

Holland Venhuizen
Labor and Legality Essay Option 2: Op-Ed
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The so-called issue of labor migrants from Mexico, especially those of undocumented status, has been a long-standing hot topic in the United States for years. In fact, immigration into the United States in general has always carried some level of controversy, from the influx of Irish immigrants during the mid to late 1800s causing tensions across America's Northeast to Chinese immigrants increasing dramatically on the West coast during the California Gold Rush sparking racism and racist views among White Americans. But ours is a country built on immigration, so the issue aiming to be solved should not be the immigration itself, but rather the tensions and conflict it causes. In this brief essay, I will attempt to tackle the roots of the issues, and hopefully offer a somewhat insightful dissection of how people could solve these problems or self-reflect and dismantle where these feelings of anger or resentment with immigrants begins.

There's 3 common concerns I've personally heard in reference to this "new" influx of immigrants, and one has to do with the idea of "job stealing." Many Americans find themselves threatened by the idea of Mexican immigrants taking away opportunities from American citizens, and that their presence in the job market is theft in itself. But, as is mentioned by many of those interviewed in the film *Farmingville*, the jobs being filled by these labor migrants are crucial to the flow of the local economy and the quality of life of Americans living in these communities. Contractor companies, landscaping businesses, restaurants, and many other industries that improve and affect the lives of everyone in a community often employ Mexican labor migrants to do this incredibly important work. Without their presence in the system, the

market could collapse. We, as a nation, absolutely and unequivocally need Mexican laborers. I think the only way to solve this issue is to remember that.

There's another common concern I've seen from American citizens, and this perspective is reiterated in *Farmingville* as well. There is a general concern that, when these employees are being hired, there are a lot of shady, illegal dealings going on. Lack of worker's comp for Mexican laborers, companies evading taxes by paying immigrant workers off the books, illegal tennant amounts in a rental property, and criminally underpaying workers are all unfortunate possibilities for trades that hire Mexican laborers, especially due to the desperation many of these workers feel to find any sort of work. When citizens see this all going on, there's a pervasive sense of lawlessness, and people begin to feel that their world view or safety is being challenged. But I think it's important to make a distinction here. If someone takes issue with this, then their problem is absolutely not with the migrant laborers. Their problem is with shifty business owners, unlawful landlords, and under the table dealings within companies. I think that to solve this issue, we simply need to hold our local businesses and corporations to a higher standard, or perhaps encourage and make room for Mexican migrant labor unions. Both of these solutions could afford a higher level of protection for these workers, and would encourage a more harmonious, safe, and legal workplace for migrant laborers.

The final concern that is ever present within groups of people that tend to take issue with immigration from Mexico is a concern for the safety of small-town children. This could stem from internal racism within predominantly white small towns across America, where the introduction of a street-corner of Mexican men could make people anxious. Obviously, this point is unjustifiable, and it's incredibly harmful and ridiculous to presume someone would be more dangerous or more likely to harm a child simply due to the color of their skin or national origin.

However, another aspect of these immigrant's identities that could potentially have more footing is their gender. Street corners full of men, regardless of race, could very well cause rational fear for young women or girls. However, I think this is the time and place for imaginative empathy among fearful mothers and fathers. A good portion of the men that travel to America seeking employment are doing so to feed their own children back home in Mexico. They are sacrificing so much just to help sustain their wives and kin, and I think people in these small towns in America tend to forget this. The emphasis seems to be on protecting American children, and not thinking of the Mexican children that these men have left at home. These men are people, too, with families, lives, friends, hobbies, and more back home. They aren't dangerous infestations on communities, they're just trying to provide.

Overall, I think these concerns can be mitigated or solved with a bit more communication and compassion for labor migrants. Discourse and empathy can go incredibly far in these cases, as most of the conflict stems from misunderstanding or contrasting viewpoints. The experience of labor migrants from Mexico contrasts greatly with the experience of many Americans, who would never dream of having to emigrate to another country simply to keep their family afloat financially. These men are leaving their wives, children, and friends just to be able to keep a stable living and put food on the table for their families. It's a tragic and difficult reality, and I think Americans need to self reflect and find a way to shift their perspectives to embrace empathy rather than fear and hatred.