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Migration in the Americas

How many Latin American immigrants are there in North America?

- The Latin American and the Caribbean population living in Northern America rose considerably in recent decades, from an estimated 10 million in 1990 to 26.6 million in 2019. ([source](#))
- 62% of Latin Americans living in the U.S. are of Mexican descent ([source](#)).
- There are more Central Americans living in the U.S. than South Americans and Caribbean people ([source](#)).

Why do people emigrate from Latin America and the Caribbean to the U.S.?

- Mainstream media often depicts the suffering experienced by Latin American migrants as their own fault. However, a closer look reveals the U.S. role in creating instability in Latin America and the Caribbean and forcing people to migrate.
 - **Venezuela:** In August 2017, the U.S. imposed barbaric sanctions on Venezuela that resulted in “very serious harm to human life and health, including ... more than 40,000 deaths from 2017-2018.” [Mainstream media](#) accused the Venezuelan government of causing these deaths, not the U.S.-imposed sanctions. These caused migration to jump from 100,000 emigrants to 340,000 in just one year. ([source](#))
 - **Honduras:** Honduras saw the largest wave of migration out of the country to the U.S. following the U.S. backed coup d'état in 2009. Following the coup, material conditions deteriorated for all sectors of the population while the lives of those who opposed government policies were in danger. After the U.S. backed the electoral fraud which put Juan Orlando Hernández in office for a second term, thousands of Hondurans fled the country in a series of “migrant caravans”.
- Conflicts, violence, and climate disasters not only cause outward migration, but displace people internally. Colombia has the second highest population of internally displaced people in the world ([Source](#)).

Why are migrants treated like criminals?

- To justify exploitation. Historically, migrants are brought or encouraged to come to the U.S. as a cheap alternative to fill labor shortages.
- Employers pay migrant workers minimal wages, control their living conditions, and use them to break strikes.



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- To divide migrant and non-migrant workers, the right wing accuses migrants of being “drug dealers and rapists,” of “stealing our jobs,” and “using up taxpayer-funded benefits.”
- Exploiting migrant workers depresses wages and conditions for the entire workforce.

When did the U.S. start regulating Latin American immigration?

- The first immigration program that focused on Latin America was the Bracero Program (1942-1964). Bracero means “one with arms,” and those brown arms were supposed to help fill agricultural worker shortages in California during World War II.
- The Bracero Program speaks to a global system in which temporary migration becomes permanent—and underground—over time. Workers arrive with the hope of making extra money to feed their families back home, but once here, they find the dependence on that salary never ends. When they try to find a way to regularize their status, they find the door closed to legalization.
- In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act pushed by the Reagan administration gave about 3 million people a chance at citizenship even as, for the first time, it criminalized crossing without papers. But fierce reaction from the right forced the politics, and by 1996, a Democratic administration in 1996 passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act, which closed most avenues to citizenship.
- Meanwhile, the temporary visa programs, sometimes tied to work, continue. Now there are similar temporary programs like Temporary Protected Status (TPS), that put migrants in similar precarious positions without any rights or avenue to permanent residency. ([Source](#))

When did the criminalization of Latin American migration start?

- While the Chinese were the first nationality to be excluded from immigration by law in 1882, the first laws criminalizing Latin American migrants began in the 1954 through Operation Wetback. This operation was a massive deportation scheme that targeted the same workers of the Bracero Program. In one summer alone, over one million Mexican workers were deported back to Mexico.
- The criminalization of migrants is also linked to the mass incarceration of Black people in the US. The War on Drugs targeted both Black and Brown populations living in the US, including Latin Americans who were stereotyped as drug dealers. The Immigration Act of 1990 specifically expanded immigration detention and linked it with “anti-drug” programs.



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What are we pushing for now?

- We want a broad path to citizenship for the nearly 11 million people who are stranded in the United States without access to legal status.
- We want broader access to asylum for refugees and asylum seekers fleeing persecution, war and corrupt governments in their countries of origin.
- We want an end to immigration detention in this country, especially to the privatized detention that subjects families and children to separation, filthy living conditions, and abuse from companies beyond the reach of any regulation.
- We want an end to abusive policies at the border that force those who migrate to improve their families' lives, or who are fleeing persecution from criminal gangs, to wait in squalid camps for what is their right: a hearing where they can ask for asylum.
- WE WANT THE FREEDOM TO MOVE WITHOUT FEAR.