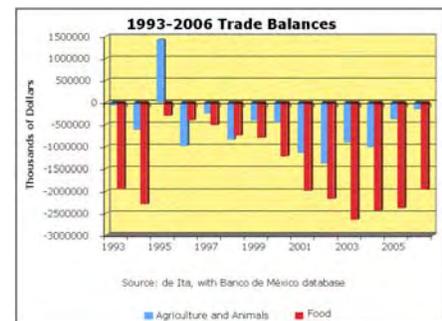
People usually don't leave home unless they can't stay



What About NAFTA?

1. NAFTA required Mexico to change its constitution making land able to be sold. Agribusiness moved in.
2. NAFTA required Mexico to end all subsidies on crop prices to farmers and food prices to consumers
3. NAFTA allowed US to maintain its agricultural subsidies which go mainly to agribusiness.

US Corn Exports to Mexico Tripled 1994-2003 while Mexico ran agricultural trade deficits¹



¹ Diane Solomon, *Tricks of the Free Trade*, www.metroactive.com/metro/08.16.06/immigration-debate-0633.html, and Gawain Kripke, *Make Trade Fair, Dollars and Sense*, Nov/Dec 2003, Americas Program Special Report, Fourteen Years of NAFTA and the Tortilla Crisis, Ana de Ita, January 10, 2008.

Real corn prices in Mexico fell 70% 1994-2003



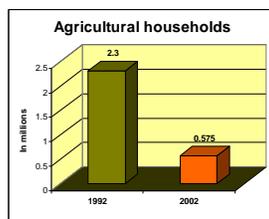
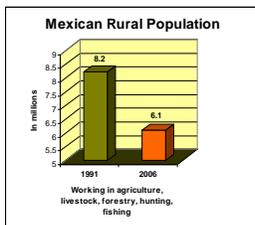
Americas Program Special Report, Fourteen Years of NAFTA and the Tortilla Crisis, Ana de Ita | January 10, 2008

Dumping

- US spends over \$10 billion/year on corn subsidies while Mexico's entire agricultural expenditures are less than \$1 billion/year. There's virtually no rural credit.
- In 2002 a metric ton of US corn sold for \$20 less than the cost of production
- Prices of Mexican sorghum, rice, wheat also declined
- However, without subsidies, the basic food cost to Mexican consumers rose 247%

The Results: Mexico since NAFTA

- Rural poverty escalated and millions left.



Americas Program Special Report, Fourteen Years of NAFTA and the Tortilla Crisis Ana de Ita | January 10, 2008

Many went to cities but couldn't get regular jobs

- But under IMF and World Bank strictures and NAFTA Mexico was privatizing leading to hundreds of thousands of layoffs.
- NAFTA led to the bankruptcy of thousands of Mexican companies and many layoffs
- Multinational companies took over the economy from rail to banks to telecom to retail
 - American companies now employ 40% of workers.
 - Wal-Mart is the largest employer in Mexico followed by Delphi
- Who is invading whom?

National Public Radio, Jeff Faux-Economic Policy Institute.

The only growth sector was the maquiladoras

- Typical wages start at \$4.85 a day
- When workers organize to force raises, they are fired and blacklisted
- The International Labor Organization in January 2008 said, "The maquiladoras are synonymous with unpaid overtime, sexual harassment, employment discrimination, non-existent health and safety protection, unjustified firings, and the impossibility of organizing."

