

A Story of Migration: My Tale of Two Cities

By Gail Emrick

A DISCUSSION LEADER'S GUIDE TO THE VIDEO

ASSUMPTIONS:

All participants have viewed the video prior to discussion/meeting.

Participants have been brought together (physically or by zoom) to discuss the video. They may already be part of a group (church members, volunteers, book club members, etc) that has decided to discuss issues of migration and the video.

PURPOSES OF THIS GUIDE:

1. To reinforce shared learning from the video
2. To raise consciousness around key issues of migration (especially from Central America)
3. To decide whether and how the group would like to continue working together to learn more and/or take action.

SIX KEY CONCEPTS FROM THE VIDEO:

1. There are multiple reasons why people migrate north from Central America.
2. Central America, like the US, has many indigenous people.
3. The US is responsible for some of the conditions that exist in Central America.
4. Climate change impacts food insecurity.
5. The US asylum system is a legal way for people from around the world to enter our country – but it is complicated and extremely difficult to access for most people from Central America.
6. By contrast to the era when our ancestors migrated to the US, there is currently no “line” for people from Mexico and Central America to get in to come here legally.

DESIGNING YOUR DISCUSSION OUTLINE

For a discussion among any group, it's helpful to provide (1) ground rules for discussion (politeness, listening, no speeches), (2) explain and agree on the purpose of the session (3) remind people of the time frame for discussion, (4) facilitate the discussion, and (5) explain and agree to any follow-up actions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - On the following pages, we have provided a range of questions that can be used to create a discussion among your participants. The questions are divided into three groups (1) ice breakers, (2) initial questions, and (3) secondary questions. Depending on

the experiences and interests of the group, you can select questions from these options while adding any other questions that might be helpful for your group.

The **FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION** section of this guide offers ways for your group to think about how they might go forward individually or as a group to learn more or take action.

The **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** section of this guide provides you with select videos, reports, and articles that will help you learn more about root causes of migration of Central Americans to the US. It also provides a list of national organizations that work on immigration issues. In advance of your discussion, you may want to develop a list of local nonprofit or governmental organizations that support immigrants in your local community. This list could be a valuable resource to share with the group if you want to encourage them to get involved with immigrant support locally.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ICE BREAKERS

Brief, personal introductions from each member of the group

What did you like most of the video? Least? And why?

In three years, what will you remember about the film?

INITIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (directly from the six key concepts, listed above)

1. What are some of the reasons that Central Americans migrate to the United States?
(1) Economic Insecurity, (2) Safety Concerns (gang violence, drug cartels, and lack of adequate, government-sponsored policing), (3) To reunite with family already living in the US. (4) corrupt, unstable governments, (5) climate change, and (6) lack of opportunity to improve lives.
2. What did we learn about the indigenous populations in Central America?
Like indigenous populations in North America (Native Americans), most Latin American countries have separated their indigenous populations from upper class European-based populations. Indigenous education, living conditions, and legal safety measures are inferior to those of their European counterparts.
3. What are some of the ways that the US has influenced Central American countries since the late 1800's?
The US has influenced Central American countries economically, politically, and militarily. United States' economic interests in these countries have allowed the US to dictate some of the governments policies and practices to ensure continued profits from the resources of the region. And US economic interests have been supported by our political leaders while influencing the leadership in the region.

4. What do we know about climate change in the Central American region? And how does this affect northern migration from these countries.

Many Central Americans are subsistence farmers who rent or own small plots of land and whose families survive only because they can eat the crops they harvest. Climate change has already caused droughts and occasional storms causing flooding. If a subsistence farmer's crops are wiped out in a given year, the family will be undernourished if not starve.

5. What do we know about the US asylum system? And how does this apply to Central Americans?

The US asylum system is a legal way for people in harms way to enter the US and become US citizens. Based on a UN Convention from 1951 (post World War II), it applies to people who have been persecuted or fear persecution based on their religion, race, political beliefs, or social groups. Being indigenous and socially discriminated against has not been formally recognized at all in US asylum cases to date. To qualify for asylum, a person must have already migrated away from their country of origin to a second country – and they must be unable to return to their country of origin. There is no such thing as “economic asylum” and very little opportunity for Central Americans to obtain the few visas that allow people to come to the US to work here (temporarily or permanently).

6. Why don't these migrating Central Americans just get in line to get jobs in the US or to become US citizens?

Unless a Central American already has a close US citizen relative living the US who can sponsor their application for a family-preference visa, they are unlikely to qualify for the few work visas or few asylum visas that are available each year. Central Americans have almost no options for living and working in the US legally.

SECONDARY QUESTIONS

1. Historically, how has the US treated new immigrants (Chinese, Irish, Italians, people of Latin American origin)? Are we satisfied with this process? If not, what can be done to change this?
2. How do nation states and borders support the separation of wealthy and poor nations and people? It is right or wrong for the US to keep people out? To keep people out while legally allowing for the flow of their products, goods and services?
3. What is the history and meaning of borders in our world today?

In early history – and to this day – natural borders, such as rivers, hills, mountains, forests, the migration patterns of birds and animals – have served to help humans find their way and survive. As hunting and gathering societies evolved into

agricultural societies, competition for resources increased. To oversimplify, competition gave rise to nation states and to protect their status, nation states established and protected their borders. But borders are fluid. As a result of invasions, wars and other factors, they change.

-Nation states control legal immigration or the legal right to cross borders. In terms of numbers, control ebbs and flows often reflecting the need for workers but also reflecting notions of which people are desirable and which aren't.

4. If one were to accept the premise that world-wide resources are sufficient to feed and shelter the world's population, and distribution systems can serve people equally would there be a need for borders?

Is it "human nature" to protect one's resources and access to them?

Is there a moral imperative to share resources? If yes, with whom and to what extent?

5. What do we know about immigrants in our local community (or our state)? What percentage of our population are immigrants? From what countries of origin do they come?
6. Does anyone here work with any local immigration organizations that support Central Americans (or other immigrants) in our community? If yes, could you share your experiences as a staff member, volunteer, or donor?

FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

Gail said that all that she had experienced and learned about Central America is "too much for one heart to bear." If the video touched your heart, how could we work together to:

- 1) Share and talk about this video with others
- 2) Learn more about
 - Why Central Americans migrate north
 - The US immigration system
 - The plight of many Central Americans, both within their countries and when they 1) cross the US border without documentation and 2) claim asylum when crossing the US border
 - The militarization of the US border
- 3) Help migrants from Central America in our local community

There are many ways for people to get involved with Central American immigrants and this cause. But it starts with a single decision to take a single action. Can you make that decision today? Please take out a piece of paper and write down one action that you can commit to doing in the next month as the result of seeing and discussing this video. Please share your committed action with the rest of the group.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles, Reports, and Videos that explore Central American migration

1. Video - Harvest of Empire (YouTube – 1.5 hours) – US government supported the destabilization of various Central American and Caribbean countries.
2. Podcast (15 minutes)– “The Shameful History of US intervention in Latin America”
3. Report – “Central American Migration: Root Causes and US Policy” (Congressional Research Services, October 27, 2021)
4. Report – “Central American Immigration in the United States” (Migration Policy Institute, August 11, 2021)
5. Mini Course on Immigration “Pew Research US Immigration Mini Course” (search on this title to start the individual mini-course on immigration)

National organizations that focus on immigration

1. National Immigration Forum
2. Migration Policy Institute
3. National Immigration Justice Center
4. American Immigration Council
5. Trac.syr.ecu/immigration – data base of immigration courts, ICE enforcement, detention
6. IRC (International Rescue Committee) – supports refugees resettling in the US