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**“Them” or “Us”?:
Assessing Responsibility for Undocumented Migration From Mexico**

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“Them” or “Us”?: Assessing Responsibility for Undocumented Migration From Mexico

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Abstract: Empirical studies, theoretical models, and public policies concerning undocumented migration have placed too much emphasis on the “supply-side”. This approach – simultaneously self-serving and self-defeating – emphasizes socioeconomic conditions within Third World countries and immigration enforcement by advanced industrialized nations. Conducting fieldwork in both rural Mexico and the United States, I found that the personnel practices and recruitment activities within three of America’s billion dollar crop industries create and perpetuate unauthorized migrant flows. My study of these rural labor markets contradicts several critical supply-side assumptions, especially pertaining to the origins and composition of international migrant networks. Supply-siders view these networks as systems of mutual aid amongst new immigrants. I found that the networks are also used by employers to maintain access to sources of low cost labor. I conclude that the involvement of an increasing number of US corporations in the development of migrant networks from Mexico shifts responsibility for undocumented migration from “them” to us”.

Introduction

The landslide support for Proposition 187 in 1994 was but the culmination of a vicious “Them versus Us” debate that had reemerged in California in the 1980s (Krissman, 2002). Another six years passed before a discourse shift began, from fear of a migrant invasion to anxiety over labor shortages. However, in the wake of September 11th, fear of foreign terrorists and an economic downturn have pushed liberalized migration back off the national agenda again.

Such oscillations are not too surprising. Anti-immigrant sentiments did not begin on “9-11”, nor in 1994. An historical review demonstrates that the level of popular xenophobia coincides with the “business” cycle. The worst anti-immigrant movements in California occurred in the 1880s, 1900, and the ‘30s, ‘50s, and ‘90s, each time after a major economic contraction. These movements always feature the gross violation of human rights (including physical assaults), typically on non-whites – Asians and Mexicans, and their American-born progeny in the west, and African-Americans across the nation. Now that we have entered another recession, immigration will remain a critical issue for academia and

the larger society.

The “conventional wisdom” says that they are responsible for undocumented migration. This makes intuitive sense. After all, it is *them* coming to the US. Nevertheless, I contend that it is *us* who are responsible; many like-minded scholars point to a history of armed, diplomatic, and economic interventions by the US in Mexico. While American foreign policies are important to international migration, my research has focused upon the domestic activities of US actors. I do not depend on macro-economics, census data, or diplomatic cables, but on the testimony of US employers, their supervisors, and farm workers and their families from Mexico. What follows is the story of the people from three Mexican towns that work in three US crop industries. This narrative illustrates *our* culpability in undocumented migration from Mexico. First, I outline my contributions to an interrelated literature on immigration, labor markets, and networks. I discuss: 1) the supply versus demand debate; and, 2) the origins and composition of migrant networks.

My Research and the Literature

Migration: supply and demand

Both supply and demand factors must be carefully considered in order to understand many complex issues. One example is drug policy. However, in that supply/demand debate one side has long dominated, particularly at the level of policy implementation. While the government throws more and more tax dollars into policing both here and abroad, insufficient funds are available for drug treatment centers.

In the case of undocumented migration, one side of the debate has prevailed since the invention of the term “illegal alien”. Supply-side perspectives effectively blame *them*, and don’t look at the role of actors in the US. Most academics and policy makers focus on the would-be migrants – the supply – rather than the demand for undocumented workers.

There are only two “solutions” for immigration supply-siders: 1) the development of more employment opportunities in Mexico; and, 2) increased immigration enforcement in the US. These solutions continue to prevail in immigration policy even though neither solves, and both probably exacerbate, international migration. If so, scholars and public makers (often the same folk wearing different “hats”) are pursuing irrational, even dangerous agendas. The question to ask is “Why?”

A number of eminent but seldom heeded scholars (such as Noam Chomsky, Louis Althusser, and Paulo Freire) have contended that ideology may influence which of the two types of factors are emphasized in the research conducted and/or the public policies adopted on topics deemed controversial issues within society. On a fundamental level, the American ideology of the “land of the free” is at odds with the reality of the use of unfree labor in many US industries. In US agriculture, for example, the myth of the “family farm” runs counter to the reality of large landholdings using unfree workers. High-value, labor-intensive agriculture in the US has long required an unfree workforce, usually ethnically marked as non-white (i.e., “black”, “yellow”, or “brown”). The high level of value that can be extracted from a surplus pool of unfree labor by capitalist producers has been well documented, while the use of migrant workers in that role has been explored in a variety of places and under diverse conditions (Galarza 1964, Castells 1977, Meillassoux 1981, Burawoy 1981, Bustamante 1983, and Kearney 1986).

