

## HANDOUT 4

# What Diego Didn't Know

What Diego didn't know was that as the American economy began to slow due to the housing crisis, the jobs that unskilled, un(formally)educated, legal and illegal immigrants were used to getting were disappearing. They are not gone, but they are becoming less and less common. Those who can get them aren't being paid the same wage that they once were and those who have those jobs are sending less and less to their families who remain in their home countries.

What Diego also doesn't know is that since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, there has been an increase in border security. Since then, the Border Patrol has stepped up patrols, often times citing and patrolling the most often used and most safe routes driving immigrants into more dangerous mountain and desert areas. Civilian patrols have also emerged inspired by such groups as the Minutemen. The Minutemen and other like-minded groups are not harnessed by police procedure or concern with individual rights and humanity and often don't treat the immigrants as well as trained border security agents.

What Diego also doesn't know is that under current policy, American law enforcement agencies, particularly Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) agents, blame the immigrants themselves as opposed to the businesses that continue to provide jobs to undocumented workers. I.C.E., often with the help of local law enforcement, raids businesses arresting undocumented workers, punishing the individuals. While past American policy was to deport illegal immigrants to their home country, American policy seems to be shifting to a punishment phase where prison sentences are being handed out instead of deportation.

What Diego also doesn't know is that immigration to the United States has become an industry that is beginning to be controlled by drug cartels, narco traffickers, and organized crime. In fact, "hopping trains" is not only dangerous because an arm, leg, or worse can be severed if you were to fall, but once you are on the train, different gangs control different parts of the trains. In order to stay on the train some form of payment must often be given or a severe punishment can be enacted. There is also little food, little medical attention, and little comfort along the way. Gangs, cartels, and narco traffickers know the immigration routes well and hunt along them, kid-knapping and forcing some into labor, robbing those who have something to take, and occasionally physically tormenting or killing migrants.

What Diego also doesn't know is that the United States has a long history of using and abusing first generation immigrants and undocumented immigrants, often through very legal means. Beginning in colonial times with indentured servants, continuing with the growth of slavery in the American South from the middle 1700s into the middle 1800s, with Chinese and Irish immigrants in the early to middle 1800s to build the railroads and the Panama Canal, in the 1940s with the Bracero Program, and some feminist scholars argue with women at the same time (Rosie the Riveter). The trend seems to be that the United States welcomes workers in when it serves our interests, encouraging immigration with the case of the Bracero Program or turning a semi-blind eye to it with Chinese and Irish immigration and using the boom to our own benefits.

### SOURCES

*Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario

*Give Me Liberty! An American History* by Dr. Eric Foner

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the problems and struggles facing immigrants on their way north to the United States?

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2. Place the problems you listed in order of most difficult to overcome to least difficult to overcome. Be sure to provide an explanation.

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3. Once immigrants reach the United States what are the problems that they must face?

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4. How has northern immigration gotten more difficult since September 11, 2001?

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5. How have gangs, drug cartels, and narco traffickers gotten involved in northern immigration?

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