

# Host a Corn-Based Movie Night

If you're like us, you've wondered where the substance is in the ongoing migration debate. Arguments are limited to border walls and enforcement.

**Surprisingly lacking from this debate is one essential question: why?** Why do millions of Latin Americans make the unlikely decision to leave their communities and make the dangerous trek to a country with notoriously anti-immigrant laws? Why did the number of Mexicans who made this decision multiply after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement? **Why aren't we discussing the roots of migration?** Bring this critical discussion to your community with a movie night. Here's how:



1. **Invite your friends**, co-workers, family, or neighbors. Decide how many people you want to come. Add your event details to the included flyer, post it publicly, and send it to invitees 2-3 weeks in advance. Your attendance will increase if you also make personal phone calls to some of your invitees.
2. **Prepare popcorn**, corn chips, or other corn-based movie food to accentuate the role of NAFTA-facilitated corn dumping in forcing migration from Mexico.
3. **Watch the *Roots of Migration***. Traveling to Oaxaca, Mexico, a recent WFP delegation of 20 U.S. citizens got a unique glimpse of migration through the revealing lens of those who migrate. Synthesizing this powerful two-week experience into a poignant twenty minutes, *Roots of Migration* offers a fresh and firsthand conversation with the people behind the migration debate. Ask your regional organizer ([witnessforpeace.org/staff#RO](mailto:witnessforpeace.org/staff#RO)) for a DVD or **watch it online: [witnessforpeace.org/roots](http://witnessforpeace.org/roots)**
4. **Pass out the factsheet** on NAFTA's 15-year legacy in Mexico. Ask people to read it over to get a better sense of the connection between NAFTA and forced migration.
5. **Discuss issues raised by the video**. This is a chance for the group to reflect on the intersection between trade and migration, the migration concerns present in your community, and how to address those concerns in a way that boosts awareness. On the back is a list of suggested questions.
6. **Pass around the sign-in sheet** to stay involved with WFP's roots of migration campaign.
7. **Email your representatives** to ask that they support trade justice. If you have Internet access, **go to [witnessforpeace.org/trade](http://witnessforpeace.org/trade)**, a webpage where participants can easily send a message to their representatives to support the TRADE Act. This widely-backed bill would launch a new trade model that supports rather than displaces family farmers. While discussing the video, people can take turns emailing their representatives by simply visiting the page, entering their zip code, and hitting send.
8. **Pass around a hat** for people to donate to WFP's ongoing work to unearth the roots of migration. WFP depends on individual donations to amplify the message of those forced to migrate and to advocate for an overhaul of the policies at root. A suggested \$10 donation will help sustain this work.
9. **Send the sign-in sheet and donations** to your regional organizer. Find your organizer's contact information at [witnessforpeace.org/staff#RO](http://witnessforpeace.org/staff#RO)

# Discussion Questions

## 10 Suggested Questions to Spur Conversation

1. As many as 12 million undocumented immigrants are living in the U.S., but few in the U.S. are talking about the multiple factors that contributed to this phenomenon. What do you think are the top 3 reasons that undocumented immigrants from Latin America choose to make the long and dangerous journey to the U.S.?
2. How does the U.S. contribute to the pressures for Latin Americans to migrate? What is the concrete connection between NAFTA and the push to migrate? Are there other U.S. policies linked to the migration phenomenon?
3. Why does so much undocumented immigration exist? Why don't migrants use legal routes to come to the U.S.?
4. Since the early 1990s, an estimated 3,000+ migrants have lost their lives during their journey to the US. Known migrant deaths on the border increased every year from 2000-2005, with a peak in 2005 of 473. What do you think may have caused the consistent rise in deaths? What does this suggest about the decision to migrate?
5. Over the past 6 years, studies show a significant rise in the number of women, children, and indigenous people migrating from Mexico to the U.S. What are the possible causes of this shift? What additional challenges might face individuals from these nontraditional migrant groups?
6. The cost of paying a coyote (human smuggler) to assist in crossing the border has increased from \$300/person several years ago to about \$2000/person today. What is the relationship between militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border and the human smuggling industry? How do migrants find the resources needed to get to the U.S.?
7. Many towns in southern Mexico have been virtually depopulated of men between the ages of 18 and 40. What effect might this have on children, families, the social structure of the community, etc.?
8. Over 10 million Mexican migrants have crossed the border into the U.S. since the passage of NAFTA and have contributed more to the economies of Mexico and the U.S. than the treaty itself. The remittances (money migrants send home to their families) represent an average of 10% of their earnings, while 90% of their earnings is spent in the U.S. Remittances account for the single greatest source of foreign income in Mexico after petroleum exports. How does this picture of immigration differ from one shown in mainstream media and political debate?
9. What economic alternatives exist for people in Latin America confronted with the need to migrate? What role is there for U.S. citizens in supporting the development of such alternatives?
10. What is missing from the policy discussions on migration in the United States? What suggestions would you make for the benefit of the debate? What needs to be included in any campaign for "comprehensive immigration reform?"