While ideology does not necessarily reflect reality, it does have its purposes. In the case of US agriculture, ideology reduces the cognitive dissonance a full awareness of the conditions under which our meals are produced could create among the citizenry. Ideological blinders help us Americans keep our appetites without insisting on major reforms. Pedagogical, methodological, practical and historical reasons have also been given for the dominance of the supply-siders. However, an analysis of each reveals that these supposed barriers may be mere academic “fig leaves” to cover up ideological biases.

While the supply-side does not explain undocumented migration, what is the evidence for the demand-side?

It is a basic fact that the timing, numbers, and types of migrant flows are determined almost entirely by actors in “labor-receiving” nations. US. Recent immigration classics (Portes and Bach 1985, Portes and Rumbaut 1996 [1990], and Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1994) have all documented the critical role of the US government, its industries, and other interest groups in immigration policy and practice. Migration studies often note this fact, but regard it as an “external given”, focusing instead on the would-be migrants. This might be excused but for the fact that these studies often claim to be examining the causes of migration (for example, Diaz-Briquets and Weintraub 1991, Escobar *et al.* 1998, Hatton and Williamson 1994, Massey and Espinosa 1997, and Massey *et al.* 1993 and 1994). Most media stories and public policies on undocumented migration ignore US actors entirely. However, the story of migration cannot be told without reference to the US actors that stimulate these flows of immigrants.

Impoverished Third World peoples such as rural Mexicans need a variety of scarce resources to engage in migration. For example, the cost for one individual to migrate to the US is three to seven times the annual household income of the average rural Mexican family. (Note: other resources, not examined in detail here, are also beyond the means of most would-be migrants.) Many supply-siders have endorsed “raising the cost” through increased policing to reduce migration. This hasn’t slowed the flow, although it has dramatically raised the death toll. Migrants still get the needed resources to come to the US. The question is: “From where?”

Employers are usually the original source of the resources funneled to would-be migrants to retain a low cost workforce. First, it is US employers that illegally give new immigrants the jobs that draw them here to begin with. Second, US firms have structured and re-structured their personnel

practices to create and perpetuate undocumented migrant flows over the course of many decades. I have focused on those that provide the resources to Mexican migrants, following the advice of one of anthropology's founding fathers:

“...[D]irect observation does reveal to us that ... human beings are connected by a complex network of social relations. I use the term ‘social structure’ to denote this network of *actually existing* relations. It is this that I regard as my business to study if I am working ... as a social anthropologist.” (A. R. Radcliffe-Browne, 1940 [emphasis added])

Networks: a unit of analysis

Scholars such as Alfred Radcliffe-Browne have long studied a wide variety of social networks that develop among individuals, primarily within a discrete community or region. Much has been learned about social structure within many societies around the world. But considering the subject, immigration scholars have adhered to an inadequate research design.

The migrant network is supposed to be the principal unit of analysis used to study the social relationships that develop among individuals *between* different communities or regions. While the distinction is obvious, virtually all studies of migration networks focus almost entirely on the members of the migrants' hometowns, (at home and abroad). When it comes to the methods employed by most immigration researchers, the origins of migrant networks are viewed as indigenous and the composition as endogamous.

The recent literature on international migrant networks is voluminous. I have selected five studies as representative: the paradigm almost always cited in the literature, as well as four others that illustrate the deficiencies of the archetype in covering the diverse situations encountered in the field. The model developed by Douglas Massey, Rafael Alarcon, Jorge Durand, and Humberto Gonzalez has become

the standard in the study of migrant networks. It was greatly influenced by the work of Larrisa Lomnitz, Lourdes Arizpe, Wayne Cornelius, Rick Mines, and many others working with Mexican migrants during the 1970s. This model helped explain many seemingly contradictory aspects of the migratory process. Yet the model fails to even incorporate all of the data found in the book where it was first presented.

