

CLS 114
Fall 08

CLS 114 *Film and the Chicano Latino Community*

Fall Quarter 2008

Tuesdays 4:00-6:30 p.m. HH 143

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Course Description

The course is not intended to be a study of film *per se*, rather to use film as a resource for the study of ethnic Mexican community. The course centers on the use of film, primarily documentaries, for class discussion and writing projects. By gleaning information and insight from films and by critically examining and analyzing the content and political perspectives of the films (and filmmakers), combined with selected readings, lectures and class discussions, students will be better informed regarding the current and past political, economic and social issues facing the Latino community. Filmmaking and historical studies related to the Chicano Latino community in large measure originated with the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and since then has changed curriculum in higher education. This course is an offshoot of that political era.

Although serious analysis of the Latino community by filmmakers has only a thirty-five year history, there is an abundance of material that can be incorporated into a course. Given that film provides the medium for much of current social analysis it is indeed fitting that it be utilized as a tool for university instruction. Be aware that a number of themes appear throughout the course presentations such as: the U.S. as an empire/imperialist power; U.S.-Mexico economic relations; migration; transnational relations by the immigrant community; labor; gender and labor; political organization, labor unions and their activities.

Note that the themes center on U.S. economic relations with Mexico, migration, labor and political activism related to labor.

Course Requirements

---Weekly attendance and participation in class discussions.

--- Weekly written papers of 1 to 3 pages on the films, readings, class discussion, lectures.

---Midterm: A discussion paper five to 10 pages in length on a theme based on the films, slides, readings and discussions due on the fifth week of class.

---Final: A discussion paper of from ten to fifteen pages based on the films, slides, readings and discussions due on the scheduled date of the final exam.

NOTE: The discussion papers should be based on, but not limited to, the course films, assigned readings, outside readings and class discussions. Students are encouraged to select a theme or themes emerging in the films, gather together readings, etc, and begin preparing a project as soon as possible.

Grades will be based on weekly assignments (20%), the mid-term discussion paper (30%) and final discussion paper (50%)

Course Presentations and Readings (Subject to change)

September 30 Presentation on U. S. Mexico Relations and Chicano Latino History

The instructor will present slides taken from photographs illustrating the economic domination of the U. S. within Mexico at the turn of the century. This domination continued throughout the twentieth century and is evident today by way of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The argument contends that Chicano history evolves in relation to this imperial economic relationship.

Readings:

“Introduction” and “Empire and the Origins of Twentieth Century Migration from Mexico to the United States,” from Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Raul Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History* (to be emailed)

Gilbert G. Gonzalez, “Mexican Migration, 1876-1930,” Draft of a book chapter. (emailed)

“Theory of the Harvest Labor Market” from Lloyd Fisher, *The Harvest Labor Market in California*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953. (handed out)

“The Economics, Politics and Culture of United States Imperialism,” a series of quotations assembled by G. Gonzalez. (emailed)

October 7 Film: Los Mineros

Here is the story of Mexican American miners and their struggle to change the course of Arizona mining history. In a saga that spans nearly half a century, this program recounts the rise and fall of copper company towns like Clifton-Morenci. Life within the Mexican American community is seen through the eyes of the miners and their families.

Reading:

“The Economic Conquest and Its Social Relations,” from Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico and Mexican Immigrants*, Austin: University of Texas, 2004. (emailed)

October 14-21 Theme: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964

The Bracero Program brought many thousands of men from Mexico to labor as temporary contract workers channeled for the most part into agriculture. The Program lasted from 1942 till 1964 and served as a means to undermine any attempt to organize labor unions in agriculture. The films will demonstrate that the imported workers labored more as slaves than as free wage laborers.

Short Films will include

Factory Farms, Produced by Harvey Richards (1958)

Why Braceros? Produced by the California Council of Growers (1959)

Tristes Recuerdos/Sad Recollections by Motor Films, Mexico (2002)

Soldiers of the Fields: The Bracero Program-a trailer of an in-progress documentary produced by Gilbert Gonzalez, co-directed with Vivian Price

Los Braceros: Strong Arms to the USA, KVIE-Sacramento (2003)

A Collection of Interviews of former braceros and their families from an in-progress documentary produced by Gilbert Gonzalez, co-directed with Vivian Price (2007)

and possibly: Why Cybraceros? (2005)

Readings:

Henry Anderson, “Social Justice and Foreign Contract Labor; A Statement of Opinion and Conscience” (1958) (to be handed out in class)

“Preface”, Chapters One and Two from Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in the Field*, Washington, DC: 2006. (handed out)

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

"Recruiting, Processing and Transporting Bracero Labor to the United States," from Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States*, Paradigm Publishers, 2007. (emailed)

Phillip Martin, "There is Nothing More Permanent Than Temporary Foreign Workers," *Background*, Center for Immigration Studies (April 2001) (handed out in class)

October 21 The Bracero Program continued

October 28 Film: Salt of the Earth

Salt of the Earth, based on a 1951 zinc miner's strike that took place in Silver City, N.M., was made in 1953 at the height of the McCarthy era. The film was denounced as subversive and subsequently blacklisted because it was sponsored by the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (which had been expelled from the CIO in 1950 for alleged Communist-dominated leadership) and was made by filmmakers who figured as 'unfriendly' witnesses before the House Un-American Activities Commission. Ironically, because it also deals with the struggle of women, specifically the miners' wives, for recognition, dignity and equality, the film is a focus of renewed interest 22 years later. *Salt of the Earth* impressively counterpoints the strike itself and the relationship between a striking Mexican-American miner and his wife.

