LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM: ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR FARMWORKERS

A COMPILATION OF DOCUMENTARY WORKS
BY 1998 STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS INTERNS

Student Action with Farmworkers - 1317 W. Pettigrew St., Durham, NC 27705
919-660-3652 Phone, 919-681-7600 Fax
http://aaswebsv.aas.duke.edu/docstudies/saf/
Important Notice

Student Action with Farmworkers' (SAF) 1998 “Into the Fields” Interns completed this collection of poetry, oral histories, interviews, photographs and stories to explore the issues of economic injustice and the pursuit of the American dream for farmworkers in the Carolinas.

Unfortunately, some of the names included in this publication have not have been changed to protect the identities of the people interviewed. Please do not distribute or photocopy any of the contents of this publication to insure the right to privacy of all individuals interviewed, photographed or mentioned within.

Thank you for honoring this request.

SAF

Una Noticia Importante

Estudiantil Acción con los Trabajadores Agrícolas - Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) - 1998 “Adentro de los Campos” internos estudiantes completaron este colección de la poesía, la historia oral, las entrevistas, los fotos y los cuentos a explorar injusticia económica, y el perseguiimiento del sueño americano por los trabajadores agrícolas en los Carolinas.

Unafortunadamente, es posible que algunos de los nombres incluyeron en este publicación no han cambiaron. Por favor no distribuyen ni copian ningunos de los contentos de este publicación a proteger los identidades de las personas adentro.

Gracias por su atención.

SAF
 Contributors

Delia Aguirre  California State University - Sacramento
Ben Cook  University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Rosa Cruz  St. Edward’s University
Irma Diaz  California State University - Sacramento
Alicia Doran  Appalachian State University
Esteban Echeverria  Appalachian State University
Lane Gary  University of South Carolina - Columbia
Jason Hicks  Appalachian State University
Daniel Hill  Furman University
Erica Lian  Appalachian State University
Cindy Lopez  California State University - Fresno
Tony Macias  University of South Carolina - Columbia
Luis Maciel  California State University - Fresno
Michelle Otis  Guilford College
Donna Risteen  Appalachian State University
Andrea Robinson  Duke University
Alma Rodriguez  California State University - Fresno
Ilda Santiago  Durham Technical Community College
Janeth Serrano  California State University - Sacramento
Andrew Smith  University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Melinda Steele  Duke University
Kandra Strauss  Guilford College
Candice Stringfield  North Carolina Central University
Lynne Walter  Guilford College
Shaundra Young  University of South Carolina - Columbia
Into the Fields Internship Program 1998 Sponsoring Organizations

Catholic Social Services
Chatham County Migrant Education Program
Duplin County Migrant Education Program
El Centro Hispano
Episcopal Farmworker Ministry
Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)
Farmworker Legal Services of North Carolina
Immigrants Legal Assistance Project
Johnston County Migrant Education Program
North Carolina Department of Labor - Agricultural Safety and Health Division
North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project (NCOSH)
Preventing Agricultural Chemical Exposure Project (PACE)
Project Avery Literacy
Prospect Hill Community Health Services
Rockingham County Migrant Education Program
Rural Mission Migrant Head Start
South Carolina Migrant Health Program - DHEC
Stovall Medical Center
Tri-county Community Health Center
Wake County Human Services Public Health Center
Watauga Medical Center
Yadkin County Health Department
Yadkin Valley Head Start Center
Student Action with Farmworkers’ Mission

Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) is a non-profit organization created to build a network of campus-based projects focusing on farmworker issues. These projects include both summer internships and year-round opportunities for direct service, community education, advocacy and community organizing work. SAF serves students, who need assistance developing quality service-learning programs, farmworkers, one of the hardest working yet most marginalized populations in our society, and agencies and community groups serving farmworkers, who need greater human resources to carry out their work.

The Into the Fields Internship and Leadership Development Program

Each summer students from universities in North and South Carolina, as well as from the College Assistance Migrant Programs in California, Idaho, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Texas, participate in SAF’s Into the Fields Summer Internship and Leadership Development Program. Approximately one-third to one-half of the Interns are from farmworking families themselves.

The SAF Interns work full-time in health centers, legal services organizations, migrant education programs, Migrant Head Start Centers, policy groups and community organizing groups. Interns organize community health fairs, inform farmworkers of their rights and responsibilities regarding employment laws, coordinate educational presentations about pesticides, teach driver’s education classes, and work with Junior and High School farmworker students in a school drop-out prevention program. The Interns work in rural counties in the Carolinas with high concentrations of farmworkers.

Documentary Projects

Each Into the Fields Intern completes a documentary project as a way to reflect on their internship experience. SAF uses students’ documentary projects to educate communities about how the demographics of farmworkers have changed, as well as how much of the living and working conditions faced by farmworkers have not.

The pieces in this publication include Interns’ work from the summer of 1998. Interns took photographs, conducted oral histories, and wrote poems and short stories to reflect on their own experiences working with farmworkers and their families. Interns focused their documentary projects on “Living the American Dream: Economic Justice for Farmworkers” in an attempt to learn and reflect on the perspectives of farmworkers, growers and advocates. Statistics indicate that a farmworker family earns approximately $7,500 annually (National Agricultural Survey, US Department of Labor, 1997) and that wages are not increasing. The words and images presented in this compilation express what statistics are not able to convey, how economic realities translate into everyday life for workers and their families.
Untitled, Donna Risteen, Avery County, North Carolina.
Lynne Walter

The History of una Historia

I.
Flee your country
and escape the injustices,
brincando to the better life,
only to watch your
propia gente
fall under new injustices
old prejudices

"Tres mexicanos condenados
a muerte en Estados Unidos
dijeron estar convencidos de
que una combinación de
pobreza y racismo influyó
para que fueron sentenciados
a la pena máxima."

fall under the weight
of burdening fruits
of endless labor
the weight of concrete and tar

but below the sol azteca
vive el espíritu invencido.

II.
¿Cómo te llamas?
somos humanos y nos llamamos mexicanos

¿Cómo te llamas?
María

Mary
María

Mary
María

Our Lady of the Roses
Hermosa señora del Monte Tepeyac,
vestida en brillantes rayos del sol,
suavemente delineada en la tilma
de un campesino,
tu gentil belleza nos trae la fe.

No fue a los padres a quien visitaste,
ni a los obispos en los anchos pasillos,
A un pueblo oprimido, volviste tu faz,
a una raza despreciada, llamaste.

III.
Maria,
who came to this country
across the Río Bravo
with hijos, following a husband
following the crops:

AGUAWATER
“Aquí llegamos pasando por el río,
uno verdad asustado porque nunca ve tanta agua. .
Nos metimos todos al agua—
este río tan grande—
Gracias a Dios que pasamos bien.”

