

“Before you ask them to respect our borders, ask yourself: Has the West ever respected anyone’s borders?”

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Why Should Immigrants ‘Respect Our Borders’? The West Never Respected Theirs

Immigration quotas should be based on how much the host country has ruined other countries.

By Suketu Mehta, June 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/07/opinion/immigration-reparations.html?fbclid=IwAR0ZqNnuWpD3v4RbXMFQf6xLJW-eAOEsgmQijclD_Vr9DKkiZLVzEos808



In Iraq, the United States imposed a war that resulted in 600,000 deaths and countless injuries.
CreditCreditTyler Hicks/The New York Times

There is a lot of debate these days about whether the United States owes its African-American citizens [reparations for slavery](#). It does. But there is a far bigger bill that the United States and Europe have run up: what they owe to other countries for their colonial adventures, for the wars they imposed on them, for the inequality they have built into the world order, for the excess carbon they have dumped into the atmosphere.

The creditor countries aren’t seriously suggesting that the West send sacks of gold bullion every year to India or Nigeria. Their people are asking for fairness: for the borders of the rich countries to be opened to goods and people, to Indian textiles as well as Nigerian doctors. In seeking to move, they are asking for immigration as reparations.

Today, a [quarter of a billion](#) people are migrants. They are moving because the rich countries have stolen the future of the poor countries. Whether it is Iraqis and Syrians fleeing the effects of illegal American wars, or Africans seeking to work for their former European colonial masters, or Guatemalans and Hondurans trying to get into the country that peddles them guns and buys their drugs: They are coming here because we were there.

Before you ask them to respect our borders, ask yourself: Has the West ever respected anyone's borders?

A vast majority of migrants move from a poor to a [less poor country](#), not a rich one. Immigration quotas should be based on how much the host country has ruined other countries. Britain should have quotas for Indians and Nigerians; France for Malians and Tunisians; Belgium for very large numbers of Congolese.

And when they come, they should be allowed to bring their families and stay — unlike the “guest workers” who were enticed to build up the [postwar labor force](#) of the colonizers and then asked to leave when their masters were done exploiting them.

The Dominican Republic, where the United States [propped up the dictator Rafael Trujillo](#) for three decades, should be high on the American preference list. So should Iraq, upon which we imposed a war that resulted in [600,000 deaths](#). Justice now demands that we let in 600,000 Iraqis: for each death we caused there, someone should get a chance at a new life here.

Some 12 million Africans were [enslaved and carried across the Atlantic](#) by European powers. Should not 12 million people from Africa be allowed to live in the countries enriched by the toil of their ancestors? Both will be better off: the African still suffering from what slavery has done to their country, and the host country that will again benefit from African labor, but this time without enormous pain and for a fair wage.

Just as there is a carbon tax on polluting industries, there should be a “migration tax” on the nations who got rich while emitting greenhouse gases. The United States is responsible for one-third of the [excess carbon](#) in the atmosphere; Europe, another one-quarter. A hundred million refugees fleeing hurricanes and droughts will have to be resettled by the end of the century. The United States should take a third, and Europe another quarter.

A huge bill would come to the West, but it is one it should look forward to paying. Without immigration, America's economic growth would have been [15 percent lower](#) from 1990 to 2014; Britain's would have been a full 20 percent lower. Immigrants are 14 percent of the American population, but they started a [quarter of all new businesses](#) and since 2000 [earned over a third](#) of the American Nobel Prizes in chemistry, physics and medicine.

Migrants are 3 percent of the world's population but [contribute 9 percent](#) of its gross domestic product. Their taxes prop up the pension systems of the wealthy nations, which are not making enough babies of their own.

If you want to help the poorest people in the world, the fastest way to do so is to ease barriers to migration. Migrants sent back [\\$689 billion in remittances](#) last year, which amounts to three times more than the direct gains from abolishing all trade barriers, four times more than all the [foreign aid given](#) by those governments and 100 times the amount of all debt relief.



A man walked to the United States side of the Paso del Norte bridge between downtown El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, in April. CreditPaul Ratje/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Are the rich countries obligated to take in any and all comers from the countries they have despoiled? There are serious arguments against open borders: that the United States is a lifeboat in an ocean of poor nations, and letting too many people in will sink the boat; that even if we owe reparations to people we have dispossessed, those reparations can come in the form of cash payments or resettlement in another territory.

There are no serious arguments that demonstrate long-term economic damage to countries that accept immigrants, even in large numbers. During the age of mass migration, a quarter of Europe moved to the United States, which went on to replace Europe at the pinnacle of wealth and power.

A world with more open borders would have a brief spasm of mass movement, and then migration might actually decrease, because money and happiness would be more equitably spread around, and more people would stay home.

To avoid paying the “migration tax,” the rich countries would have to stop propping up dictators, stop starting savage and unnecessary wars, restrain their multinational corporations from ripping off mineral wealth of poor countries and make sure that global trade is more equitable. Or else the migration bill from the devastated country would be prohibitive.

What is good immigration policy for the United States is separate from what is just and moral for the peoples whose destiny America, past and present, has affected. It might make economic sense for the United States to let in more skilled Indians and fewer unskilled Latinos, but America owes them more, and it should open its doors more to its southern neighbors.

History is what has happened and can never un-happen; history is happening right now. Attention needs to be paid. So does the bill.

[Suketu Mehta, is the author, most recently, of "This Land Is Our Land: An Immigrant's Manifesto" and teaches journalism at New York University.]

Why are close to 250,000 Hondurans & Guatemalans fleeing this year alone?

The U.S., Canada and "international community" are keeping in place the very conditions that force Hondurans and Guatemalans to flee their countries, every year. There is no end in sight to this refugee-producing machinery.

U.S. & Canadian problems

The U.S. and Canadian governments, the World Bank and global businesses and investors (privatized hydro-electric dams, mining extraction, African palm, sugar cane and fruit production, garment "sweatshop" factors, tourism complexes, etc.) maintain profitable relations with anti-democratic, corrupt, repressive governments in Honduras and Guatemala, turning a blind eye to and benefitting from exploitation and repression, environmental devastation and human rights violations, corruption and impunity.

"Venezuela factor"

After a flurry of mainstream media coverage in 2018, the reporting has died off. A majority of the refugees are fleeing Honduras and Guatemala whose corrupt, repressive, exploitative governments maintain full relations with the U.S. and Canadian governments and are considered "democratic allies" in the U.S. and Canadian-led efforts to illegally overthrow the Venezuela government. The hypocrisy is over-whelming.

Keep sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to families, friends and networks, to politicians and media, to pension and investment funds, asking: Why our governments, companies and investment firms benefit from and turn a blind eye to poverty, repression and violence, environmental and health harms that are directly causing the forced migrancy/refugee crisis in Guatemala and Honduras.

Rights Action (U.S. & Canada)

Since 1995, Rights Action has been directly funding community-based human rights, environment and territory defenders in Guatemala and Honduras. We provide relief funds to victims of repression and human rights violations, health harms and natural disasters. We work to hold accountable the U.S. and Canadian governments, companies and investors, international actors (World Bank, etc.) that cause, contribute to and profit from repression and human rights violations, environmental harms and forced evictions, corruption and impunity.

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To support our partner community groups in Honduras and Guatemala, [make check to "Rights Action" and mail to:](#)

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