In *Return to Aztlan* (1987:164-169) the individuals cited as key to the formation of the four migrant networks examined include an farm foreman, a factory worker, and hometown businessmen. Even in the five page ethnographic synopsis it is clear that these pioneers became network conduits at the invitation or insistence of employers. Indeed, in one case the authors note that network recruitment “...primarily benefited (sic) the company for whom they all worked.” Nevertheless, the data collected and analyzed to explain the “social process of international migration from western Mexico” (the book’s subtitle) did not systematically include employers.

The rich ethnographic data that resulted in the four modified models cannot be elaborated upon at length here. It must suffice to outline a few critical points. Note that each of these researchers felt compelled by their field data to substantially alter the Massey *et al.* model.

For example, while David Griffith and Ed Kissam’s “natural” network is a replica of the Massey formula, these two researchers found that migrants can also get into the US and find jobs via “artificial” networks. The latter are established by intermediaries (farm labor contractors [FLCs]) and their kin to support complex businesses that serve the same basic aims of any international migrant network. What is critical here is that the FLCs are usually *not* members of the same villages, regions, or even nation as the workers they recruit, smuggle, house, feed, etc.

Sarah Mahler finds that suburban migrants from El Salvador have to extend their “natural” networks to persevere in the US, including other immigrants (mainly from South America). While established immigrants provide a great deal of social support for the new migrants, they typically do so

in order to improve their own economically marginalized positions by charging the migrants various, often exorbitant, fees for the services provided.

Diana Tamar Wilson's "strong" network ties are with the same actors in Massey's model. But the migrants' critical "weak" ties (famously explored by Mark Granovetter for urban professionals), which often help migrants to find new and better economic opportunities than those provided by natal contacts, are with co-workers and neighbors first met in the US (mainly but not exclusively immigrants from other nations, similar to Mahler's addition). Wilson further undermines Massey *et al.* by noting that weak ties can be converted to strong ones via the establishment of new familial relationships (marriage and fictive kinship). Thus, new or extended strong networks involve individuals not from the same hometowns as the migrants being studied.

Finally, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo describes a set of three different networks for domestic workers in Los Angeles. Employee and employer networks can and do work together in a complementary fashion, while agencies constitute a type of artificial network similar to those found by Griffith and Kissam to be fabricated by intermediaries. However, Hondagneu-Sotelo does not explicitly overlay employee and employer networks the way I have here. She just says that the two often use each other. Nor does she refer to agencies as networks, "artificial" or otherwise. Hondagneu-Sotelo does note that those would-be domestics using agencies lack employee or employer networks, and receive a variety of network-style services from agencies.

At this point the following question needs to be asked: why has there been a proliferation of modified network models in spite of a decade of near unanimity in support of the Massey *et al* archetype? I contend that *all* of "actually existing" relationships that develop within migrant networks have not been systematically examined by many researchers. Specifically, the members of the "larger society" have been largely ignored in the study of networks, even though Eric Wolf demonstrated

decades ago the importance of studying the wider socioeconomic context within which *any* community is situated. For example, government officials, money lenders, employers, their supervisors, smugglers, landlords, and even neighbors and co-workers are seldom discussed in network studies unless these actors are from the same hometowns as the migrants. Such manufactured endogamy – endorsed for its elegance by Michael Kearney (1986:353) – ignores the complex actually existing relations within migrant networks.

Instead of accurately depicting relations within migration networks, a number of unsupportable assumptions have persisted in the migration literature (for example, Portes and Bach 1985:5-7; Massey *et al.* 1987:40-44). Three major assumptions, already alluded to in the discussion above, are: 1) migrant networks originate in, and are comprised exclusively of members of the same, hometowns; 2) migration has become “self-perpetuating”, continuing to grow regardless of the actions of those actors deemed external to the networks; and, 3) labor recruitment no longer stimulates undocumented migration. While various studies may dispute one or another of these assumptions, none has systematically done so.

In my study I included all relevant actually existing relations within the migrant networks regardless of the place of birth, class, ethnicity, etc., of those involved. As a result, my research contradicts the “conventional wisdom” regarding migrant networks and undocumented migration from Mexico. I found: 1) migrant networks seldom originate in, and are never comprised exclusively of members from, one hometown; 2) migration is not self-perpetuating, but a result of the conditions in and emanating from the US; and, 3) labor recruitment continues to be a major stimulus to undocumented migration. If my findings are correct, fundamental assumptions supporting supply-side theory will have been undermined, and their policy prescriptions revealed as irredeemably flawed. After presenting a sample of my study data, I will suggest an improved model for the study of the social networks used by

international migrants.

