

## Immigration 101

By [Molly Ivins](#), [AlterNet](#). Posted [March 30, 2006](#).

Racists seem to think that illegal workers -- the hardest-working, poorest people in the US -- are getting away with something.

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In 1983, I was a judge at the Terlingua Chili Cookoff, and my memory of the events may not be perfect -- for example, for years I've been claiming Jimmy Carter was president at the time, but that's the kind of detail one often loses track of in Terlingua.

Anyway, it was '83 or some year right around there when we held The Fence climbing contest. See, people talked about building The Fence back then, too. The Fence along the Mexican border. To keep Them out.

At the time, the proposal was quite specific -- a 17-foot cyclone fence with bob wire at the top. So a test fence was built at Terlingua, and the First-Ever Terlingua Memorial Over, Under or Through Mexican Fence Climbing Contest took place. Prize: a case of Lone Star beer. Winning time: 30 seconds.

I tell this story to make the one single point about the border and immigration we know to be true: The Fence will not work. No fence will work. The Great darn Wall of China will not work. Do not build a fence. It will not work. They will come anyway. Over, under or through.

Some of you think a fence will work because Israel has one. Israel is a very small country. Anyone who says a fence can fix this problem is a demagogue and an ass.

Numero Two-o, should you actually want to stop Mexicans and OTMs (other than Mexicans) from coming to the United States, here is

how to do it: Find an illegal worker at a large corporation. This is not difficult -- brooms and mops are big tip-offs. Then put the CEO of that corporation in prison for two or more years for violating the law against hiring illegal workers.

Got it? You can also imprison the corporate official who actually hired the illegal and, just to make sure, put some Betty Sue Billups -- housewife, preferably one with blonde hair in a flip -- in the joint for a two-year stretch for hiring a Mexican gardener. Thus Americans are reminded that the law says it is illegal to hire illegal workers and that anyone who hires one is responsible for verifying whether or not his or her papers are in order. If you get fooled and one slips by you, too bad, you go to jail anyway. When there are no jobs for illegal workers, they do not come. Got it?

Of course, this has been proposed before, because there is nothing new in the immigration debate. As the current issue of Texas Monthly reminds us, the old bracero program dating from World War II was actually amended in 1952 to pass the "Texas proviso," shielding employers of illegal workers from criminal penalties. They got the exemption because Texas growers flat refused to pay the required bracero wage of 30 cents an hour. Instead of punishing Texas growers for breaking the law, Congress rewarded them.

In 1986, the Reagan administration took a shot at immigration reform and reinstated penalties on employers. They weren't enforced worth a darn, of course. In 2004, only three American companies were threatened with fines for hiring illegal workers. Doesn't work if you don't enforce it.

This brings us to the great Republican divide on the issue. Conservatives, in general, are anti-immigrant for the same reasons they have always been anti-immigrant -- a proud tradition in our nation of immigrants going back to the days of the Founders, when Ben Franklin thought we were going to be overrun by Germans. But Business likes illegal workers. The Chamber of Commerce lobbies for them. They're lobbying now for a new bracero program. What a bonanza for Bidness.

Old-fashioned anti-immigrant prejudice always brings out some old-fashioned racists. This time around, they have started claiming that Mexicans can't assimilate. A sillier idea I've never heard. Why don't they come to Texas and meet up with Lars Gonzales, Erin Rodriguez and Bubba at the bowling alley. They can drink some Lone Star, listen to some *conjunto* and chill.

Racists seem obsessed by the idea that illegal workers -- the hardest-working, poorest people in America -- are somehow getting away with something, sneaking goodies that should be for Americans. You can always avoid this problem by having no social services. This is the refreshing Texas model, and it works a treat.

Aren't y'all grateful that we're down here doing exactly nothing for the people of our state, legal or illegal? Think what a terrible message it would send if you swapped Texas with Vermont, and they all got health care. In Texas, we never worry about illegals taking advantage of social benefits provided by our taxpayers. Incredibly clever, no?

One nice thing about the benefit of long experience with *la frontera* is that we in Texas don't have to run around getting all hysterical about immigrants. The border is porous. When you want cheap labor, you open it up; when you don't, you shut it down. It works to our benefit -- it always has.

*Molly Ivins writes about politics, Texas and other bizarre happenings.*

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**Good grief. I agree with Ms Ivins. I think I need a boiling shower.**

Posted by: ABetterFuture on Mar 30, 2006 1:24 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

So, yeah...put the criminals who hire people who enter illegally in jails.

The wall is possibly (probably) a stupid waste of money. We have no one to blame for it but ourselves--we elected these silly people to congress. It is nice to hear someone slamming the building of this silly wall *in English*.

P.S. Not everyone who wants to toss illegal aliens out and build a wall is a racist. You don't have to be a racist to be a xenophobe. Then again, you don't even have to be a xenophobe to oppose unchecked entry across the border. I do think you have to have a logical disconnect, or some sort of societal-neuronal short circuit to *hate* anybody you've never met, but *hate* isn't why most folks oppose open borders. That is the only thing that Ms Ivins get's wrong--as usual--the name calling. "Racist"? Nah. Just guarded and cautious; for better or worse, justifiably so or not.

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**cobblepot**

Posted by: cobblepot on Mar 30, 2006 2:41 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

When the economic pie gets noticeably smaller, people get pissier about "others" getting financial help. This time we have the ambient atmosphere of fear of All Others. A bad combination. Regarding the alleged drain of tax dollars by illegals (highly debated statistics), wouldn't it be fun to close tax loopholes, enact windfall oil taxes, and raise the rates for the uber-wealthy, and lower the maximum on the Death Taxes. Then americans wouldn't have to worry so much about illegal-drain.

