

# MainLine Life Education

## Sociologist Douglas Massey speaks about 'dismal failure' of U.S. immigration policy

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"A pretty dismal failure" is how Douglas S. Massey sums up current U.S. policy towards Mexican migration into this country.

Massey, a renowned sociologist who researches immigration, spoke at Bryn Mawr College on March 1 in a talk sponsored by the college's Center for Ethnicities, Communities and Social Policy and its Center for International Studies. He is best known for his book, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*.

"Immigration Policy in an Era of Globalization" was the title of Massey's lecture, in which he debunked several stereotypes about migration and the U.S./Mexico border.

Massey, chair of the University of Pennsylvania's sociology department, spoke of the misconceptions of the current "massive" migration of individuals to developed countries. "People think, 'They're really poor and we're really rich,'" said Massey, "but immigration doesn't come from the poorest countries."

Instead, he said, immigrants come from nations in the midst of economic growth and transformation – like Mexico – that creates unstable markets and displaces peo-

ple from their jobs.

He pointed out that the poorest region of the world is sub-Saharan Africa but that its people constitute the smallest percentage of international migrants.

Massey discussed the opportunities available to immigrants.

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**"Every society, no matter how it's organized, has jobs at the bottom. And of course, nobody wants these jobs."**

Douglas S. Massey,  
sociologist

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women and teenagers. But today, Massey said, these sources of labor have been eliminated.

"Immigrants are willing to do the jobs," he said. Even working in a low-status job, the money they earn gains them status in their home countries.

Mexicans are the largest immigrant group in the United States. The money that they earn here is often sent home to families in hometowns – in large quantities. "Mexi-

cans annually remit \$4 billion back to Mexico," said Massey.

Most of these migrants will often eventually follow their wages and return to their homes. "Mexicans aren't moving here because they're really poor and we're really rich and they want to stay here forever," he said.

Today, global migration is occurring at a rapid rate. But according to Massey, "most advanced industrialized societies follow a policy of denial – of smoke and mirrors. They've structured their policies so as to receive immigrants without appearing to receive immigrants."

Massey included the U.S. in his criticism, citing the hypocrisy of NAFTA and charging the U.S. with "repressive border enforcement." He called for a "fundamental rethinking of our immigration policy."

He suggested a "12-step plan," presented "with only a little bit of sarcasm." These steps included the creation of a new two-year temporary U.S. work visa, a reduction of U.S. border enforcement personnel and resources, and an increase in the number of permanent residency visas available to Mexicans and Canadians.

"We try to pretend like labor migration isn't going to happen," said Massey. "It's time to end the charade."