TIERRALAND
“Al principio llegamos a Florida
y estuvimos trabajando un tiempo en el tomate…
está muy duro el calor
y el trabajo es muy duro.
Nos vamos a la manzana cuando hay
y es muy bonito recordar de lo que uno sufre.”

IV
“The feast of San Isidro
the patron saint of farmers
is May 15th.
A little statue of the saint
is carried through the fields.
the farmers and their families
singing alabanzas,
offering their humble crops
and praying that this year’s planting
might be successful.
This is his prayer:

Señor San Isidro
De Dios tan querido
Pues en la labor
Tú séás mi padrino.

Fuiste a la labor
Comenzaste a arriar
Junto con los hombres
Que iban a sembrar.
Together with the men
that went away to survive

Porque sois de Dios amado
Y adornado de esplendor
Bendecid nuestro sembrado
San Isidro Labrador"

Bless our packet of papers
San Isidro Labrador.
V
A child was born
long after the slaving in the fields
fermented in the past.
This child, una hija de esperanza,
will know life
under a sturdy roof owned by her papás.
The flowy yard abounds with trees
that are not picked at a piece rate.
Two trucks are parked out back
so her father and brother can continue
the construction of roads
their raza will travel on,
roads which stretch across the country
uniting a population
divided by necessity

VI.
Steady jobs
A home
Two trucks
A yard

This is the life into which María
and her family have settled out.
One child already married
con su propio hijo
a first generation
a grandson for María.

VII.
Lingering underneath
the apparent success,
the "American Dream,"
is a fear
that taints every aspect of life.
After filing
G-325: Biographic Information-Naturalization
I-130: Petition to Classify Status of Alien Relative for Issuance of
Immigrant Visa
I-485: Application for Status as a Permanent Resident
I-765: Application for Employment Authorization
9003: Additional Questions to be Completed by all Applicants for
Permanent Residence in the United States

La Migra says they cannot
continue their dream
because they do not earn enough.

VIII.
The fear that the life
they have struggled for
fought for
sweat for
    and bled for
might come crashing down around them,
leaving them with already fading faded memories,
is the fear lurking behind
the shining, hopeful eyes of children,
the shy smiles of teenagers,
and the tired sighs of working parents,
explaining su vida escondida

"Mi vida escondida
    en la esquina de la luna
Mi alma luce calma
    en la luna, en la luna
Si sueño me mantengo
    con el dueño de la luna
Pero un ladrón robó mi corazón
    y lo entregó a la luna.

La Luna    La Luna    La Luna    La Luna
La Luna    La Luna    La Luna    La Luna

VIX.
Old prejudices
and new injustices
only fall under
your propia gente.
Watch the better life
brincando the injustices
your country flees and escapes.

Lynne Walter
NOTES

Section I. Quoted portion taken from newspaper clipping from La Noticia, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México

Section IV: Taken from “The Ruins” by Patricia Preciado Martin, found in Growing Up Latino: Memories and Stories: Reflections on Life in the United States. Edited by Harold Augenbraum and Ilan Stavans

Section VIII. Quoted portion, “La Luna,” written by Martha Valdez
Janeth Serrano, opposite photograph.

Teresa Velasco is a native of Oaxaca, Mexico who came to the United States in search of a better life for her and her children. She and her husband were migrants in Mexico and were used to traveling from Oaxaca to the state of Sinaloa where they worked as farmworkers. Farmwork has never been something that Teresa and her husband are strangers to. She is very much aware of the hard labor that is involved in doing this type of work since she was a young child. Sometimes Teresa believed that she would never stop working in the fields because to her, farmwork had become a way of life. Four months ago, though, Teresa finally began to work at a child care center here in Newton Grove. St. Martin’s Migrant Head Start has been a way out for Teresa who now thinks that her children are growing older and in a country that has a lot to offer them, but in a way it has also taken something away. Teresa’s first language is Mixteco, an Indian dialect from the southern part of Mexico. It took her about nine years to learn enough Spanish to be able to communicate with the native Spanish speakers of Mexico and then come to the U.S. in the early part of the 1980’s to North Carolina. One of the things that Teresa is very happy about is that her and her husband have finally bought a new trailer (mobile home) for her and her family to live in. She currently lives at a mobile home park and doesn’t like it too much because the houses are too close together and the street is too close. She fears that her children will try to go near it. She is also afraid that her children will not speak Mixteco, although they understand her when she speaks it to them. They are sometimes shy, she says, about my language and don’t want to speak it.” Her oldest son is ten years old answers to her when she speaks Mixteco and that makes her feel good. Teresa is glad that this is her first summer not working in the fields because the heat is sometimes unbearable and she is making a lot more money working at the Head Start center than she would be if she were working in the fields this summer.
Tony Macias

Economic Justice

Working with farmworkers kind of gives one a sense of what the word equality is all about. One has to look for the similarities, for what your average farmworker has in common with your average American. Differences are plain to see— in lifestyle, in ideas, language—but what’s most striking is a lack of equality in both what already exists, as well as in what is even considered appropriate. That’s another word one learns quickly in this line of work, “appropriate.” How much of what we are expected to take for granted has a history of hard labor? It’s easy to eat an apple; the trick is to get someone to pull it off of the tree for you. The worker is paid for his or her labor, right? But is it equal to what we would consider appropriate pay if we were doing it? Is it just?

I interviewed a man. I asked him about his life, his work, and what he thought about it. I think it’s really fascinating to look at an individual case, especially after looking at farmworkers as a whole for so long. He doesn’t pretend at anything, he doesn’t claim to know much; but he’s a good man, and he cares about his family. I asked him about other workers’ situations, but it was always “Que se Yo,” or “Quien sabe.” We like to think about equality and justice— and it’s appropriate— but Jesus Rodriguez is a normal guy. Don’t expect him to attend rallies. He’s not stubborn— but he knows what he knows, and he lives an honest life. He sees the other workers as normal people with all the problems and graces of any American. He thinks people are largely responsible for their own situations, that we can all help ourselves.

Wait! That can’t be right— these people need help! These people are suffering, right? Well, if I still thought that, I wouldn’t have learned much this summer. There’s a huge
difference between charity and then helping people out when they need it. I guess it’s all about dignity. I think that’s what Don Jesus can teach us— he’s just a guy. He’s a good guy, but he’s just a guy. He has goals, he has ambitions, and a family he loves above all else— maybe he can give a little individual insight into a subject that seems so fraught with issues of equality and appropriateness. He doesn’t think in those terms— he’s just a guy.
Tony Macias

Economic Justice

-Yo se que he preguntado a usted esto primero, pero cuando vino Ud?

Yo vine en el año del mil novecientos ochenta y cinco.

-Y de donde?

De... Bueno, yo nací en el estado de Guanajuato. Cuando yo me vine para acá para E.E.U.U radicaba, o radico en Veracruz, Veracruz.

-Nacio alla?

