

# The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration

By David Bacon

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**The story of the growing resistance of Mexican communities to the poverty that forces people to migrate to the United States**

People across Mexico are being forced into migration, and while 11 percent of that country's population lives north of the US border, the decision to migrate is rarely voluntary. Free trade agreements and economic policies that exacerbate and reinforce extreme wealth disparities make it impossible for Mexicans to make a living at home. And yet when they migrate to the United States, they must grapple with criminalization, low wages, and exploitation.

In *The Right to Stay Home*, journalist David Bacon tells the story of the growing resistance of Mexican communities. Bacon shows how immigrant communities are fighting back—envisioning a world in which migration isn't forced by poverty or environmental destruction and people are guaranteed the “right to stay home.” This richly detailed and comprehensive portrait of immigration reveals how the interconnected web of labor, migration, and the global economy unites farmers, migrant workers, and union organizers across borders.

In addition to incisive reporting, eleven narratives are included, giving readers the chance to hear the voices of activists themselves as they reflect on their experiences, analyze the complexities of their realities, and affirm their vision for a better world.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“An important contribution to the current immigration debate.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Americans mostly think of immigration in terms of its impact on the US. David Bacon’s work reminds us that migration has a profound impact on the places migrants leave from, just as surely as it does on the places they go to. He argues persuasively that the right *not* to migrate cannot be divorced from immigrant rights. The heart of his work is in human stories, and this book validates its ideas with vivid testimony, in migrants’ own words, from those most affected.” —John W. Wilhelm, president of UNITE HERE!

“Bacon’s book, which is enhanced by 11 personal narratives, will help readers gain a significantly more sophisticated understanding of the context and on-the-ground reality of undocumented migrants in the U.S.” —*Publisher's Weekly*

“Combining evocative personal narratives with penetrating geopolitical analysis, this compelling book vividly reveals the devastating effects on Mexico of the global class war of the past decades and their impact on the United States. Perhaps the most striking demand of the victims is ‘the right to not migrate,’ the right to live with dignity and hope, bitterly attacked under the neoliberal version of globalization.” —Noam Chomsky

“A must-read for organizers, immigrant advocates, policy wonks, and citizens who care about our history and values as a nation. This book puts a human face on the immigration debate, its impact on people on both sides of the border, and the indispensable elements of real comprehensive immigration reform—who got us into this mess and what we need to do to fix it.” —Eliseo Medina, international secretary-treasurer of the Service Employees International Union and former vice president of the United Farm Workers

*From the Hardcover edition.*

#### About the Author

Award-winning photojournalist, author, and immigrant rights activist **David Bacon** spent over twenty years as a labor organizer. Bacon’s previous books include *The Children of NAFTA*, *Communities without Borders*, and *Illegal People* (Beacon, 2008). He is an associate editor at Pacific News Service and writes for the *Nation*, *American Prospect*, *Progressive*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*, among other publications.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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#### From the Introduction

When I left the organizing staff of the United Farm Workers in the late 1970s, I took with me some functional working-class Spanish and a new worldview. I grew up in Oakland, California, and knew nothing about Mexican culture before I left the Bay Area to work in rural California and Arizona. In the union I began to learn—the UFW was a great teacher, and I’ll always be grateful to the workers and organizers I met

there for changing my life.

I was a pretty good organizer in a union that had some of the best. I helped workers pull together their committees and picket lines, and fight the foremen and the growers. I have good instincts and grew up in a left-wing family, so in many ways my own culture fit pretty well. And I really loved the union's culture. Holding hands and singing in union meetings! Eating lunch and talking in the grape rows or under the tangerine trees. No sleep.

Here's how the day went during just one campaign in Calexico and the Imperial Valley. We'd have meetings of worker/organizers til midnight, then meetings with the campaign leaders til one, then get up at three to get down to the Hoyo when workers were crossing the border, then drive in the dark up to Blythe, then talk for hours next to the field with workers waiting for the ice to melt on the lettuce, then house visits after work in Mexicali, and then the meetings in the evening all over again.

You get the idea. Exhausting. Inspiring. You learn a whole world in a short time.

The other thing I took with me leaving union staff, or rather didn't take with me, was money. I had to get a job quickly, to pay child support and just to live. So I went to Salinas to get a job picking strawberries. I couldn't last a week bending over that far, and my hands were far too slow. So I went over to Hollister to get a dispatch at the union hall to work the wine grape harvest at Almaden, then one of the world's largest wineries.

A thousand workers showed up the morning the picking started. I was the only white guy. Most knew each other from previous harvests, so they quickly formed crews and went to work. A few dozen were left, and from them each tractor driver picked the six who would pick behind his gondola. Finally there were just six left. It was like not getting picked for softball in junior high.

Our crew, the final six, made up the slowest pickers in Paicines, Almaden's long valley of grapevines south of Hollister. So with typical Mexican irony, we called ourselves Los Relampagos—the Lightning Bolts. We never made much more on the piece rate bonus than the hourly guarantee, and my crewmates were pretty impatient with me. Each crew of six splits credit for what they all pick, so the faster pickers basically carry the slower ones.

Almaden and the Hollister UFW office were self-administered by the workers' elected ranch committee. That was a tradition in the wine grapes and was also true of the union at companies like Christian Brothers and Paul Masson. In all these companies, workers themselves did most of the original organizing, helped by Jose Luna, a legendary worker/organizer who expected them to carry most of the load in running the union.

I earned my credit with my crewmates when the company decided to bust the number-one tractor driver on the Almaden seniority list, accusing him of sleeping on the job. By sending him back into the picking crews, he would have lost not only his place in the list but a good year-round job driving a tractor. His family would have been thrown out of their company-owned house.

I suggested that we hold a company-wide meeting in front of the office in Paicines at lunchtime and then refuse to go back to work until the company talked with us. Farmworkers organize work stoppages a lot, so the idea wasn't that strange. The company did agree to talk with us. We called in Bill Granfield from the Salinas UFW office, knowing that the managers needed to save face by seeming to agree with the union's official representative rather than with us, the workers. Bill, a good organizer, knew the game too and played his part well. Our driver got his job back, and after that my crew might not have been fast, but we were well

loved, me included.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Jonathan Head:**

Do you have favorite book? Should you have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each book has different aim or perhaps goal; it means that e-book has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time for you to read a book. These are reading whatever they get because their hobby is actually reading a book. Why not the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, individual feel need book after they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will require this The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration.

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#### **Martha Holt:**

Is it anyone who having spare time in that case spend it whole day by means of watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration can be the reply, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are thus out of date, spending your free time by reading in this completely new era is common not a geek activity. So what these books have than the others?

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