



# Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants

*David Bacon*

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For two decades veteran photojournalist David Bacon has documented the connections between labor, migration, and the global economy. In *Illegal People* Bacon explores the human side of globalization, exposing the many ways it uproots people in Latin America and Asia, driving them to migrate. At the same time, U.S. immigration policy makes the labor of those displaced people a crime in the United States. *Illegal People* explains why our national policy produces even more displacement, more migration, more immigration raids, and a more divided, polarized society.

Through interviews and on-the-spot reporting from both impoverished communities abroad and American immigrant workplaces and neighborhoods, Bacon shows how the United States' trade and economic policy abroad, in seeking to create a favorable investment climate for large corporations, creates conditions to displace communities and set migration into motion. Trade policy and immigration are intimately linked, Bacon argues, and are, in fact, elements of a single economic system.

In particular, he analyzes NAFTA's corporate tilt as a cause of displacement and migration from Mexico and shows how criminalizing immigrant labor benefits employers. For example, Bacon explains that, pre-NAFTA, Oaxacan corn farmers received subsidies for their crops. State-owned CONASUPO markets turned the corn into tortillas and sold them, along with milk and other basic foodstuffs, at low, subsidized prices in cities. Post-NAFTA, several things happened: the Mexican government was forced to end its subsidies for corn, which meant that farmers couldn't afford to produce it; the CONASUPO system was dissolved; and cheap U.S. corn flooded the Mexican market, driving the price of corn sharply down. Because Oaxacan farming families can't sell enough corn to buy food and supplies, many thousands migrate every year, making the perilous journey over the border into the United States only to be labeled "illegal" and to find that working itself has become, for them, a crime.

Bacon powerfully traces the development of illegal status back to slavery and shows the human cost of treating the indispensable labor of millions of migrants-and the migrants themselves-as illegal. *Illegal People* argues for a sea change in the way we think, debate, and legislate around issues of migration and globalization, making a compelling case for why we need to consider immigration and migration from a globalized human rights perspective.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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