No, mi nacimiento, o sea -yo soy originario de San Diego de la Union Guanajuato, estado de Guanajuato. De muy chico, de muy joven, como de nueve o ocho años, me fui para Veracruz. De allá fue cuando me vine para E.E.U.U

-Qué hacía en Veracruz antes de llegar a E.E.U.U?

Bueno, mi profesión siempre ha sido de operador de maquinaria pesada- por decir-Caterpillar o tractores. Entonces, cuando yo vivía en Veracruz eran lo que trabajaba, en tractores.

-Y aquí también?

Pues, aquí también.

-Y en su pueblo, que tipos de trabajo tienen los que viven allá?

En el estado de Veracruz, pues, es un. un estado muy rico en, digamos- pues, muy fertil. Se siembra de todo lo que es el estado de Veracruz, siembra caña, de muchas zonas ganaderas, y este- ahora últimamente, están sembrando también- limón. -Que parece lo están exportando para acá.
Sí, donde Yo nací en el estado de Guanajuato es un lugar muy pobre, por decir es un lugar- allí sí es muy pobre en cosas de agricultura porque todo lo que se siembra se siembra temporal. Vez de si llueve, hay coseche. Si no, no hay nada.

- Es poquito como aquí, como en sandía y maíz...

No, aquí de todas maneras- llueve mas, es mas Fertil. Allá. no. En un año que yo fuí- ya estando viviendo en Veracruz, fuí para Guanajuato- tenía cinco años de no recoger, nada de coseche.

-Y como vivieron ellos?

Llueve una vez. siembran. y no cosechan.

... El maíz crece- creo crece mas aquí la cebolla mas que el maíz- la que queda no vuelve a llover.

-Si pueden exportar algo, pueden ganar dinero.

Pues allí. no pueden exportar nada porque lo único que hay es tunas.

-Pescado?

No, pescado tampoco- pues, ni agua hay

-Oh, sí.

Tunas es, una fruta que da el como cactus que se dice nopál, el nopál.

- Seco?

Sí, pues seco completamente. Ahorita, me parece que muchos lugares han hecho posos profundos, pero eso apenas no tienen mucho.
Tony Macias

Economic Justice

-Por qué se fue? No hay mucho de trabajar?

Por que me vine, o, pa’acá?

-Sí, por qué.

Bueno, mi situación en ese tiempo económico era un poco... poco difícil. Entonces, hubo la oportunidad de que- pues- de venirse para acá, para ver se ganaron mas centavos.

-Y no había ni una problema, y no tenía que pensar mucho- si tenía la oportunidad, se fue.

Pues, sí. En cuanto tuve la oportunidad de seguir buscando el. el mejoramiento de mi familia, sabiendo que en Mexico no se lo podía dar lo, lo necesario que se necesitaba- y hubo la oportunidad de venirme para acá.

-Y trajo su familia con Ud.?

No, ellos vinieron todo al último. Mi esposa tiene cuatro o cinco años aquí..

-Como pagaba, como mandaba su dinero a Mexico?

Al principio cuando yo no tenía mi esposa o mi familia aquí- este- se batallaba un poco porque se mandaban lo poquito que se podía. Se mandaba por money orden... por correo. Pero, demoraba demasiado, y a veces la se podían porque llego comprobado no aqui- si no en Mexico- las personas- por decir asi- telegrafos y correos- muchas abrían esas cartas..

Ahora, últimamente- digamos- mi esposa está aquí, no? Pero mis hijas viven en Veracruz y ahora lo que estamos haciendo es primero se le mandaba por Western Union.

-Cobre mucho no?
Tony Macias
Economic Justice

No cobran mucho.

---

---Bueno, como ha cambiado su forma de vivir aquí? Comparada a México:

Mi forma de... pues, ha cambiado. Bastante un poco de vivir la vida- digamos- económica. Pues, ha cambiado mucho. En otros aspectos, no ha cambiado demasiado porque... pues- estar lejos de uno de su familia... es difícil. Por otro lado la situación económica- pues, ha cambiado demasiado, porque, pues estando aca se ha logrado sobre todo a mis hijas- que en Mexico no había hecho. Yo tengo una que está por trabajadora social. Sigo estudiando computación. Todos sus estudios... estando en Mexico no había logrado Yo estables.

Otra que la mas chica todavía está en secundaria. Pero- digamos- la que está estudiando no se había logrado allá.

-Hay mas oportunidades en esto allá?

Bueno, yo no sé en casos de los estudios tienen mas oportunidades aquí que en Mexico. Tengo entendido que dicen que las escuelas en Mexico son mas... mejores que aquí, no?

No sé. Pero hay oportunidades aquí pero- digamos- para uno trabajando de mandar el dinero para los estudios allá. Pero trabajando allá, no se logra. Hay muchas familias que he conocido que a veces tienen que sacar los jóvenes de la escuela para trabajar- para poder sostenerse. La situación económica sobre todo ahorita -que la situación
Tony Macías
Economic Justice

económica- en Mexico está demasiado. demasiado pesada. Muy alto los precios de las cosas- digamos- los comestibles, del ropa para vestir, y los sueldos que les dan son completamente bajos. No está compensado, y aquí tiene. . aquí está compensado el sueldo

Digamos- una persona con un día de trabajo aquí, tiene para comer- tiene para comer una semana. Pero en Mexico, con un día de trabajo no alcanza ni el sustener el mismo de vivir

-Pero está mejorando Mexico ahora?- la situación?

Yo me imagino que no, no mejora. Porque apenas. me habló mi hija que aumentó el 10% el precio de las cosas, y los sueldos están estancados. Si suben las cosas, si sube el 10% de todo, los sueldos no suben- entonces va de mal empeor

-Y la agricultura allá?

En, sí, las cosas del campo- de agricultura- es mas pesado en Mexico que aquí porque las cosas mas pesadas aquí- siempre lo hacen la maquinaria. Y en Mexico- pues- no mas si es cosa de limpiar o sea de algodon, es mas pesado que aquí. Aquí muchas quemicos, lo que es mas pesado se hace siempre con maquinaria o con quemicas.

Y en Mexico, si Ud. No tiene una pasela, o tierras, para cultivarlas- si tiene dinero, las cultivará con- que se yo- con tractores, rentando un tractor, o, de herbicidas y
insecticidas. El si no tiene dinero, no logra eso; el tiene que hacer todo, todo a mano. Y aquí no, aquí no.

-Es mas peligroso aquí?

Bueno, es peligroso- pero- si tiene uno cuidado, no es peligroso, no? Si uno usa las cosas necesarios para. sabemos que hay muchas noticias- lo que en California, en otros estados, que se los riegan insecticidas, pesticidas, todo esto; pues, yo pienso que si uno no tiene cuidado, probablamente que así, así mal. Sí aquí, aquí nada mas porque- pues- saber uno si quiere trabajar, pues, como ahorita en las limpias. si se espraya, por decir, no pueden entrar a limpiar- que sé Yo- veinte y cuatro, setenta y dos horas que la puedan entrar a limpiar. Y, a veces, uno como vine trabajar no quisiera perder di un día, no?

