

Chicano Latino Studies 139 The Bracero Program

Winter 2010
ELH 110

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Course Description

In 1942 the United States negotiated a guest worker agreement with Mexico known as the Bracero Program. Proponents, primarily corporate agriculture, justified it as a means for overcoming a wartime labor shortage. However, other reasons were involved in the decision making. The conventional explanation for the Program remains to this day a shortage of labor, but labor unionism was widespread in the 1930s, especially in California, and appears to be the more important reason for implementing the Program. The Program lasted into 1964, long after the war ended, and brought into the United States an untold number of men, and only men, estimated by some to number about 5 million to work mainly in agriculture. During the 22 years of the Program a number of severe criticisms were directed at the Program which ranged from accusations of outright slavery to a means to destroy labor unionism in agriculture. However, the U.S. government, which administered the Program, and the employers of braceros consistently maintained that highest labor standards were strictly observed.

Via an emphasis on film, the course will examine the Program in detail, including but not limited to: the reasons why the Program was implemented; the work performed; the treatment of the men; their wages and living standards; the effects on the economy of Mexico; the main beneficiaries and a host of other aspects relevant to the Program. In addition, we will present poetry written by former braceros and listen to music that captures the era of bracero labor. Not only will the Bracero Program be the topic of discussion, we will also look to the Program to tell us what we may expect from a new guest worker program that the Bush administration proposed in 2001 and which is now on the agenda of the Obama Administration. As a means to understanding these proposals

we will view the present guest worker programs sponsored by Canada as well as the limited guest worker program known as H2A now implemented by the United States.

Students are encouraged to raise questions and topics for discussion. Far too often the best questions are left until the class is over and students then approach the instructor. I therefore encourage students to raise questions in class and avoid that feeling that your question is a potential embarrassment. More often than not it is an important question and needs to be raised. In order to encourage comments and questions, the final 30 to 45 minutes of each class meeting will be devoted to discussion.

Required Readings

NOTE: All readings will be emailed as attachments except Galarza and Rosas

Henry Anderson, "Social Justice and Foreign Contract Labor: A Statement of Opinion and Conscience" an unpublished statement on the bracero program, (1958)

Richard Chabram, "Activism and Intellectual Struggle in the Life of Ernesto Galarza (1905-1984)" with an Accompanying Bibliography first published in: *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 1985, Vol 7 No. 2, 135-152

Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers on Our Fields*, Fund for the Americas, Fund for the Republic, Washington, DC, 1956 (handed out in class)

Gilbert Gonzalez and Raul Fernandez, "Empire and the Origins of Twentieth Century Migration to the United States," in Gonzalez and Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations and Migration*, Routledge, 2003

Gilbert Gonzalez, "Recruiting, Processing and Transporting Bracero Labor to the United States," in Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States*, Paradigm Publisher, 2007.

Gilbert Gonzalez, "Hiding Modern Slavery," in Paul Lopez, *Que Fronteras: The Bracero Program and the Re-examination of the Legacy of Migration* (in press)

Tom Knudson and Hector Amezcua, "The Pineros: Forest Workers Caught in Web of Exploitation," *Sacramento Bee*, November 13, 2005.

Southern Poverty Law Center, *Close to Slavery: Guest Worker Programs in the United States*, A Report by the SPLC, 2005

Ana Rosas, "Mujeres en Transicion (Women in Transition): Understanding the Gendered Contours of Bracero Family Separation, 1942-1954," (2008)

Victor Quintana, "Why the Mexican Rural Sector Can't Take it Anymore," in Gilbert Gonzalez, et al, *Labor Versus Empire*, Routledge, 2006.

Grading Policy

Weekly attendance

A five to eight page critical essay on material covered in class due week five, worth 40% of final grade.

A ten to fifteen page creative, critical paper based on the material covered over the quarter, 60% of final grade.

And Take Note: Turn off all cell phones and no use of laptops for any other purpose than to take notes. Violators will be asked to leave class.

Weekly Topics for Discussion [Subject to change]

January 4 Introduction: Why the Bracero Program?

Reading: Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields*

Richard Chabram, "Activism and Intellectual Struggle in the Life of Ernesto Galarza (1905-1984)"

Power Point Presentation on Mexican Labor Migration

Short Silent Films: El Monte Berry Pickers Strike of 1933, Produced by the Film and Photo League

1933 Cotton Pickers Strike, Produced by the Film and Photo League

January 11 Presenting the Bracero Program to the Public

Film: Why Braceros?

Newsreel of the Bracero Program

“U.S. Tightens Patrol on Mexican Border”, Paramount News, 1951

“U.S. Eases Entry of Mexican Farm Hands,” Universal News, 1951

NBC News with Chet Huntley, 1963

NBC News with Bill Brown in Sacramento, 1963

Power Point Slides: *Agricultural Life* (a magazine published by citrus growers) (March, 1957; March 1958),

“They Help Feed America,” by Thomas Gorman in *Today’s Health, Journal of the American Medical Association* (October 1957).

Mexican Workers, U.S. Department of Labor publication (1959)

Readings: Gilbert Gonzalez, “Hiding Modern Slavery,” in Paul Lopez, *Que Fronteras: The Bracero Program and the Re-examination of the Legacy of Migration* (in press)

January 18 No Class/Martin Luther King’s Day

January 25 Documentaries Critical of the Bracero Program

Films: *Poverty in the Valley of Plenty*, Hollywood Council-AF of L. (1947)

The Land is Rich, produced by Harvey Richards (ca. 1962)

Reading: Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers on Our Fields*.

Henry Anderson, “Social Justice and Foreign Contract Labor: A Statement of Opinion and Conscience” (1958)

February 1 Documentaries Critical of the Bracero Program continued

Films: *Factory Farms*, produced by Harvey Richards (ca. 1959)

Uno Veinticinco[A Dollar-twenty five], produced by Harvey Richards (ca. 1963)

Reading: Ana Rosas, “Mujeres en Transición”

February 8 Current Reflections on the Bracero Program

Films: *Los Braceros*, produced by David H. Hosely, KVIE-Sacramento (2006)

The Braceros, produced by Eric Cain, Oregon Public Broadcasting (2007)

Sad Recollections/Tristes Recuerdos, Motor Films (2004)

February 15 No Class/President’s Day

February 22 Current Reflections on the Bracero Program continued

Films: *Bracero Stories*, produced by Patrick Mullins, 2008

A Compilation of Film Clips from *Lonely Hearts*, produced by Gilbert Gonzalez

Soldiers of the Fields, a trailer produced by Gilbert Gonzalez, 2008

Reading: Gilbert Gonzalez, “Recruiting, Processing and Importing Bracero Labor to the United States.”

March 1 An Examination of Current Guest Worker Programs in the United States and an Critical Examination of Proposals for a New Guest Worker Program

Film: *H2*, produced by Stephanie Black, 1990

Reading: Victor Quintana, “Why the Mexican Rural Sector Can’t Take it Anymore.”

Southern Poverty Law Center, *Close to Slavery*.

March 8 Current Guest Worker Programs: The Case of Canada and Conclusion

Film: *El Contrato/The Contract*, produced and written by Min Sook Lee (2004)

Reading: Tom Knudson and Hector Amezcua, “The Pineros: Forest Workers Caught in Web of Exploitation”