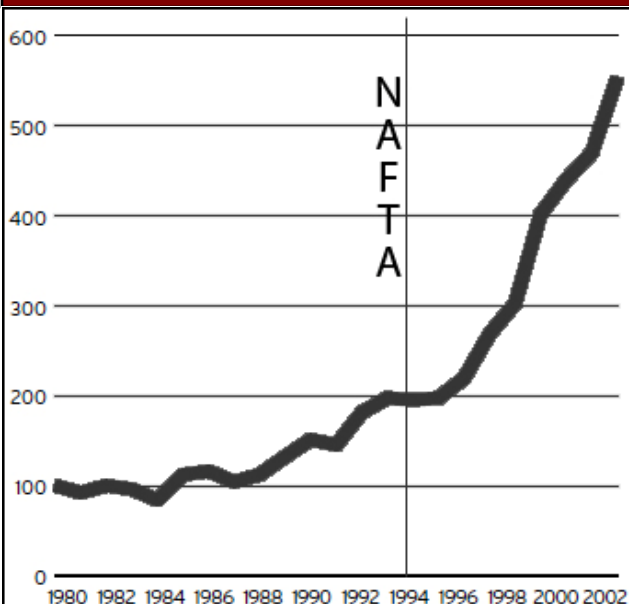


### NAFTA's Broken Promises Result in Increased Migration

When NAFTA was implemented in 1994 Mexicans were told that increases in trade, foreign direct investment, and exports would raise incomes and the standard of living in Mexico. The promises included reduced migration, more and better jobs, and lower prices for goods. After 15 years, the reality is the opposite. While trade and foreign direct investment have dramatically increased in Mexico, only 10% of the population has seen a higher standard of living, and millions have seen no other option but to migrate.

#### Migration from Rural Mexico to the U.S.

Household Members: 1980 = 100



Source: Analysis of data from Mexico National Rural Household Survey of 2002. Taken from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report: *NAFTA's Promise and Reality*, pg. 51.

Ψ Since the 1994 passage of NAFTA, the number of Mexicans migrating each year to the U.S. has **more than doubled** (from 235,000 to 577,000 per year).<sup>2</sup>

Ψ **Two-thirds of the undocumented Mexicans** currently living in the U.S. (4.13 million people) came after NAFTA's implementation in 1994.<sup>3</sup>

Ψ Remittances are the second highest official source of income for Mexico, following petroleum, **rising from approximately \$3 billion in 1993 to over \$20 billion** for the last four years. One third of Mexican families depend on remittances.<sup>4</sup>

### Why so much migration? A look at the agricultural sector:

By eradicating food tariffs and quotas, NAFTA forced Mexican family farmers into direct competition with U.S. agribusiness—some of the world's largest grain exporters. Benefitting from government subsidies, genetic modification, economies of scale, and highly mechanized technology, the U.S. grain companies flooded Mexico's market. The influx of cheap U.S. grains under NAFTA resulted in the decimation of at least **two million Mexican farming jobs**.<sup>5</sup> This does not include an estimated **eight million farmers** who abandoned their land as subsidies, access to credit, and a guaranteed product price were stripped away as prerequisites for NAFTA's implementation.<sup>6</sup>



Ψ The U.S. subsidizes agriculture with **\$20 billion** each year compared to **\$3.5 billion** in Mexico,<sup>7</sup> enabling large U.S. grain companies to sell corn at prices 30 percent below Mexico's cost of production.<sup>8</sup>