By the way, molly, your quip about running oprah for prez made me nauseous; she is just another dishonest media-whore.

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**I love Molly. Even when...**

Posted by: Sojourner on Mar 30, 2006 5:04 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

...she doesn't look up from her typewriter to see that times have changed. Actually, when she sees that her keyboard no longer goes clackity clack, it should be obvious that times have changed. The "never mind" border is a thing of the past.

I love her feel good pieces, where she gives us the old downhome Texas girl yippe ki yeah getalong there little racists.

Nevertheless, our border with Mexico will be secured. No, it won't be perfect. What would Hollywood have to dramatize if Godzilla patrolled the Swanee (or whatever river it is they have down there). But it's gonna be different from her growing up days.

Latin America is a seething swamp of increasingly desperate people. They have my sympathy. But so long as they continue to elect mob bosses (OK. Bush fits that category, too. You're right, when it comes to governance, we got nothing to crow about.) our foreign aid to Latin America goes directly into investment in the US stock market.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but no matter how you slice it, my objection to illegal immigration has nothing to do with race and everything to do with laws that should be obeyed.

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» [RE: I love Molly. Even when...](#) Posted by: appelpie

» [They're NOT on a sympathy quest](#) Posted by: FedUp

» [Gosh, I'm glad to hear from someone who can speak for all of Central and South America](#) Posted by: Sojourner

» [RE: Gosh, I'm glad to hear from someone who can speak for all of Central and South America](#) Posted by: FedUp

» [You Durn Tootin](#) Posted by: O.B.Server

» [Latin america is a chronic failure](#) Posted by: Bobsays

### **I don't hail from a border state...**

Posted by: sgtmartin1 on Mar 30, 2006 6:52 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

...but I come from one where immigrants in the early part of the last century came here and dug coal and died to build this country.

You nailed it Molly. Guys like Tancredo are playing this to sidle up to the worst among us. This parody is for you Tommy:

### **Tancredo Calls for Catapult to Return Aliens**

EWM- (March 30, 2006) Anti-immigrant firebrand Representative Tom Tancredo (R-CO) said today that he's looking forward to the upcoming House-Senate conference to reconcile differences in the immigration bill and will seek to add provisions that will make the final version even tougher.

"We're going to build a wall to keep them out and I'm proposing a catapult to send those already here back," said Tancredo, "when those alien rascals see their amigos being returned via airmail, they'll think twice about climbing my wall to come here and take our jobs..."

...When a reporter suggested that Tancredo's proposals were xenophobic, the congressman became enraged.

"That's a mighty big word and I'm not sure what it means, but let me tell you a thing or two about history. This melting pot business is a big crockpot of shit. We've played footsie with the foreigners for 230 years in this country and what did it get us? Montezuma's revenge, German measles, Asian flu and Dutch elm disease—they're a scourge I tell you!..."

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### **what do mexicans think of redheads molly?**

Posted by: gotmyeyeonyou on Mar 30, 2006 8:41 PM [[Report this comment](#)]

so should the canadian gov to give full citizenship benefits to left leaning americans who manage to sneak into canada in order to improve their lives? gimmie a break, how are you going to compare anti german sentiment with anti mexican sentiment and try and claim anti immigration feelings must be racist? take a trip to mexico sometime, tell me what the race relations situation there is like among the noblest of the noble La Razza.

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[» shut up racist!!!!](#) Posted by: gotmyeyeonyou

### **The Real Deal....**

Posted by: Tom Degan on Mar 31, 2006 1:56 AM [[Report this comment](#)]

As usual, Molly Ivins is on the mark (Damn! Is this infuriating woman EVER wrong?) The thing that always amuses me is when George W. Bush, the First Fool, talks about the jobs that "Americans won't do". Will somebody, ANYBODY please explain to this idiot that they are jobs that Americans can't do because IT IS NO LONGER HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO SURVIVE ON THE MINIMUM WAGE! The fact that it has not been raised in over ten years is obscene.

Tom Degan  
Goshen, NY

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[» RE: The Real Deal....](#) Posted by: thinkverybig

### **Issue needs a cold, hard analysis**

Posted by: Bobsays on Mar 31, 2006 3:41 AM [[Report this comment](#)]

The issue of illegal immigration has become totally mired in the passions of our times. It is marked by fear, xenophobia, racism, jealousy, latino manifest destiny, etc. In fact, the issues are rather simple. Illegal immigration needs to be stopped. The border needs to be secured until such a day as free trade and free labour movement is a reality between Mexico and the US. Illegal workers do drag down wages, standards and benefits - it is because they are exploited by employers. Illegals are not the hardest working people in the US. There are plenty of hard jobs in the US, and they don't have the market cornered on breaking into sweat. It is also a neither here nor there

issue. This is just sentimentality - the kind of sentimentality deployed by white liberals who see Mexicans as more noble and honourable because of their relative poverty. That is nothing but a condescending attitude and one that can only be espoused by somebody who has never known poverty themselves.

I come from poverty. And I have worked in many debveloping countries. Those people are no more noble than anyone else. Human beings come in all types, and darkness can lurk in a poor man's soul as much as it can in a rich man's. The only difference is that the rich man has more power.

The US government has a responsibility to uphold the law and the rights of its citizens. To date, it has washed its hands of this responsibility and inflaming this problem.

Many examples around the world exist of countries who both securely control their borders, and have economic dynamism and high living standards. It is a massive myth that loose borders bring economic prosperity. It is like saying loose bowls bring clean underpants.

Molly Ivans is a grade A liberal. She is in equal measures smug, condescending, elitist (would she ever live near the people she champions?), and economical with the truth.

Let's look at this issue from one stand point only: what is in the best interest of America's existing citizens.

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