

Poverty Is Still Home-Grown

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In his Sept. 5 op-ed, "Importing Poverty," Robert J. Samuelson made a common yet fatal mistake when it comes to the supposed link between immigration and poverty.

Immigrants are no more responsible for poverty than are the native-born working poor. Demonizing the foreign-born workers who fill so many of the essential yet low-paying jobs that fewer native-born workers are interested in won't do anything to raise the minimum wage, expand health insurance coverage or implement any of the other policies that might alleviate poverty.

Immigrants aren't bringing poverty to the United States. Rather, they are coming to fill jobs that have always been performed by workers at the economic margins. Like it or not, the U.S. economy creates large numbers of low-skill jobs that tend to be filled by younger workers with lower levels of education. As the native-born population grows older and better educated, more of these workers are foreign-born. The problem is not the workers who fill the jobs, regardless of whether they come from Mexico or Missouri. The problem is that the jobs pay low wages and provide few, if any, benefits.

Perhaps it's time we stop asking where these workers come from and start focusing on the wages and working conditions of the jobs they fill.

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