Pero, preferir de perder un día y no tener algún infección. Nosotros aquí por ese lado no tenemos muchas problemas- Pues, un día que se riega- que se yo- cosas de insecticidas, no? Es lo mas peligroso.

-Hay unas cosas como tabaco, fresas, y durasnos que son un poco venenosos, no?

Pues, yo realmente aquí en este rancho, no hemos tenido problemas. Tenemos melón aquí.

-Quien es el Dueño?

Simms Moore. No sé si es el dueno de la carrera. tengo entendido que el está rentando esta tierra. No se que acuerdos tengan. Sé que al morir de el o ella [esposa], pasa a manos de los nietos.
-Él es buena gente? Tienen problemas?

Me imagino que no, sé que, que veces tenemos problemas, porque, como... Soy encargado aquí a veces, hay ciertos problemitas, veces nos se enojamos pero problemas así con él, no.

Yo pienso que de otras maneras, vamos a seguir trabajando. En todos los trabajos hay problemitas, problemitas porque- como le de- a veces éllos tal vez éllos también por sus problemas, no? Porque, pues- él tiene también muchas problemas - en vender la producto. Yo conozco a él- cuando anda un poco mas de nervios es cuando tiene demasiado producto y no lo puede sacar. Mientras está vendiendo todo, anda feliz. Pero ya cuando no puede sacar, anda, pues, un poco mas de nervios.

-Se que muchos de los dueños creen que trabajan tanto como sus trabajadores.

Él no trabaja. pues, él anda activo, claro que es un trabajo mas pesada, no? Porque el tiene que sacar su producto, cuentos, y donde lo venden... pero, no sé realmente aquí para trabajar en el campo realmente no se mete para nada. trabajen mas duro o anden muy despacio- no- nada de esto.

Si los trata a unos bién, lo tratan a uno bién- siempre.

-Cree Ud. Que le tratan bién aquí?

O, sí. Yo veo que sí, me tratan aquí con- pues... bién.

-Muy bién, o...
Bien.

-Cuales cambios quiere ver?

Pues, no, no se necesita aquí muchos cambios. Hasta la fecha estamos trabajando, pues, bastante bien.

-Que estaría haciendo si no se hubiera ido de Mexico?

Pues, no sé si al no ver tenido yo la oportunidad de venir a E.E.U.U. Pues, también igual-trabajando alla.

-Ha trabajado en otros lugares de los E.E.U.U?

De recien llegado yo acá, estuve en Washington- pescando manzana, pescando asparago.

-Como fue la vida alla?

Pues, bastante bien, con mucho frio (laughs) La ultima temporada que hice yo de la pisca de la manzana. .este... llegan muchas personas para la pisca, pero hay años que hace mucho sol, mucho calor, y casi quemo la mitad de fruta. Pero, de todas maneras a comparacion de Mexico, pues, si gana uno mas.

------------------

-Que le parece la vida de los otros trabajadores agrícolas en E.E.U.U?

Pues, yo no se realmente de otras personas que conozco. Pues, viven bien. Tienen sus trabajos. Yo pienso que a veces, si uno no vive bien es porque uno no sabe cuidar su dinero o no sabe comportarse bien- que sé yo-

-Piensa que todos pueden cambiar sus vidas. mantener sus vidas a un nivel.
Pues, yo pienso que todos, todos los seres humanos estamos capacitades para... para salir adelante- nada más que muchos veces- que sé Yo- uno mismo a veces tiene la culpa de no vivir, de no vivir mejores. Porque, realmente aquí, la persona que trabaja- la tratan bien. Una persona trabajadora... siempre. siempre tiene trabajo.

Sobre todo, aquí, aquí todas las personas que trabaja, vive bien. Si trabaja, gana su dinero- si lo cuida. viven bien. Pues, yo veo- si algunas personas viven mal es porque a veces uno mismo tiene la culpa.

-Tiene Ud. Una meta?

Pues, siempre toda mi vida mi meta ha sido- que sé yo- progresar. Progresar, sobre todo, no para mí- para mi familia. Gracias a Dios que estoy progresando. Pues, como le dije es un rato. Pues, la casa en Mexico, es pobre, no? De ese lado no es rica, no es nada, pero, a. como en Mexico pues, no. Aquí también, pues. carro yo tengo (laughs) estoy pagando- pero en Mexico no traje a esas cosas. Entonces, es mi meta de seguir trabajando hasta donde Dios me de licencia. Claro que sí, llego estar aquí mi logro, mi jubilacion- mi meta es de horar unos centavos, el dinero para ver si logro de... pues en mi vehez tener con que contar, y si no , pues, a ver si las hijas lo mantienen a una.

-Hasta cuando? No Sabe?

(laughs) Quien sabe.
-Pero, cree Ud. Que va a ganar suficiente dinero.

Realmente, Yo ahorita- que sé Yo- que día que yo tengo ahorado, o dinero suficiente.

No, realmente, porque, como le decía, no, ahorita todavía están estudiando mis hijas, y que nosotros- yo soy el único. . que mando siempre para que ellos vivan allá en Mexico.

Pero como le dijo está realmente el sueldo de allá es muy poco, sé que yo.. soy él que les estoy mandando pa’allá

-Cuando piensa de su vida- en esto- y de sucesos en su vida, tiene orgullo en algo especial? Creo que. es muy bien que quiere ayudar a su familia como así, porque aquí no, muchos no. Y esto es muy especial, pero, tiene orgullo en algo.. de toda su vida, adonde va y de donde vine?

Bueno, pues, yo me siento orgullosos.. de ahora sí que de mi vida como te decía antes, no? Pero yo tomaba- posiblemente, me salga un poquito de la línea que llevamos, pero.

hay una de las cosas muy importantes, Tonio. cuando tú te formas una meta. en tu vida. de, que sé Yo- de hacer algo, de dinero, de trabajar.. hay una base muy importante que si no trata de vivir una vida Cristiana- claro que no vamos a ser santos, ni vamos a ser perfectos, pero cuando uno trata de estar llevando una vida mas Cristiana, es muy facil- la vida.

Entonces- digamos- yo, mi meta, como te dijo- antes tomaba, ahora tiene siete años que deje completamente de tomar He visto el cambio en mi vida. Te hace mas responsable- tienes mejor tu trabajo, y a tu familia también.
Y sobre todo, si tu te portes bien (chuckles), vives mas feliz. Si tu te portes bien tienes avance en sus trabajos, los sacas adelante, te trata mejor el patron.

La meta, o- que se Yo- la meta, lo principal es de portarse mejor que pueda y trabajando y ahorando- no mal gastar.
"This, this is where the spray comes out, with this hose here, putting it into each cut. Putting the spray from the top to the bottom. It has to fall all the way down in each plant that it touches", Farmworker.

