Escondido
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Doublespeak dominated U.S. immigration politics this summer – speed somehow equaled due process, protecting immigrant children threatened immigration reform, and stripping them of the right to see a judge masqueraded as equality under the law. Space for compromise evaporated and the smallest controversies became fodder for epic, even existential rhetorical battles.

The root of the problem lies in the way in which we discuss the issue, much more than in the content of any specific policies or proposals. Resolving this problem is central to making democracy meaningful in a multi-cultural society; it requires a common language and space for expression; and it must begin locally, in places where neighbors, classmates, and citizens in the classical sense seek mutual understanding, collaboration, and compromise.

Escondido, California has long been a flashpoint for local immigration politics – from ordinances prohibiting landlords to rent to undocumented immigrants to local enforcement of immigration law, from school curricula to racial profiling. This summer a group of recent high-school graduates from Escondido explored the origins of local conflicts over immigration and the possibility of humanistic alternatives. In partnership with photographer Jon Lowenstein, the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego, and the Escondido Municipal Gallery, the students embarked upon an interactive photo-documentary project exploring the impact of migration on their lives and their communities. This book is the product of their efforts, and it couldn’t be timelier.

On a warm July evening, more than five hundred people overflowed the Escondido City Hall. Satellite trucks from several television stations filled the front driveway. Anger and frustration boiled over into the hallway and the park behind the building. Reporters and photographers jostled for position and neighbors eyed each other with suspicion and incredulity.

The buzz was unusual for a monthly meeting of the City Planning Commission. At issue was a permit for child welfare provider Southwest Key. They had just signed a contract with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a unit of the Department of Health and Human Services responsible for the care and placement of immigrant and refugee children who arrive in the United States without a parent or guardian. Southwest Key wanted to open a ninety-six bed facility on the site of a former nursing home to house unaccompanied immigrant children from Central America in response to the arrival of more than sixty-thousand of these children on the U.S. border this year. What would normally have been a technical discussion of land use was sucked into a caustic national debate over the proper response to a humanitarian crisis on the border and an immigration reform effort stalled in congress.

Opinion in the room leaned heavily against granting the permit, and the format of the public comments encouraged the more extreme and hyperbolic positions. Anyone who wished to speak was given one minute at the podium, in front of a lively audience that amplified the general sentiment with cheers and jeers. Baseless rumors that children would bring disease, criminality, or violence to local schools and communities were reaffirmed, while serious questions about the functioning of the proposed facility and the role of Escondido in immigration enforcement remained unanswered.

The conflict in Escondido has deep roots and it reflects a larger degeneration of our immigration debate into a shouting match. In explaining the present crisis, journalists and policymakers have emphasized either “pull” factors – the perceived laxity of U.S. immigration policy or, “push” factors – chiefly, the extreme violence and poverty proliferating in Central America at the moment. Both sides acknowledge the perilous journey through Mexico that these children are forced to make, but neither fully integrates that journey or the multitude of factors that shape the decision to embark into a broader understanding of the nature and origins of the phenomenon.
In so doing, they overlook not only the social networks and cultural understandings that inform migrants’ decisions, but also broader more subjective understandings of poverty, violence, and inequality.

The same can be said of efforts to provide a path to immigration status for individuals whose parents brought them to the United States as children – the “dreamer” generation. At best, they have been framed as victims of circumstance, at worst as agents of legal and cultural contamination. Like the unaccompanied children from Central America, the dreamers and their classmates and friends have seldom been invited to speak for themselves. The authors of the photo-documentary that follows challenge and question the shallow caricatures of the dreamer generation offered in mainstream debates, and they do so in a medium that invites a much deeper reflection to a much broader audience.

Thanks to increasingly inexpensive and high-quality cameras on cell phones and other mobile devices, photography use has increased dramatically over the last decade, particularly among teens and young adults. Coupled with the rise of social media, young people are taking and sharing more photographs than ever. Modern debates over the tyranny of images, voyeurism, and the cultural impact of mass-mediated images have taken on new urgency. At the same time, the potential to engage communities through the use of photography would seem to be greater than ever. The creative use and dissemination of photographs has energized student activism against genocide, the forced recruitment of child soldiers, and the deportation of immigrant youth who have grown up in the United States. At the same time, project-oriented pedagogical models that include a strong visual component have proved incredibly successful, particularly for socially disadvantaged students. The challenge is to cultivate visual literacy – a critical awareness and understanding of visual media that enhances ethical and intellectual engagement with a subject, rather drowning it out in a race for instant gratification.

Visual media tend to be more democratic than text and spoken-word media through which we generally discuss immigration policy. While different individuals bring their own social, cultural, and personal perspectives to bear in reading the same visual image, images have lower barriers to participation. They don’t tend to require the prior knowledge, specialized vocabulary, or cultural cues necessary to make sense of most policy discussions, and images don’t even require that everyone speaks the same language or dialect. Images can inspire stronger affective connections among families, friends and communities, making it possible for others to learn from and explore each other’s lives. They tend to stir empathy more immediately than other media.

A decade after the largest wave of immigration in U.S. history and in the middle of a very heated immigration debate, the need for empathy and cross-cultural understanding is acute. Neighborhoods, towns, and cities like Escondido are divided by relatively recent linguistic, cultural, social, and economic barriers. More recent or otherwise marginalized groups have trouble integrating and enjoying richer, more productive lives. More established segments of the same communities, in turn, are saddled with fear, uncertainty, and ignorance about their more recently-arrived neighbors.

The authors of this book have created a remarkably thoughtful and humanistic public document during a summer of shouting matches and political posturing over immigration in a deeply divided community. Along the way, they honed their critical thinking and composition skills, their ability to work as a team, and their sense of civic participation. In short, they made democracy more meaningful in their own lives, and in that of their community. The torch now passes to the rest of us.

Everard Meade, PhD, Director
Trans-Border-Institute, the University of San Diego
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Let $\text{Dom.}$ ring. Let $\text{Free.}$ ring.

$\text{Free.}$ is $\text{Dom.}$ ring.

Let $\text{Dom.}$ ring. Let $\text{Free.}$ ring.

Convese, $\text{Dom.}$ ring.

Nun.

Ton $\text{Free.}$
For some reason I thought that the sign in the photo reads Better Than?

I really don’t mean anyone but that’s the first meaning that came to mind when I saw it. There appears to be toilet paper on the foreground but I don’t know what its purpose is. Did the man in the photo put it there? Why is he out in what appears to be just his underwear and some sort of hat? Is the pouring rain? Is he just having fun or is some serious purpose involved? Are there other things here? What country? Where or what country? As is my practice whenever, I want to get some context.

I’m not sure why I’m going with stories that I feel the need to insert and want to retell my own theories and assumptions on it. I want to

I just noticed that the man also appears to be wearing shoes and of course, I find this a bit odd and amusing because they just seem so out
The person looks like he wants to participate and is standing up for something, but looks like he is about to leave a house party in the cabin.

"Blamage"

...in which brings us...
free. BE.