Mexico since globalization

- The real value of the Mexican minimum wage dropped 22% just since 2000 and 75% since 1977
- Today it is 52.59 pesos a DAY or \$4.85
 - You must work 48 hours a day at minimum wage to earn enough to afford the basic food basket
 - 24% earn minimum wage³
 - 24% of workforce receive less than minimum wage
- Poverty rate had risen
 - 50 million Mexicans live below the poverty line.
 - 30 million live on \$3 US a day
 - 10 million live on \$2 a day
 - 10 million on less than \$1 a day

Alfredo Sanchez *What's the Use of this Dyrlic Raise in the Minimum Wage?* www.correo-otro.com.mx/notas.asp?id=9416.
Richard Roman and Eduar Volasco, Mexican Workers Call for a Continental Workers' Campaign For Living Wages

Pay gap with US went from 30% to 15%



Jus Semper Global Alliance

Emigration since NAFTA

- Annual emigration to US: 500,000-1 million per year. One in seven Mexican workers now works in U.S. ¹
- Remittances back to Mexico rival oil, tourism, and the maquiladoras as top source of foreign earnings. In 2007 they were \$24 billion. ²

¹ Pew Hispanic Center

² Dallas Morning News, Jan. 31, 2008

What would you do to feed your family?

- A maquiladora worker making auto parts in Juarez works over 3 and a quarter hours at the minimum wage to buy a half gallon of milk.



- If that worker moves to Kansas City, she would work 20 minutes at the US minimum wage for the same milk.

What's pulling them here? Is it good jobs?



"I CAN'T DECIDE WHETHER TO CROSS AND TAKE A JOB AMERICANS WON'T DO OR STAY HERE AND TAKE AN OUTSOURCED JOB THEY WILL DO.."

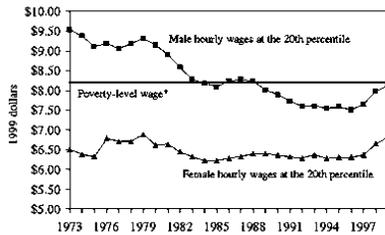
What's pulling them here?

Is it good jobs?

Real Average Hourly Wages



Real Hourly Wages of Low Wage Workers – 1999 dollars



* \$8.19 is the wage level that, at full-time, full-year work, would lift a family of four above the poverty line (\$17,028 in 1999 dollars).

Economic Policy Institute

Source: Authors' analysis of CPS data.

What happened to our jobs? The story of meatpacking



How IBP Turned Meatpacking into a Low-Standards Industry

Before the 1970s,

- Meatpacking was a high-wage industry
- Skilled butchers cut an animal carcass into different cuts of meat
- Factories were located in cities
- Union contracts covered most firms, so unions set the standard for wages, benefits, conditions, health and safety

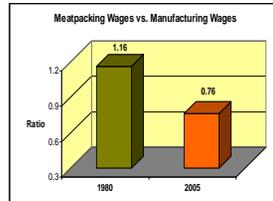
The IBP Revolution

- In the 1970s, Iowa Beef Processors changed the work process
- "Disassembly Line" with simpler, repeated jobs and higher speeds
- Hired lower-skill workers
- Moved factories away from union cities
- Cheaper process captured market share
- Non-union companies set the standards; unions had to come down to them

(Jackie Gabriel, "Organizing The Jungle," WorkingUSA, September 2006)

After the IBP Revolution

- Wages dropped from \$20 an hour in 1977 to \$10.50 in 2001, adjusted for inflation.
- More than a quarter of meatpacking workers have had a workplace accident, one of the highest rates in any industry.



Workers “fled the industry” to find jobs. Workers with fewer options, including immigrants, took their places.

- § Thus meatpacking restructured the jobs before the immigrants came.

Saket Soni, New Orleans Workers Center

- “You have a single restaurant in New Orleans where before Hurricane Katrina African Americans were working in the back of the house for twelve, thirteen, maybe fourteen dollars an hour. After Hurricane Katrina their wages dropped to ten.
- “A few weeks later they were fired, they were replaced by Honduran undocumented workers through a temp agency. They were paid eight dollars an hour.
- “A couple of weeks later they were fired and replaced by Brazilian H2B- holding guest workers who were paid six dollars an hour.
- “And now we hear that once they’re fired they will be replaced by Louisiana prison labor who will do the work for \$5.25 an hour, and that’s a slice of the reconstruction.”