My Ethnographic Data

I began my research by looking at immigrant-dominated rural industries in the US. I visited agricultural firms in the hinterland of the farm worker towns where I lived. I provided business cards and outlined the study focus: the supply of migrant labor. I interviewed agribusiness representatives and their supervisors, toured their facilities and gained access to their workers. I had open-ended interviews with workers off-site, both in the US and in Mexico.

I enjoyed extended stays in the hometowns of the Mexican workers, visiting with the workers of the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, with the stay-at-home family members of US farm workers. I arrived with invitations from many workers met in the US, and carried letters, photos, and gifts from those workers unable to return. I told the Mexico-based informants about my family, life, and work before questioning them about theirs.

There are distinctive regional identities of the thirty-odd indigenous populations in Oaxaca. I lived in the Mixteca region. Few Mixtec still wear the homemade clothing shown here. However, many stay-at-homes are still monolingual Mixtec speakers.

Aside from the large landholdings of the regional *caciques* along the river bottoms, most corn plots are small, eroded, and rocky. These plots provide only a small portion of the basic subsistence needs of most rural Mixtec families.

Subsistence farmers live in shacks. Along with other problems, families living in such housing suffer infant mortality rates five times higher than for other rural Mexicans. Fortunately, remittances from migrants can quintuple annual household income, allowing families to build improved housing like this brick home on the right. Mixtec have engaged in migration since the early 1900s: first to both the Pacific

and Gulf coasts, then after 1940 to Mexico City, and further north since a sustained economic crisis began in the '60s.

The US and Mexican governments, along with California-based agribusinesses and large landowners in Mexico developed export-oriented agriculture in north Mexico in the 1950s. One advantage for US companies is average farm wages of only four dollars (US) *per day*. A second benefit for US agriculture is the creation of a transnational labor force. The US imports 60 percent of our winter vegetables from Mexico, mainly from around Culiacan and San Quintin. Growers in Mexico bus the members of whole villages from the Mixteca north rather than increase wages for local workers. Each year a portion of the hundreds of thousands of indigenous workers based in north Mexico cross the international border, following the tomato harvest into California or over to Florida.

The transnational tomato industry is a migration stepping stone. Many other crop industries also offer low-wage employ along both coasts. For example, the Mixtec now dominate California's citrus labor markets. The Mixtec were reported to be working in Ventura by the 1970s, and in the San Joaquin Valley by the 1980s. Rick Mines and Ricardo Anzaldua (1982) and others have documented the fact that farm labor contractors (FLCs) went into north Mexico to recruit the Mixtec to replace union workers

One of those pickers is Lourdes Sanchez. She was 14 years old when she ran away from her family while living on a north Mexican tomato plantation. Her boyfriend got the money to smuggle her into the US from his crew foreman. Her growing family is housed, along with those of thirty other pickers, in the crew boss's backyard shacks in Farmersville, California. Each adult pays thirty dollars weekly. A third of California's 20,000-odd citrus workers are women. What are working conditions for harvesters like Lourdes Sanchez?

Pickers use unstable twenty-five foot tripod ladders to hurry up and down the trees while

heavily laden to earn piece-rate wages. As a result, the industry has one of highest worker's compensation rates in the state. Pickers carry a sixty-five pound bag around their necks, and drag them to 1,000 pound bins. It takes sixteen trips to fill a bin, which pays ten dollars fifty cents. Pickers must work fast enough to earn the equivalent of the minimum wage, or they either accept sub-minimum wages or termination. Citrus crews average more than 60 percent turnover seasonally. FLCs replenish their crews by recruiting new immigrant workers. The actual personnel practices will be discussed after I introduce the second migrant network in my study.

Subsistence plots in Zacatecas are larger than in the Mixteca (due to a redistribution of farmland after the Mexican Revolution). However, corn is still the main crop on unirrigated farms. Stalks are harvested for livestock feed. Jorge Gamboa migrated to the US in the '50s when the government brought 5 million Mexicans to work on the rails, the mines, and farms. These teenage grandsons already migrate illegally each year to rural California.

US dollars provides a number of benefits, but the modern demographic profile in this Zacatecas hometown is of the elderly, children, and unmarried women. This marginal population must do much of the tasks at home, since most able-bodied community members live eight to ten months a year in McFarland, California. Over time less farm production occurs on subsistence plots, and rural residents become even more dependent on the remittances of workers in the US.