Photograph taken by a farmworker. Ben Cook, Caswell County.
"We play basketball to be in condition to beat the heat. And, so that we can be in better condition. The spray (or herbicide) sticks to you. The sweat causes it to leave, to get out. If the spray sticks, or remains on the skin, the sweat blocks it, makes it run off", Farmworker.

Photograph taken by a farmworker, Ben Cook, Caswell County.
Andrea Robinson

“Settled Out but Not Settled Down”

My first thought when I met Olga Torres was of how young she looked. And she is young -- only 26 years old -- to have left her native country, worked in the United States, and started a family. She is only a few years older than her younger sister who is working this summer in Pamlico County in a crab processing plant. They agree on some things, such as why they came and the trade-off between how they are treated and the money they earn. However, already Olga and Elvia have different ideas about their futures, that is, about the permanence of their residence in North Carolina and the United States.

Like many of the people with whom we have worked this summer, Olga came here to earn more money than could be had in Mexico and to send what she could home to her family. Her story differs from many farmworkers in two major ways. One is that she worked in crab plants on the coast, rather than in the fields, which she considers to be more difficult work than what she was doing. Secondly, after a few years of coming to work and returning home after the season ended, she decided to stay here. She has lived in Greenville, North Carolina for two years now.

When I first approached our interview, I thought she would tell me that she intended to stay here permanently, maybe making an occasional visit home to Sinaloa, Mexico, and that she hoped that more of her family would join her here. But that did not prove to be the case. When I asked Olga about her hopes and dreams for the future, she replied immediately that she hoped to return to Mexico someday and raise her family...
there. On the other hand, her sister seemed interested in making a new life in this country. Their journeys, although begun in the same place, have at this point diverged. What happened during the course of Olga’s several temporary stays here accounts for this difference and defines more clearly the difference between the motivation to come to the United States and work and the desire to remain here.

The journey that has placed Olga where she is now began when she was still a child, working with her family in crab processing plants in Sinaloa. In the past few years, many labor contractors have begun recruiting women from this area of Mexico because they already have experience picking crabmeat and do not have to be trained. When asked how long she had picked crabs before coming to North Carolina, Olga laughed and could not give a definite answer. She has known the job her entire life.

While farmworkers in the fields must contend with the blazing sun, pesticides and feel the effects of excessive stoop labor, crab pickers work inside old buildings often situated in remote areas of the North Carolina coastal plain. They stand on their feet for hours on end, sometimes having a stool, and perform repetitive tasks such as cracking claws and scooping the crab meat out of its shell. When I asked Olga if she thought it was difficult work, she said yes, but that “for those who already know how [to do the work], it’s not hard.” For her, the hardships of working here were not related to the work itself, but to how she was treated and to being so far away from home.

Home for Olga is a family of six other siblings, three of which are also living here. Two of those, younger sisters Rosi and Elvia, are working as crab pickers this summer. Olga is the oldest child of her family and was the first to come to the United States “to work out of necessity ... [and] send money to my family ... We came under
contract [H2B] but the same boss we had in Mexico, he sent the people. That was the first year I came, in 1990.” In other words, not only are labor contractors and their employers in North Carolina benefiting from contracted crab workers, but employers in Mexico also have an interest in finding labor for U.S. operations. Almost all of the women who came with Olga were from Sinaloa as well. She was 17 years old that year, traveling with about 50 others, four days in a bus from Sinaloa, up through Texas and then across North Carolina. She paid about $300 for the trip, the food and her visa.

The crab season runs about six to eight months, and the workers are contracted for the longest possible time, from May until November, although there may not be full-time work for that entire period. During the month of August, there is the highest volume of work, since it is the peak of the crab season. Towards the beginning and ends of the summer, the work is more difficult because the crabs are smaller and the meat harder to pick out. The women are paid by the pound and are charged for taxes and for the cost of their tools. They work eleven or twelve hours per day, six days per week. Olga said they would go into work at 1:00 p.m. and not leave until midnight, or one, two or three in the morning, according to the amount of crabs to be picked. “There were times when we would return to the trailers (where they lived) and they would call us back earlier in order to can [the meat] ” They received a half hour for lunch and no other breaks, except what they managed to take on their own.

A series of articles from a couple years ago in the Independent magazine focused on the African-American women who have worked as crab pickers in North Carolina companies for decades. Most are aging out, some still working even though they have reached their 70’s and 80’s, and younger African American women are not taking the
same jobs as did their mothers and grandmothers. For this reason, crab plant owners are increasingly turning to Mexican H2B workers to fill the gap. I assumed that a plant would either have all African American workers, or all H2B workers. However, Olga informed me that where she worked, in Belhaven and New Bern, there were both. What an incredibly divided work force, to have on the one hand guestworkers from Mexico, most under 40 years of age, working together with women who have lived in this region all their lives, most of which have spanned 70 or 80-odd years. Olga recalled that “las morenas” were given more freedom, and could leave when they wanted to, while she and the other H2B workers had to wait for the bus to come to take them home. She also mentioned that although all the workers came into the plant together, the Latinas and African-Americans were then separated for work. When I asked the reason for this arrangement, she replied, “because we didn’t like ‘las morenas.’” Probably the sentiment was shared on both sides, and understandably so. To the aging African American women, here are a bunch of young women from another country whom their employers hire, apparently reluctantly in some cases, and who do not have the same connections and history with the place as their predecessors. On the other hand, the guestworkers like Olga know that they do not have the same history and trust with their employers and so are probably wary of those who do.

Also, personal experiences add to the mistrust. I asked Olga whether she felt that the contract program worked well. She replied “well, yes, yes because it helps the people [earn money] but many times the bosses, like with someone who does not know much, they don’t treat us any better than to rob us.” Olga and the other workers probably had more direct contact with their supervisors, who were also women from Mexico, than with
the plant’s owner, just as is the case with farmworkers in the fields who know their labor
contractor better than “el patron.” The conflicts between workers and supervisors often
arise over pay, since the supervisor controls the time cards and is responsible for
punching the workers in and out. Olga told me of a time when she was docked an hour’s
pay simply because the supervisor and she did not get along.

She also remembered wondering why their cards were punched when they began
work but not when they ended for the day (or night) and discovering that it was because
“they would punch [the cards] at 4:00 in the afternoon even though many times the
people were still working past 4:00. And when the people were ready to leave, the cards
were already punched. I told this to the ‘patron’ but he just said I was crazy”

She told of another instance with a supervisor, one who tossed crab bones and
water on the meat Olga was picking to grab her attention and accused her of throwing
meat away, but that “what she wanted was for me to leave the plant. But she didn’t
succeed, I never left. She was very unfair with the workers. And they did what she said
-- if she went and told the ‘patron’ [anything bad about them], the patron went and fired
them. Also, once three girls were fired simply because she didn’t like them.” Time and
time again, the same place that offered economic opportunity to guestworkers also
exacted a price from them -- a loss of independence and exposure to mistreatment.

