

Collective Behavior and Social Movements Workshop

Session 15: Immigration Reform: Strategies for Promoting Immigrant Rights

Workshop Facilitators: Patrick Coy and Lynne Woehrle

Date: Friday, August 10th, 2007,

Hofstra University, Student Center Room 145

(Notetaker: Tiffany Johnson)

Goals of the workshop:

- 1) Identify key questions that scholars of the immigrant rights movement should be working on;
- 2) Discuss what scholars' research and activists' experiences suggest are the answers to these questions.

Questions for discussion:

- 1) Who is most likely to become involved in contention over immigrant rights? Who is most likely to become involved in both sides of the issue?

Who is most likely to oppose immigration?

Discussion

- Zero population growth people
- People who are worried about the "carrying capacity" of the environment
- "Border" states
- Economic anxiety
- Possible union base
- Some African Americans---competing for resources
- Class divides in immigrant communities
- Those lacking consciousness of institutional racism

Review of Academic Literature

- Have personal negative experiences or encounters with migrants
- Define being American in terms of cultural assimilation and homogeneity (i.e., to be American one must speak English and believe in God), opposition to increased immigration is likely
- Hold negative images of immigrants
- Believe immigrants contribute to resource scarcity (e.g., jobs, housing, education)
- Believe immigrants are to blame for social problems in the U.S. (e.g., crime, drugs..)
- Live in racially segregated areas
- Are not satisfied with how things are going in their lives and believe the government doesn't care
- pre-Vatican II Catholic or members of a fundamentalist Protestant denomination

Who is most likely to support immigrations?

Discussion

- Businesses----want profit through cheap labor
- The military---need soldiers
- Not all activists are automatically pro-immigrant
- Some mainline Protestants and mainstream Catholics
- Governments from other countries that depend on remittances
- Progressive/liberal people
- Cosmopolitan/pluralist- people whose lives give them consistent, non-problematic exposure

Review of Academic Literature

- Parental emphasis on benevolence while growing up
- Helping motivations, including altruism, humanitarianism, and concern for human rights
- Membership in activist communities
- Support from local group leaders and significant others to get involved
- Perceptions that the powerful are to blame for migrants' suffering
- Those who define being American in terms of cultural pluralism and heterogeneity
- Strong religious commitments and beliefs
- Believe most immigrants in the US are documented
- Have inter-ethnic friendships

2) What messages are most effective in mobilizing potential supporters or demobilizing opponents? What messages are most appealing to individuals in both sides of the issues?

What messages are used most by opponents?

Images and signs from protests gathered from the Internet

- Military metaphors (e.g, "stop the invasion")
- American flags
- "Illegal, Illegal, Illegal"- Tons of signs focus on the word "illegal." Discourse that "we are a country of laws." "These people are illegal" as highly effective. Cover to deny that opposition is based upon prejudice.
- English Only
- General sense of fear, loss of control with regard to the economy, education...

Review of Academic Literature

- Emphasis upon illegal entry to the United States
- "Immigrant welfare problem"
- Immigrants as threat to the nation

What messages are used most by supporters?

Discussion mixed with images and signs from protests gathered from the Internet

- Children (note: MEUS Module of GSS suggests that images that are consistently most positive for Latinas/Latinos are hard work and family oriented)
- Religious symbols
- Accusations of being racist; calls for racial equality (effectiveness questioned)
- U.S. flags, a mixture of U.S. flags and the flags of other States. The U.S. is supposed to be multicultural. There is not one type of American. Debate about flags---Should we bring only American flags or a foreign flag? Should we show people that we are “American.” Use of U.S. flag depends upon audience (e.g., use to widen appeal; don’t use when building solidarity within the movement). Rapid shift to using flags may damage credibility of the movement (perceived as being simply strategic)
- Chants in Spanish alienated non-Spanish speaking immigrants
- Human rights and shared humanity
- Legalization promotes security
- Current immigration laws are unjust
- Messages reaching out to the civil rights movement

Review of Academic Literature

- Trigger strong emotions such as anger, sorrow, and compassion
- Equate support with parental or other care-giving roles
- Appeal to humanity and concern for human rights
- Support and draw parallels with other causes of importance within shared activist circles
- Feature local group leaders, including religious leaders
- Blame the powerful for the plight of migrants
- Emphasis racial equality and the U.S. as a multicultural nation of immigrants
- Reference religious commitments and beliefs (e.g., Christian kinship, unity, & shared humanity)

Brainstorming of pithy soundbites

- If you want security, seek justice for immigrants
- If you think we’re a threat to the system, make us part of the system
- If you support family values, support immigrant rights

3) What methods of outreach are most or least effective in disseminating messages?

Review of Academic Literature

- Churches and religious rituals (e.g., Posada Sin Frontera)
- Family gatherings
- Events with local leaders in attendance
- Informal gatherings providing opportunities for inter-ethnic friendships

4) *What types of research might be mutually beneficial to activists and scholars?*

Dr. Kraig Beyerlein and Matthew Ward from the University of Arizona plan to “field a large public opinion survey of Arizona residents this fall and in the spring. A primary focus is on answering the question: do civic and volunteer groups (e.g., humanitarian groups, migrant rights groups, minutemen groups) actually affect how residents think about (and potentially take action regarding) a variety of immigration issues. There is always the assumption that movement groups are actually responsible in some way for outcomes, and it is this assumption (among other things) which we wish to put to the test.”

Other issues/questions that participants were interested in answering:

1) Gender

There is a lack of gender analysis in the immigrant rights movement. Out of 1 million Philippians who leave the Philippians each year 75% are women. 55% of world’s migrant workers are woman How do you reach to Americans who have no interest in Immigrant rights listen and become interested in the issue? You can use gender as a method. Women will often listen to other women who are having an issue because they have woman/motherhood in common. Also--- domestic violence is another way to reach other women and get them to support the issue. Also, out 11 million undocumented people in the U.S. 4 million are woman. How many women are involved in domestic work and healthcare work—how does this effect women immigrants?

2) Fears

How to respond to concerns regarding overcrowding without compromising civil and human rights of the immigrants? How do you neutralize the fears of “whitez’ people?

4) Which levels of government provide the what types of access to healthcare

5) To what extent is the issue of immigration a distraction from people recognizing common interests and shared problems?

6) Nationality representation in the Immigrant right movement? Why does it seem to be that only Mexicans are involved in protesting? Is that what the media is trying to portray?

7) Media representation

How does the media use certain images, “buzz words” (amnesty), and phrases (stealing our jobs) to give a biased representation?