Zacatecan migration is different in its nature and destinations from the Mixtec. The Mixtec often go to multiple destinations to obtain short-term jobs within Mexico and along either coast in the US. Zacatecans typically migrate directly from their hometowns to a specific destination where jobs are often prearranged. I found one Zacatecan hometown storefront that was a recruitment center, where jobs were pre-assigned and loans for migration were paid out. Most Zacatecans from this town work in San Joaquin Valley agriculture; others are Bay area janitors, Omaha meatpackers, or Chicago warehouse

workers.

McFarland is at the heart of the grape belt. One third of the population is from one Zacatecan town – more than remain behind in Mexico. The link between the two towns is a result of recruitment by the federal government in the 1950s. Many Zactecans became members of the United Farm Workers (the UFW); one is now a Vice President. However, the new generation of grape workers is employed by the FLCs that the growers used to displace the union in the 1970s.

Inez Garcia is a crew boss. To keep their jobs, pickers and packers must prepare the grapes properly. Inez is supervising work on a 700 acre vineyard, part of the grape and citrus empire of a corporate grower. Inez is sister-in-law of an FLC owner that employs 1,000 workers from one Zacatecas town.

FLC owner Umberto Rodriguez surveys the progress of a crew. A “checadora” is tallying up the worker’s boxes behind Umberto before a “burro” , foreground, loads them onto a flatbed truck. With the crew boss (Inez), these specialists constitute different levels of the management hierarchy of the FLC. All are Umberto’s kin.

Umberto was a company supervisor when the vineyard manager made him an “independent” contractor to undermine a UFW contract in 1976. The company provided him with financial and technical assistance. These personnel changes occurred in countless California agribusiness firms in recent decades. FLC-provided labor has gone from less than 10 percent of the farm workers in 1970 to more than 70 percent by 1992. New FLCs like Umberto’s firm usually have other assets to help them maintain control of a non-union workforce.

Large, extended families provide an ample supply of supervisors for the harvest. In the case of Umberto, two brothers who helped him later began their own firms, which now employ another 1,000 workers annually. The brothers all hire from their hometown, financing migration and settlement, and

deducting this assistance from workers' paychecks. The provision of such "services" is a lucrative part of the business; most FLCs charge 30 percent interest *monthly*. Under such conditions turnover averages over 60 percent annually, forcing FLCs to recruit new migrants to keep up the crews' sizes. Workers as young as 13 are commonly found in the vineyards. Subsequent research revealed that similar practices occur outside of California too.

After a 50 year effort the priest of this Michoacan parish built a second church tower in the 1980s after a pilgrimage to central Washington in search of funds. So-called "*migra*-dollars" also helped the town to purchase an ambulance and finance restoration of the central plaza. 70 percent of Washington's apple workers are from this one Mexican state, a result of intensive labor recruitment over the years, in both California and in Mexico.

Apples are grown across central Washington; most apples are grown and packed by large corporations. Note the example on the Snake River. This one 5,000 acre orchard is fifty miles from the nearest town. The orchard owner provides housing for 200-odd packinghouse workers, but 600 seasonal pickers camp outdoors for the four month harvest.

Other growers house farm workers in World War II-era military barracks. The grower of the camp says that the workers are provided free housing, but the crew bosses charge each worker twenty-five dollars a week. The foremen say that they supplement their low salaries by providing services for a fee. The housing lacks a kitchen, heat, or flush toilets. Catering truck drivers give kickbacks to crew bosses to access the orchards and barracks, while a mobile cantina brings booze and prostitutes on paydays, with more payoffs to the foremen.

Transport such as that shown here violates federal safety standards. Accidents in such unauthorized vehicles kill about 100 workers annually. In California most farm workers must pay five to eight dollars daily for so-called "reites" to and from work, often in unsafe vehicles. In Washington,

transport costs each worker four to six dollars, or about an hour's wages.

Substandard housing and transportation, low wages, piece-rate pay, no benefits, and high interest for services leave farm workers in abject poverty. The average farm worker earns 6,000 dollars annually. Apple workers receive five cents for every pound of apples they pick, while the retail price averages a dollar or more. But fruit packers build fifty million dollar facilities such as mock Tudor-style mansions. The Washington apple industry takes in more than a billion dollars yearly, and spends as much on advertising as on wages and benefits combined.