The women’s housing where Olga lived was located far enough from the plant
that they were transported to and from work in a bus by their supervisor. H2B workers,
unlike H2A agricultural workers, must pay rent for their housing. According to Olga, she
paid about $20 per week for her housing, which she described as four huge, ugly houses
in the style of a “bodega” with very small dormitory-style rooms. There were seven or
eight women in each section. Not all of them were as young as Olga; the ages ranged from forty-five to fifteen.

Unjust conditions made Olga’s home as undesirable as work. First of all, the women were not allowed to go out at night. They also had a curfew, or maybe more accurate, a bedtime, of 10:00 p.m. after which there was to be no noise. But while the workers themselves were trying to sleep in a small bedroom next to the sitting area, the supervisors, who lived in the same place, did not respect the rules or the workers, as they stayed up in the sitting area until 10 or 11 p.m., not letting the others sleep because of their noise.

Another difficult situation with the living arrangements was the availability of the telephone. Once again, the two women who supervised the work, lived with the workers and transported them controlled the phone, only allowing it to be used in case of emergency, for example when someone was sick.

Olga came to North Carolina through the H2B program for two years, in 1990 and 1991, and then did not return until 1996, when she worked in New Bern. There she met Lucio, whom she married. They moved to Greenville and had a son, named José. Lucio now does works various outdoor jobs, and she stays at home with José. When I asked if she would consider her life now better than it was when she was a guestworker, she replied yes, because that was not a happy time. She does not know personally anyone else who did the same as she, coming under contract and then staying, but says she feels a part of the community because they have an apartment and because of the growing Latino population.
But I got the feeling that these things are only helping her to get by until the time comes when she can return to a more familiar setting. When asked what her first impression of North Carolina and its people were, she said she did not like it and wanted to go home to Mexico. It was also hard because she knew none of the people with whom she was working and living.

I asked Olga about the importance of maintaining her native language and culture while she is here. She answered that it was indeed important, especially for those like her husband who have been in the United States so long (since he was a very young boy) that they begin to forget the language and heritage. When asked if this was a difficult thing to do, she said, hesitantly, that no, it was not. I suggested that it was made easier with someone like her around, and she agreed. That is, it is easier to do with someone who is more recently from Mexico, who has a large family there, and who wants to return.

I questioned Olga as to her hopes and dreams for the future. Without hesitation, she replied that she wanted to live in Mexico with her family. Lucio wants to return even more than she does, since he has been away for so long. As to what she desires for her son, José, she wants what many parents do for their children, a better life, one in comfort, off the streets, one in which he can take time to study and do well for himself. When asked if she thought that “money” equaled “success,” Olga replied “not necessarily.” She mentioned that what was more important was that you have enough to get what you need, food, a place to live, and so forth. To her, success meant having her family close by.

Olga’s younger sisters Elvia and Rosi are working in Pamlico county this summer in a crab plant there. I talked to Elvia for a little while after interviewing Olga, and found that their attitudes towards settling out differ. Elvia was fifteen, and Rosi sixteen, when
they came for the first time to North Carolina to work four years ago. When asked what
she thought of the work with the crabs, she said, “In some ways it was okay because they
allowed us to make money and bad because, well, you need money to come here to work
... you have to do many things in order to earn money.” I interpreted “do many things” as
working very hard, very long hours and enduring unfair conditions.

The two sisters are living with other workers in two trailers. Elvia said they will
return to Mexico after the season and might come back next year. They also send money
back to the family in Mexico since “now it is a little difficult there because there isn’t
enough work.” In contrast to her sister Olga, Elvia said that someday she would like to
stay here, since it is easier to find work. She did not have a preference as to which type
of work, as long as she was earning money.

What is the difference between the two sisters? Why is one so eager to return to
Mexico and one willing to try living here? Is it not easier to achieve “economic justice”
in the United States than in Mexico? I think the answer may be found in two other
names: Lucio and José. Olga’s primary concern is no longer earning money for herself
and her parents, but is instead her own new family’s well-being. She would like to raise
her children where they can know their grandparents and other family members. When
families move, it is often in search of better economic well-being. Many guestworkers
are motivated by the same desires: to bring more money home than they can by working
in Mexico. They endure many injustices while here in order to make the journey a
success.

But providing for the family takes on a whole different meaning when you have
one of your own. In such a case, it may seem worthwhile to stay in a foreign land only
long enough to save some money, and then return home to raise a growing family in a familiar place.

So if things turn out as Olga hopes they will, they will come full circle. When I asked her how long she thought that would take, she replied that there was no way to know I suggested that it may be years, and she agreed. Recently she had a car wreck in which, though no one was seriously injured, the car was totaled. Such a setback may only lengthen the time she is here, since it may inhibit Lucio from getting better-paying jobs. Olga may be different from many settled-out workers who do intend to remain in the United States, if not North Carolina, to continue taking advantage of the jobs here.

But surely there are also many like her, to whom family is even more important than economic opportunity, being the original motivation for coming as well as the reason for going home.
"The Gomez Family" (top) and "Brother and Sister Share a Moment", Lane Gary, Rockingham County, North Carolina.
"Up in Smoke" (top) and "Marjelia, Rodrigo and Benjamin in their favorite toy", Lane Gary, Rockingham County.
E: Could you tell me about your community when you were a child?

B: Um, I don’t remember in Mexico. What can I say. I was very young. I liked to play and go to school.

E: When did you come to the United States?

B: In 1987. '97

E: How did you decide to come to the United States? Your reasons?

B: We wanted to come and know what it is like. So that the children can learn English and study.

E: Why did you come to North Carolina?

B: To work. Because people said that it was better here in North Carolina for the family. It was more laid back than other places.

R: Who told you?

B: My husband. Because he was in California and he said that over there it was a lot bad for the family.

R: Your husband was here before you?

B: Yes, he was here four or five years. And then he was with his uncle in California, Salinas. And he said he didn’t like it over there for the family.

R: But did he live here [in North Carolina]?

B: Yes, he was like four years here, working.

R: Alone?

B: Yes.

R: Did he send money to you in Mexico?
B: Yeah, to Mexico.

E: What did you expect when you came to the United States?

B: That I would go. That he'd come back for us, for the family.

R: But when your husband came here to the United States and you came with him, did you have all your papers.

B: Yes. He arranged it. If not, we wouldn't know North Carolina.

R: How did he fix his papers?

B: Well, he has his visa card and he himself applied for legal residence.

D: But how did he get his papers?

B: With a letter from an employer

E: What did you think before you came?

B: What?

R: What did you think before you came here? Like, what did you expect?

B: Well, we wanted to come to know.

D: But what did you expect to see? What did you imagine you where going to see?

