



THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for
Social Justice: News,
Issues, and Ideas

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David Bacon

What if Immigration's Not the Problem?

by *Cara Anaam*

Why at this point in our history are we, a nation of immigrants, so hyped up about immigration? And what in the heat of the debate is not being talked about? As with so many issues in this country at the moment, the debate seems to have served mostly to create division rather than clarity.

Framing the current controversy as being about "immigration reform" puts immigrants at the root of the problem. But are they really?

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What indeed is the “problem” that our country is facing? Is it that we have too many people so we need to reduce immigration? Is it

By trying to identify more specifically the problems our country is facing we might see root causes that point us to very different solutions.

that public services like education and medical care are strained and even failing? Is it that there is a lack of jobs for all who want to work in the United States?

It’s also curious that the debate at this time seems to focus primarily on our southern border and even more specifically on undocumented immigrants . . .

By trying to identify more specifically the problems our country is facing we might see root causes that point us to very different solutions. If, for example, we are worried about the flow of undocumented immigrants, shouldn’t we examine the national and international policies that our country has supported in the last several decades? The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the International Monetary Fund

(IMF), and the World Bank have demanded many rapid changes in the traditional economic structures of developing countries. What is the United States’ responsibility for the havoc policy decisions like NAFTA have

And if we’re worried about strained public and social services or the lack of living wage jobs shouldn’t we question the roles played by continual budget and tax cuts, corporate outsourcing and downsizing, and a low minimum wage?

It’s also curious that the debate at this time seems to focus primarily on our southern border and even more specifically on undocumented immigrants who often cross this border. It is there we see the flow of impoverished brown workers from Mexico and Central America. Most come because traditional agricultural labor is no longer a way to support their families in their native lands, and they do not have the education or the opportunity to seek other work.

...immigration policy does need some changing, but it’s only one part of a web of interconnected economic and social policies that need reform.

Our existing policies are not working for the prospective immigrant or for our nation. There are extremely

long backlogs for visas and green cards meaning that people can wait for many years before being admitted and reunited with their families. It is also difficult for employers in some industries to find the workers they need. Surely our immigration policy does need some changing, but it’s only one part of a web of interconnected economic and social policies that need reform.

Identifying the problem correctly is what will lead us to the best solutions. Blaming immigrants seems unlikely to get us very far.

Cara Anaam is the assistant editor of The Change Agent.