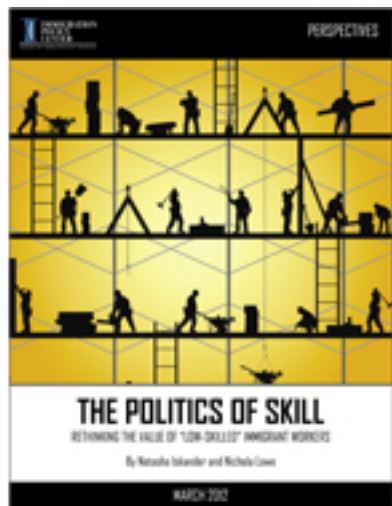


The Politics of Skill: Rethinking the Value of "Low-Skilled" Immigrant Workers



[1]By [Natasha Iskander](#) [2] and [Nichola Lowe](#) [3]

The political discourse surrounding the incorporation of immigrants into the U.S. labor market tends to sort immigrant workers into two broad and mutually exclusive categories: high-skilled workers who are valued by many for their contribution to economic growth, and low-skilled workers who are viewed by some as causing a glut in the U.S. labor market and thereby displacing low and middle-income native-born workers. For the most part, these categories are structured around formal education. Workers possessing a level of formal education equal or superior to the median in the United States are on one side of this divide, while workers with less formal education than that threshold are on the other. Most current proposals favor expanding immigration opportunities for those immigrants with high levels of formal education.

This Perspectives challenges the assumption that skill is primarily derived from formal schooling and classroom education. Instead, authors Natasha Iskander and Nichola Lowe focus on the tacit skills of newly-arrived Latino immigrant workers in the construction industry, many of whom continue to innovate new construction techniques and carve new pathways for training immigrant co-workers and new labor market entrants. By acknowledging and highlighting the expertise of these immigrants, the authors hope future immigration policy will reflect the real value of these immigrants—as skilled workers who revitalize laggard industries in this country, saving vital U.S. jobs and businesses along the way.

Published On: **Thu, Mar 15, 2012** | [Download File](#) [4]

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