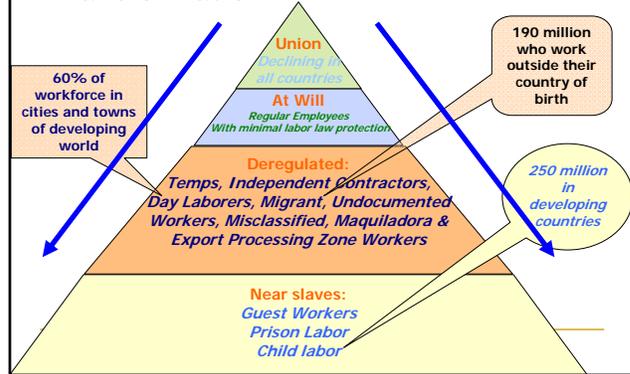
Immigration is a small part of what’s ailing working people, but immigrants are getting most of the blame.

- Immigrants don’t ruin jobs; they don’t lower wages or displace people.
- In meatpacking, construction, hospitality restructuring and the attack on labor standards preceded the use of immigrant labor

The deregulated economy

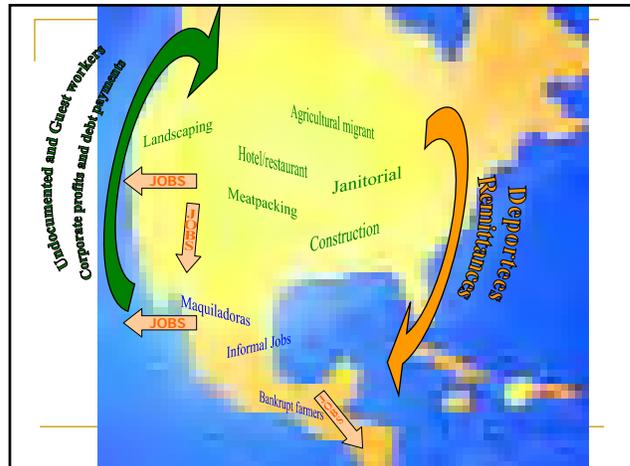
- Since 1981 employers and government policy have driven down labor standards through
 - Subcontracting, outsourcing and offshoring
 - Failure to enforce labor laws
 - Union busting and denial of right to organize
 - Downsizing
 - Misclassifying workers
 - Use of undocumented immigrants, prison labor

The Great North American Job Transformation



The North American Disposable Workforce

- The result of macro policies aimed at cheapening and deregulating labor while creating one market in goods and services
- In Canada, Mexico and U.S. neoliberal restructuring has made labor precarious while protecting the rights of corporations



Do we have an immigration problem or a labor regulation problem?

- Will excluding immigrants solve it? Will deporting them raise wages or guarantee that employers pay work comp or overtime.
- What could employers do instead?
 - Pay under the table
 - Offshore what they can
 - Send work to prison
 - Bring in guest workers who are more abused

Maybe we should just start enforcing labor laws and make our trading partners do the same

- 95% of the shingle roofers in KC are misclassified
- Workplace injuries have skyrocketed since enforcement has decreased
- It's harder to organize a union in the US than in any other developed country
- Most employers who hire the undocumented also break labor laws, that's what makes it profitable
- That's why all workers need enforceable rights



Immigration Law Trumps Labor Law: Hoffman Plastics vs NLRB

- Hoffman Plastics is a family-owned company in Paramount California. . .
- José Castro was hired in 1988 as a production employee with a friend's papers. . .
- José distributed union authorization cards and was fired along with the rest of the organizing committee.
- In 2002, The Supreme Court ruled that José had no employment relationship with Hoffman Plastics and was therefore not entitled to back pay or reinstatement.

Redefining the problem and the solution

- Do the people who pick your tomatoes, change your sheets in hotels and roof your house deserve to have dreams and rights like you do?
- If they can't have dreams, neither can the rest of us
- Any solution to the problem, if they are to work, must address the forces pushing people out of their home countries and it must address what's really threatening working people