

# **The Postville Immigration Raid**

Five years ago, on May 12, 2008, the largest single-site immigration raid in the history of the United States occurred in Postville, Iowa. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials raided Agriprocessors, the main producer of kosher meat in the U. S., arresting almost 400 undocumented workers, most of them from Guatemala. Hundreds were bused off to the nearby cattle fairgrounds to be processed and jailed. Most detainees were charged with identity theft and were shipped to prisons across the country where they spent five months before being deported. In a matter of hours of that day, Postville lost a significant amount of the population and, worse yet, hundreds of families were torn apart.

Most of the arrested workers were from El Rosario and San Jose Calderas, two neighboring villages wedged between two volcanic peaks overlooking Antigua, Guatemala.. Young men and women from these villages had been making the risky journey north for years. For their families back home, their wages from the plant were an economic lifeline that suddenly had been severed.

But the raid's economic devastation didn't end in Guatemala. Postville, a local anomaly for its multi-cultural make-up, and prospering before the raids, saw its economy grind to a halt after losing a large chunk of its population and seeing the meatpacking plant go bankrupt. As a local storeowner said, " When you take 400 people out of a town of 2000 people, it hurts."

Greg Brosnan and Jenn Szymaszek, a writer and photographer who had been working together on stories about how the U.S. recession had affected Mexican villages dependent on migrant cash, had seen how workers from particular towns or villages flocked to specific U.S. destinations, building up cross-border kinship networks. Given the size of the Postville raid, they figured that somewhere a village dependent on Postville was falling apart.

Watch the YouTube video they produced to tell the story: "Guatemala: In the Shadow of the Raid" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGdvv4dwzIA>