B: Oh, you do know. I thought it was going to be ugly. When one gets here everything seems strange but then after a while you get used to it and then you start liking it. And then you don't feel that the people are strange.

E: How many people are in your family?

B: We are eight with my husband and I.

E: How many work?

B: Four.

E: And what do you work?

B: In the fields.
E: And in and other thing.
B: No. Only in the fields.
E: Do you move around to do agricultural work?
B: Well, like, last year we went to Florida. Well, yeah. Yes.
R: Do you move every year?
B: Well, no last year was the first year we came here.
E: What do you do during the months when there is no work.
B: Well, we stay here without working. Thinking, what are we going to do to eat.
E: Do you like your work?
B: Even if I don’t like it, what else am I going to do? We can’t find anything else to work in.
E: What would be your ideal job?
D: What would you like to work in?
B: In something easier. In anything as long as it’s not that tobacco.
D: Like in a hotel?
B: No, I don’t like working in a hotel. In a job that is easy. In whichever. Oh Alejandra, they are putting me to think.
E: What do you do in your free-time?
D: What do you do when you don’t have anything else to do?
B: Mmm, I sing sometimes. I put on the stereo. Well, yes. When one isn’t occupied.
E: What does education mean to you and your family?
B: Oh, I don’t know what to answer
E: What is the highest grade of education a member of your family has completed?
B: High school. Well, you all answer since you know the answer. [Directed to daughters]
R. What is the highest grade of education a member of your family has completed?

B. Sixth.

R. In Mexico?

B: Yes. In Mexico.

R. What about here in the United States?

B. You. [points to daughter]

D: Seven.

E: What are your plans for the future?

E: Would you like to live here?

B. Well, yes so the kids can learn

E: Or in Mexico?

B. Well, I'd also like to return to Mexico.

R. Which one would you like to do more, stay here or return to Mexico?

B: No, return to Mexico, to my country. I like it here also but one has to return back. Staying here is difficult. In both places. In Mexico and here.

E: What would you like to have in the future?

D: Would you like a limousine?

B. Oh, a limousine. Well, I don't know

[moment of chit chat]

R. How is the situation in Michoacan?

B: Well, it's fine. It's very peaceful. Except there isn't any work like here.

R. What did you work in?
B: Well, my husband, he planted corn like a farmworker and I was in the home and sometimes we’d go and help him.

R. And did your husband own any of the land over there in Michoacan?

B: No.

R. Well, he only worked as a farmworker?

B. Yeah.

R. And do you still have family in Michoacan?

B: My husband?

R: You or you husband?

B: Yes. Him and I.

R. Do you send money back to Mexico?

B. Yes, sometimes. But very little.

R. Do you plan on having a house here or over there?

B: No, well I think in Mexico. And here the boss gives us a house to live in.

R: Does he pay?

B: Yes, he pays for everything.

[chit chat about family relations in Selma]

R. And when you lived in Florida, where did you live?

B. In a house.

R. Where did you work?

B: In the oranges.

R: And do you also work in the fields, in the oranges, and here in the tobacco?

B: It's because over there I worked in a hotel but it was very difficult for me to work in the hotel. And I told my husband, I'll get out. I'd rather go to work in the oranges. And
he said, “How are you going to look working in the oranges?” And I told him, “How I am going to look but I don’t like the hotel.” And we were over there in the oranges.

R. And in what part of Florida were you in?

B: Ken City

R: What do you like most of Mexico in Michoacan?

B: Everything.

R. What do you like least of Michoacan?

B: I like everything about Michoacan.

R. What do you not like about here?

B. A lot of things.

R. What do you not like? The food, clothes, the people?

B: Yes.

R. What do you not like?

B: How can I not like the people if all of us are human beings. Yes, the people. I can’t say anything about the people.

R. And do you like most of North Carolina?

B. That there is work. That we have enough money to sustain ourselves. I like it because the kids are learning English. Slowly, slowly they are learning.

R. And when you go to Michoacan, do the kids go to school there?

B: Yes because if they don’t they won’t allow them to go to school here. They have to have their papers.

R. All the kids have their papers?

B: Yes.

R. Why do you think the kids learning English is important?

B: So they can get an easier job. English is good for everything.
R. Do you think that if you learned English that you'd have a better job?

B: Yes. There are a lot of people who know English and they find an easier job.

R. From here, where are you going to move to? To Florida? Or back to Michoacan?

B: We don't know.

R. And you're going to decide that when you finish the tobacco harvest?

B: Yes.

R. And if you go back to Florida? What are you going to work in?

B: In the oranges.

R. If you go back to Michoacan, are you going to go back to your house?

B: Yes.

R. Do you have a house or do you live with someone else?

B: We have a house.
Untitled, Delia Aguirre, Wake County.
Untitled, Delia Aguirre, Wake County.
E: Can you talk a little bit about how you became involved in Telamon?

C: Okay

E: Just a little bit about yourself.

C: Well, I am a veteran. I was in Nam for 15 years and, ah, you know, then rest a where, just, I was in the service. When I got out, uh, I applied for a job with, uh, it was a migrate seasonal farmworker at that time. So, office was in Dunn and I was hired as a van driver. Ya know, to transport the farmworkers back and forth to the clinics, and uh, McCain and places like that, an apartment. And I was laid off a couple of times and I came back as a field service rep. And, uh, was laid off and came back as a job counselor and I've been with 'em ever since, since, uh, July 17, 1978. Yeah, and so now I'm the case manager here, office manager here in Benson.

E: Could you talk a little bit about the mission statement behind the organization and some of the programs and services you provide for members of the community?

C: Well, uh, to put it in my words, our mission is to help the farmworkers to become self supportive and, uh, we do this by lending supportive services, and not only supportive service. We have, uh, training and employment for the migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and, uh, when they come in, we take applications and we'll assess their needs. Some want to be in training programs, some don't. Some just want supportive services and they move on. Those who want training and employment after we set down and work up a plan and decide what employment or training they want to go in, then we proceed with that. And in there are the needs, in the way of supportive service, that would in the, you know, help keep them on the job, to ease the pain a little bit, ya know, they might need transportation, food stuff, housing, ah, a relocation near the job, ya know. And, uh, we have the On the Job Training program, OJT. This is where, uh, we go out and negotiate with the employer. And, uh, they hired this person and we can reimburse them up, after negotiating, we can reimburse the employer up to fifty percent. It might be less. [phone interruption- paused recording] As I was saying, On the Job Training. This is a placement with our employer. They hired a person. We reimburse them up to fifty percent, could be less. And then we have the work experience program. This is designed for persons who have little or no employment history. Fresh out of school. Or those who are chronically unemployed and they need to build up a good work record. So we do that training with nonprofit organizations and we pay the salary for that and the workman's comp. insurance. And what they do is, as I say, build up a good work
record, good work habits. We do a follow up on them and watch how they spend their money, uh, do they use it wisely and we also counsel them in budgeting and things like that and, uh, then again, supportive services they needed, until they get their first check. Yeah. And then we have the classroom training program. This is were we can sponsor a person up to two years in community college, transfer programs, all social degree program. They can be two years or less and we pay their tuition, for their books, and we give them a mileage fee, and some child care, if it’s necessary. And they have a time sheet they turn in and they are paid weekly, ya know. That’s the classroom training. That’s the way it works. And when they get out of that type of training, we also are responsible for assisting them in job placement. In a matter of fact, all three categories I just explained to you, except for the OJT, they already hire and we’re just reimbursing the employer because it takes some time away from his schedule to train this person. That’s what the reimbursement is all about.