Ψ Given highly mechanized technology, U.S. agribusiness can produce corn at a much higher rate than Mexican family farmers. While it takes the average Mexican farmer **17.8 days** of labor to produce one ton of corn, it takes the average U.S. grain company just **1.2 hours**.<sup>9</sup>

Ψ Every hour Mexico imports **\$1.5 million** worth of food; in that same hour **30 farmers** migrate to the U.S.<sup>10</sup>

## NAFTA Fails to Deliver Sufficient Employment in the Industrial Sector:

NAFTA and the economic policies that paved its way reoriented the Mexican economy away from subsistence agriculture and towards a low wage labor force for multinational assembly plants called *maquilas*. During the peak growth period from 1994-2001, 1.3 million jobs were created in the maquila sector, not nearly enough to offset jobs lost in agriculture, nor in Mexico's decimated domestic industry,<sup>11</sup> not to mention the 730,000 Mexicans who enter the labor market per year.<sup>12</sup>

### The Reality of the Maquila Sector:

- Ψ A line worker in a plant makes an average of **7-9 dollars a day**, equivalent to what an undocumented worker might make **per hour** in the U.S.
- Ψ The factories are notorious for abhorrent health and safety conditions<sup>13</sup> and **disregard for labor rights**.<sup>14</sup>
- Ψ An estimated **1/3 of the jobs** created in the manufacturing sector in Mexico have been lost since 2001 as a result of companies moving their production orders to Central America, Southeast Asia, and China, **where labor is cheaper**.<sup>15</sup>

### Rising Prices

NAFTA promised lower food prices. However, partially due to consolidated corporate control, prices for tortillas, which represent 75% of the nutrition for Mexico's 50 million poor<sup>16</sup>, **increased by 571%** during the first six years of NAFTA<sup>17</sup>, and by January 2007 had nearly tripled again.<sup>18</sup>

Not only tortilla prices have risen. The cost of the basic food basket in Mexico rose 60% in 2008 alone. Families now have to spend practically **10 times the daily minimum wage** of approximately \$3.80 to acquire basic products for their meals, personal hygiene, and home.<sup>19</sup>

Upward price pressure, combined with precarious, low-paid employment and job loss, leaves many Mexicans with few options for survival. Many make the choice to migrate to the U.S. in order to provide for their families.

## Take Action

NAFTA is a proven failure, representing 15 years of economic desperation and migration for millions. But if we're against NAFTA, what are we for? Enter the TRADE Act. This widely-backed bill names unequivocal economic justice, human rights, labor, and environmental standards by which NAFTA and CAFTA must be renegotiated, and to which any future trade agreements must conform. If passed, the TRADE Act would launch a new trade model that supports rather than displaces family farmers. Please help make trade justice a reality by asking your representative today to support the TRADE Act. To easily do so, just visit [www.witnessforpeace.org/trade](http://www.witnessforpeace.org/trade), enter your zip code, and send a quick email to your representative.



This fact sheet has been compiled from a Witness for Peace Congressional document available soon at [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org). For a complete list of references, contact [mexico@witnessforpeace.org](mailto:mexico@witnessforpeace.org)

### Sources

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- <sup>3</sup> Goodman, Peter S. "In Mexico, People Really Do Want to Stay." The Washington Post. January 7, 2007.
- <sup>4</sup> Goodman.
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- <sup>17</sup> Olson, R. Dennis, "Lessons from NAFTA: Food and Agriculture", IATP, Dec 2, 2008
- <sup>18</sup> Olson.
- <sup>19</sup> Wage calculated based on exchange rate in August 2009.
- <sup>20</sup> Laura Gomez Flores, "Se disparo 60% la canasta basica en un ano," La Jornada, January 26, 2009.

# Movie Night: *Roots of Migration*



**Where:**

**When:**

**Contact:**

Why do millions of Latin Americans make the unlikely decision to leave their communities and risk their lives trekking to a country with notoriously anti-immigrant laws?

Come watch *Roots of Migration*, a new film shot in Oaxaca, Mexico that offers a fresh and firsthand conversation with those most knowledgeable about immigration's root causes—immigrants themselves.

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