[Juan] Chacon helps organise the strike which demands that Mexican-Americans be given the same safety standards that the mining company provides for Anglo workers, but at home he refuses to end discrimination and change the status quo. Miss [Rosaura] Revueltas, pregnant with her third child, is traditionally passive and at first reluctant either to take part in the strike or to assert her rights for equality at home. But she changes and when the men are forced to end their picketing by a Taft-Hartley Act injunction the women take their place in the picket line and she joins them. The women, indeed, come out looking stronger than the men, some marching with babes in their arms, resisting tear gas and making jail so unendurable for the sheriff (deliciously played by Will Geer) that they are released.

Salt of the Earth is also a love story about the young couple divided by conflicting attitudes, traditions and roles, but under crisis finding the common cause. It is the wife who speaks for survival. 'You want to go down fighting,' she tells her husband. 'I don't want to go down fighting. I want to win.'

Michael Wilson's script is a masterful blend of passion, poignancy and restraint. The cast is comprised of five professional actors; the rest are the actual miners and their wives. All

perform exceedingly well. Miss Revueltas is stunning. Her portrayal is unforgettable. The late Herbert J. Biberman directed with conviction and excellence. *Salt of the Earth*, 25 years after the ugly controversies of its birth, remains a taut and moving achievement and a milestone of American political expression."

— Linda Gross in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 2, 1976.

Readings:

"The Ideology and Practice of Empire," from G. Gonzalez and R. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History*, New York: Routledge, 2004. (emailed)

Vicki Ruiz, "South by Southwest: Mexican Americans and Segregated Schooling, 1900-1950," Organization of American Historians, *Magazine of History* 15 (Winter 2001) (emailed)

November 4 Film: The Global Assembly Line

A documentary filmed in electronics and garment factories, homes, and communities in Mexico's northern border. The film follows with detail and intimacy the lives of working women and men in the 'free trade zones' of two developing countries, Mexico and the Philippines. In the assembly lines workers are working for American companies to produce goods for the American market, goods consumed in the US. In a sense, the American economy has extended itself into Mexico to produce goods that would otherwise cost more to produce in the US. The greatest benefit for the U.S. companies is that the cost of production is lowered although the price of the good remains the same. For Mexico, the workers are paid minimal wages guaranteeing them a life in poverty. Meanwhile, they are not allowed the 'luxury' of a union or the right to strike for better pay or working conditions. All union organization must be under company and governmental supervision.

Reading:

David Bacon, "Hunger on the Border: An Interview with Julia Quinones" January 25, 2006 (emailed)

"American Maquiladoras" from Chapter 14, John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War*, University of California Press, 2002. (handed out in class)

November 11 Veterans Day Holiday

November 18 Film: Letters from the Other Side

"Heather Courtney's film interweaves video letters carried across the U.S.-Mexico border by the film's director with the personal stories of women left behind in post-NAFTA

Mexico. The video letters provides a way for these women to communicate with both loved ones and strangers on the other side of the border, and illustrates an unjust truth - as an American Courtney can carry these video letters back and forth across a border that these women are not legally allowed to cross. Focusing on a side of the immigration story rarely told by the media or touched upon in the national debate, the film offers a fresh perspective, painting a complex portrait of families torn apart by economics, communities dying at the hands of globalization, and governments incapable or unwilling to do anything about it.”

Readings:

A collection of newspaper and journal articles regarding Mexican migration during the free trade era. The collection will be read for the following week’s film as well. (handed out in class)

Victor Quintana, “Why the Countryside Can’t Take it Anymore,” from Gilbert G. Gonzalez, et al, Eds., *Labor Versus Empire: Gender, Race and Migration*, New York: Routledge, 2004. (emailed)

David Bacon, “Stories from the Borderlands,” *NACLA* July/August 2005 (emailed)

November 25 Film: Los Trabajadores/The Workers

“We build the buildings, we do the hardest jobs, and still they don't want us.” These are the words of Juan Ignacio Gutierrez, a Nicaraguan profiled in the film *Los Trabajadores/The Workers*, winner of the International Documentary Association David Wolper Student Award. *Los Trabajadores* tells the story of immigrant day laborers, placing their struggles and contributions in the context of the economic development of Austin, Texas. Through the stories of Juan from Nicaragua and Ramon from Mexico, and through the controversy surrounding the relocation of a day labor site from downtown to a residential neighborhood, the film examines the misconceptions and contradictions inherent in America's dependence on and discrimination against immigrant labor. As Juan says, 'they say Austin is growing, but thanks to whom?’

Readings:

“Dénouement and Resistance,” from G. Gonzalez and R. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History*, op cit. (emailed)

An Account of Day Laborers in Fairfax County, Virginia, a report by Fairfax County (June 2004) (emailed)

December 2: Film: The Guest Worker and Conclusion

The Guestworker tells the story of Don Candelario Gonzalez Moreno, a 66-year old Mexican farmer who has been coming to the U.S. since the 1960s as a farm laborer. He is some twenty to forty years older than all the thousands of Mexican men who work in today's United States' H2A Guest Worker program started in 1986. Despite his age, he continues to work long hours in tobacco, cucumber, and pepper fields, sweating and worrying – all for his family, particularly his ailing wife. He says he still wants to work “harder than all the others” as he did when he was a younger man, but now knows he just can't. Yet he is asked back, year after year, because of his commitment to hard work, his “good attitude,” and his long-term service to Wester Farms in North Carolina.

Readings:

The collection of newspaper articles will be discussed. (handed out in class)

“The Integration of Mexican Workers into the U.S. Economy,” in G.G. Gonzalez and R. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History*, op sit. (emailed)

David Bacon, “The Political Economy of Migration,” *New Labor Forum*, June 2007

Note: (This article previews an argument that will be made at book length in “Illegal - How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants,” Beacon Press, Fall 2008) (emailed)