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Malnutrition in Mexico

In order to find evidence of poverty and malnutrition in Mexico, one only needs to turn on the evening news. Each day I hear new political rhetoric bemoaning the influx of illegal immigrants. Many solutions have been proposed, yet few address the casual factors in the push and pull of northward immigration.

Mexican immigrants enter the United States for a myriad of reasons. And yet it never occurs to most American citizens the why's of immigration. Until we begin seriously examining this issue, the how's of immigration will continue to be an illusive, and moot, point.

Living in Arizona, I am able to see first hand the effects immigration has on the United States. I have witnessed the competitive spirit engendered by groups who fear the change and rapid slew of working non-citizens would bring.

Many people think that all immigrants are criminals. Although there are some who cross the border with a criminal record, and some who make one while they are here, the majority of illegals are simply here to make a better life for themselves and their families. Further more, these people themselves, are often the victims of criminal activities due to the secretive world they find themselves a part of before, during, and after entering the U.S.

So what would cause a person to uproot his or her life, leaving all friends and family behind only to move to an insecure life where they don't know the language, have no income or home, and are likely to be subject to discrimination and resentment? The answer is, of course, the hope for a better future.

Mexico is classified as a 2nd world country. This means that while some parts of Mexico are wealthy, the majority live in extreme poverty. Not only do the wealthy of Mexico have more assets, but among these assets are the majority of the nations natural resources. This leaves the Mexican poor with few opportunities to get their own food. In fact, approximately 15% of Latin America was undernourished in 2000-2002 (U.N.). And Mexico, which is the worlds 13th largest economy finds itself with 40 million (of 97 million) living below the poverty line.

People in Mexico are constantly being malnourished. Some may not have jobs, or even a place to sleep. Families are starving, and most people do not see how bad it is for them. As people struggle in Mexico, they see how people in the U.S. take for granted how much they have. Immigration is a major issue in the U.S., and people are not aware of just how much poverty and malnutrition effects immigration. Since more than 40% of the Mexican population lives in poverty, they must sometimes travel into the U.S. in search of work and a steady life.

74% of the population in Mexico is urban. Many times families are all clumped together, working 9-5 for very little pay. It is difficult in these situations to support a family as well as hoped. This is one main reason why immigration is taking place. People come to America to build a better life, whether or not they bring their families along. The other 26% of the people are living in rural areas. Most of the time people in urban areas are there because it is the only place that they can afford to live. When people are poor, they usually must live in poor neighborhoods, which are more prone to illness and violence.

The life expectancy in Mexico is about 72 years old, which is about 3 years less than the life expectancy in the United States. Most people in Mexico, however, do not reach the life expectancy, because they are not

healthy. The infant mortality rate is 31 per 1000 live births, which is about 3.1% of all Mexican infant who do not survive. Also, approximately 95% of the population has access to safe water.

The malnutrition and poverty levels have effected the Mexican government and standard of living severely. Since so many people are living in poverty, most of them are unable to pay taxes, which effects the quality of schools for those who are able to afford to attend. Only about 90% of the population can read and write. Although public schools do not have a yearly tuition, many families in Mexico need for their children to stay and work at home or on a ranch, rather than get an education. Since a lot of children do not get an education, they are not able to get a sturdy job. This in turn causes them to immigrate in hopes of finding job somewhere in a hot crop in the U.S. This effects how many trained workers there are. If there are no trained workers, there are no doctors or lawyers or teachers in Mexico. This cycle just continues, which makes living in Mexico very difficult.

Family sizes also effect the Mexican economy. Many people debate whether or not having a large family is a good thing for people living in poverty. Some believe that if you have a large family, it will simply be more mouths to feed. Others think that if they have a lot of children, there would be more of a chance that one of their children would grow up, become rich, and be able to support their parents.

Since the economy is so bad, many Mexicans are choosing to immigrate to the United States. The process to legally become a citizen on average take about 10-15 years. This is too long for most people who need to get away from Mexico. So they instead choose to illegally cross the border. This is not the right way to go about things, but they think that since it is the fastest way, it is also the most logical. Reports have estimated that about 850,000 illegal immigrants have entered the U.S. every year since 2000. There is also a large flow out of the United States, but since Americans are not directly effected by these immigrants, they go more or less unnoticed.

The Mexican and United States governments are trying to help the issues of both starvation and immigration. The Mexican government has been finding ways of helping their countries starvation problem. They have set up a program called Oportunidades, or PROGRESA, which began in August of 1997. This program was started in a effort to stop malnutrition, morbidity, high infant mortality rates, school dropout rates, and unhealthy living conditions.

Oportunidades helped about 40% (2.6 million) of families in Mexico by the end of 1999. Also at that time, the program worked in nearly 50,000 different locations, more than 2,000 municipalities, and 31 states. The budget for Oportunidades was about \$777 million in 1999, which is equal to 0.2% of Mexico's GDP.

With programs such as Oportunidades they are able to help feed and cloth many people living in Mexico. If people in Mexico were able to have a better life, there would not be as big of a need to immigrate, because people would be healthy, and they would be able to stay in their own country. This approach is working, however it does not cover everyone who is in need of it's benefits. Many impoverished people are overlooked, this is mainly because the government thinks it would cost to much to take care of them all. But I think that that is the type of thing taxes should mainly be spent on.

The United States government is trying to solve immigration issues as well. They are currently in the process of building a fence between the U.S. and Mexico border in order to try and keep illegals from crossing the border. I believe that this could work, but the fence would have to stretch across the whole border, which would cost the government a lot of money. However, while this does confront the act of immigration, it does not address the issues of why they are immigrating in the first place.

Organizations, such as the Red Cross are helping support people in Mexico who need it. There are many donations coming from the U.S. and going to Mexico. This is because many people think that a person is a person, and they should be helped no matter what. This is one of the best ways a person can look at an issue such a malnutrition. Since the Red Cross is a U.S. based organization, they do not help Mexico as much as

Oportunidades does, because they are also working to fight hunger in the United States.

I myself have come up with a few ideas on what would help the problems with malnutrition. I know that if every person who was able or at least somewhat willing was able to in Mexico/the United States donated \$10, we would be able to help families in Mexico for about a year. If we did this, any people would be able to afford to go through school, so that they may help their communities. This in turn would make less of a need to immigrate.

While on the topic of immigration, I think that if we made the process to become a legal alien much faster, say 1-2 year tops, more immigrants would do it legally, and that way they would be able to benefit their communities much more here and abroad.

I am aware that illegal immigrants will continue to find ways of crossing the border, but I think that since such a large majority want to come legally, but simply can't because it is too difficult, they would become legalized if they had the chance.

The issues just discussed have posed very large problems and panic. There are so many people living in poverty, but if you are not one of those, it is very hard to see just how severe it all is. Children die every day because they are born into a family who cannot support them. There are adults who cannot get a job because they did not have the finances to go through school. And yet, at the same time, there are people here in the land of the free and the home of the brave deciding on what designer handbag to buy?

As I'm sure we are all aware, problems do not always have easy solutions. Many times they simply lead to more problems. That is why it is up to us to find ways of solving them. Poverty is causing Mexicans to immigrate into the U.S. in search of a better life. Since it is so difficult to come legally, they are coming the way they see most convenient, illegally. Immigration has taken this country by storm, and we are still not sure how to handle it.

People do have their own ways of helping, such as giving money and old clothes to families in need. But do you think that that's enough? Do you think that poverty will ever stop, or even decrease? These are good questions that people are always trying to answer. I think that if we can work together to find a way to stop hunger, we will find a way, and hopefully my paper has given you some of the information we need to help solve the problems in Mexico.

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