As in California, farm workers in Washington have tried to fight the unequal distribution of revenues. In the late 1990s the UFW and the Teamsters united to organize apple workers. The region's agribusinesses responded by adopting the "California model". Many of these strategies were employed against citrus and grape workers in California earlier.

The growers fired longtime employees and replaced them with new undocumented migrants. They threatened to invite the Immigration and Naturalization Service in to check their workers' documents. Finally, some apple producers began hiring "Temp" agencies to obtain replacement workers. (These "Temp" agencies are licensed FLCs, but in various ways are more like the domestic agencies studied by Hondagneu-Sotelo than the FLCs studied by Griffith and Kissam, or by me in California.) To date, not a single contract has been signed after the unions spent four years and more than a million dollars on the effort.

A New Model and Discussion

In this presentation I have: discussed the importance of labor demand in the case of undocumented migration from Mexico; noted problems with the conceptualization of the networks that migrants use; and, illustrated these two points with data gleaned from international migrant networks that link three

rural Mexican villages with major agribusiness industries in the western US.

Clearly the Massey *et al.* archetype alone does not represent the “facts on the ground”. None of the alternatives covers all the possible actors within international migrant networks either. Of the five, only Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo discusses both intermediaries and employers, a major step in the right direction. However, her model is unwieldy, breaking up the various actors into what she considers separate networks. Actually, as I noted earlier, this tripartite model is derived from her description, not her analysis. Finally, her model does not encompass the whole mix of social relations for migrant networks in the US.

I propose an improved model for what I prefer to call “international migrant networks”. Basically, I include in a single integrated network all of the actors identified previously, and encourage scholars to add any other actors found important in the origination and/or perpetuation of any other migrant network. I contend that every migration study should include all the participants found to be involved in the social process of international migration. In my study moneylenders, labor smugglers, drivers of various kinds, landlords, supervisors, and the policies and/or practices of both the US and Mexican states were often as important (or even more so) to understanding the flows of undocumented migrants that I studied as those included in the five studies discussed earlier. That is, without the whole panoply of actors – many of whom are not from the same hometowns as the migrants under study – international migration would have very different configurations, or might not even take place at all.

The principal contribution of this model is to recognize that the social process of international migration involves many more actors – and much more powerful ones – than those for which data are typically compiled and analyzed, and from which theories and policies are derived. I contend that the conclusions and public policy recommendations of major migration studies would have been different if the international migrant network had been the principal unit of analysis. In particular, the importance of

labor demand and the roles of actors in the labor-receiving nations would receive considerably more attention than the situation in labor-sending nations and along international borders. One more question needs to be answered in order to consider alternative public policies: why do so many employers prefer new immigrant workers?

Many labor-intensive industries such as those in US agriculture insist on maintaining substandard conditions for their workers. Only desperate workers partially supported by an alternative subsistence economy, usually back home in their Third World countries of origin will willingly accept such jobs. Growers offer low paying, dangerous, dirty work to a workforce unfree due to its composition as foreign (and largely undocumented). The maintenance of substandard labor markets in the US comes at a cost, mainly paid by the migrants and their families. Among the costs that make the news: sustained management-labor conflict, increasing poverty rates, and the continuous flow of new immigrant workers into the US and to these industries. The public mainly complains about the residual costs we bear, while overlooking the benefits. It's past time to ask ourselves: what would we do for food if all our slaves were freed?

So, who *is* responsible for continuing undocumented migration from Mexico? It's certainly not "them", because they could not afford to come here, nor would they know where to go, unless someone provides the financing and the jobs. Impoverished Mexicans cannot afford to risk many years annual income on a high-stakes adventure *al norte*. Yet they do get the money – directly or indirectly – from US employers.

In sum, when the federal government refuses to recruit foreign workers directly, employers usually use intermediaries to obtain new migrant workers from Mexico. These intermediaries, whether company supervisors or FLC staff, are usually Mexicans promoted out of the fields with the understanding that they will use their network connections to provide growers with as many new

workers as needed. But it is the employers that decide to create and perpetuate international migrant networks from places like Mexico.

It is also all of us in the US that are responsible for continued undocumented migration from Mexico. Our government representatives ignore employers that violate US immigration, labor, and health and safety laws. And, we consumers demand inexpensive fresh produce, but do not want to think about the conditions under which these commodities are produced. We do not insist on a higher standard of human and labor rights – not even in our own country. It is up to us to insist on reforms within our labor-intensive, immigrant-dominated industries, starting with dramatic improvements for those that feed us each and every day.

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