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## **The Debate You're Not Hearing: Immigration and Trade**

**by Andrew Christie**

As immigration again becomes the hottest political topic in America, the debate has again focused on higher fences and driver's licenses, amnesties and guest worker programs. As always, a central fact has gone largely unstated: Corporate globalization and U.S. trade policies have more to do with how many people cross our borders illegally than U.S. immigration policy or any potential reform thereof.

The exploitation of less developed countries in the economic globalization framework known as free trade has resulted in their financial and environmental impoverishment - both major causes of global overpopulation and increased migration.

When the focus of the debate is U.S. immigration policy rather than the nature of immigration, this reality is invisible. But a consensus has begun to emerge. "At the turn of the millennium," said Marcelo Suarez-Orozco in his presentation at the 2001 conference "Global shifts: U.S. immigration and the cultural impact of demographic change," "we are witnessing intense new worldwide migration and refugee flows...largely structured by the intensification of globalization." The same year, the Journal of Media and Culture noted "The privileging of rich migrants over poor ones romanticizes globalization as corporate progress and ignores the immense human suffering it entails for the majority of the world's population.. These waves of internal migration also result in the movement of peoples across national borders in order to survive."

The Globalization Caucus at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism noted the "actions of transnational corporations, international development and financial institutions...[that] heighten inequality among and within states, increase pressure to migrate, and impede efforts to fight racism and racial discrimination"

But word has not gotten around. While it's a given that overconsumption and waste is built in to the model of economic globalization, one seldom hears it acknowledged that forced migration is also a consequence of the increasing impoverishment of less developed nations, and therefore also directly attributable to the role of free-trade style globalization. At most, you might hear a vague comment that other countries should improve the lot of their citizens so they won't flee to the U.S. and the riches of the West, with no analysis of how that improvement should come about or exactly what is preventing it.

Regardless of what you believe about resource consumption, overpopulation or immigration in setting the bar for a sustainable society and healthy environment, the problem is the economic engine of inequity that is driving both wasteful consumption and forced migration. Tackling the problem at its source means focusing our energies on a common strategy with a common goal: Eliminating the growing chasm between the winning and losing ends of the "free trade" equation. That means turning free trade into fair trade.

"Restricting immigration to the United States won't solve the environmental problems that force people to move in the first place, and the increasing numbers of illegal immigrants indicate that restrictions are more thumb-in-the-dike than viable policy," says Stephen Mills, director of the Sierra Club's International Program. "The Sierra Club's international efforts go to the headwaters, promoting environmentally sustainable livelihoods that keep forests and families healthy, while making polluting multinational corporations accountable and trade agreements fair."

Or as environmental legend and past Sierra Club President David Brower succinctly put it as he cast his sharp eye on the fallout from the North American Free Trade Agreement: "Rather than complaining about immigration from Mexico, the U.S. could stop causing it."

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