E: Can you give an example of On the Job Training Program like, um, what type of job or what type of training that they would need or what the employer would provide?

C: Well, uh, now, the type of training they go into, uh, that job, On the Job Training is based on what they want. We don’t determine that. Uh, for example, I had one man who wanted to be, uh, he liked the outdoors. So, after assessing his needs and everything we boiled it down to, uh, environmental scientist assistant. So, so it happened we got there. So there was a lot of walking involved in that, uh, digging holes, putting dirt in jars, and things like that. So, uh, we don’t determine what they go into. Uh, we do assist them in making a decision, ya know, if they’re scratching their head and really don’t know. We can open the book and tell them about things. Plus, uh, the ABLE test we give, its a measuring device to help them to see they can’t start out as the executive, or school teacher, or doctor, or lawyer or anything like that. Then again, some just max out the test. That’ll help them measure their ability, but we don’t use that test, as you say, to measure their intelligence, you know. But, it’s just a measuring devise and we have other things, ya know, that help us, that will assist us in helping them to determine what type of training they need to go into. Did that answer your question about that OJT?

E: Yeah. And, um, who are you funded by and how do you get people to come here?

C: Okay, we’re funded by the Department of Labor out of Washington, D.C. We’re federal funded program not state. Now we have field service reps., uh, field service representatives, and we send them out to find the people. We also do outreach to, the case managers. Most of that is done by the field service rep and they visit the camps, they visit the homes, and any place they think there might be farmworkers. And then they take an application. We also have flyers that we put up different places, post office, the stores, and laundry mats. Once you do something good for one person, that’s your advertising and it just spreads. So actually, at this stream of time we don’t have to do much advertising because we’re well known. Been in business just about 35 years. So, uh, people know where we are. So most by word of mouth.
E: How has Telamon changed over those 35 years? What different paths has it taken?

C: Well, when I first came with the organization, uh, it was basically the same as it is now, training and employment. Some supportive services have changed, some job titles have changed. They have gone into the Head Start school, uh, now back in '78, '79, '80 it was rare. They would help set up these programs but it wasn’t under Telamon. But, now, you know, they have, uh, Head Start schools in Michigan, Indiana, Tennessee, North Carolina, just about all the states, and, uh, Michigan, I have to look in the book, about eleven Head Starts in North Carolina. They have a Head Start in Newton Grove, putting one in Angier now, uh, up in the mountains up there in Hendersonville and different places. yeah. But that’s one project they’ve taken on. Now they used to have a project, the food and nutrition program where they taught mothers how to cook and they had that program, they’d get into that, they cut that program out. Uh, the vans. Each office used to have a van to transport the migrants, they cut that out. They went from job developer to job counselor, from job counselor, to case manager. So everybody’s a case manager, just like in social work in the schools now. Titles have changed and there have been some states added since then, since the early '80’s. But, basically, Telamon does the same thing. Uh, what they do, they do it good.

E: So, um, you don’t have any transportation to go out and pick up farmworkers. They are responsible for finding rides here?

C: If a person is eligible for our program and we, uh, take an application and they’re eligible and they need transportation to the clinic we can do that, our personal cars, yeah. Because we get paid mileage. Uh, so we use our cars now for our clinics. We have applicants, clients, participants, that’s the way I break it down, you know. Applicant, just got an application. He’s not a participant yet or might not be a client yet. But, they can still get a certain amount of service.

E: These different placements of jobs, how do they compare with other job? Are most of them above minimum wage or are most of them at minimum wage?

C: Above minimum wage. We have what’s called a Direct Job Placement. This is were a person come in, just like the fella this morning, “I need a job”, uh, if he’s not going to go into training, I can develop a job. So the job would have to be over $6.00 that I put him in. And uh, if we spend ten thousand dollars on a person to go to school for Head Start teacher, or whatever. If you can understand what I’m saying. It wouldn’t be right. I wouldn’t feel good putting him into a five dollar and twenty-five cent job. See we’d been paying him more than that in stipend, you know, while he was in school. So our average hourly wage is seven dollars.
E: The theme of our documentary project is, “Living the American Dream: Economic Justice for Farmworkers” and I was wondering what are some of the American dreams or hopes that farmworkers have when they come to you or when they come to this organization?

C: Well, “Get my own house”, see what I’m saying? “I want my own house. The majority of the females now are saying that, those who are participating in the, uh, AFDC program, “I want to get off welfare. It’s a headache. Gotta get this. Gotta get that. Go back tomorrow and come back. Appointment here, appointment there. They cut it out and then I’ve got to be recertified.” And some feel like, uh, it’s a form of, and, uh, you could probably put it in better words, form of, uh, slavery. In other words, they get, uh, they get, it’s kinda like an addiction, they get in, they get addicted to in and they want to get off because they can’t get the things they want. You know, they can’t get a car, they can’t have a house, get nice things like other people. But if they are getting eight hundred dollars a month with that type of service and then they go get a job paying five seventy five and get six hundred dollars. They’re going down instead of going up. So, uh, but they do want to come off of the AFDC program, most of them lately that I’ve talked with.

E: How do you help them achieve that?

C: Training. Training. And we assist them in job development. I’ll say eighty percent of it is done by us. But, we also encourage them to go out and look, let us know.

E: What is the success rate of getting off welfare?

C: I’d say eighty percent.

E: Of those that come in for your program and then leave?

C: Yeah, eighty percent.

E: Do you feel that farmworkers can reach economic justice?

C: With programs like this, yeah. Sure, and it all has to do with their attitude, their motivation, ya know. And we try to motivate, you know, and when they come in, instead of tearing them down or as you’ve heard social workers and psychologists say about how you deal with the children, you don’t call them knuckle-heads, and you’re no good and you never will be no good, and this is where you’re going to be. We don’t do that. We try to build self-esteem, you know, and help them.

E: What do you see as the most prominent issue farmworkers are dealing with?
C: Well, let me break it down into two categories. Uh, for the Hispanic population its legal documentation.

E: Do you deal with legal documentation or do you refer them . . . ?

C: We’re referral now We used to have to, we used to be an entity for the INS but we don’t, we’re not anymore. So, we, just referral service. Uh, and housing. And with the other population the blacks and whites and so on when it comes to the migrant itself its housing, transportation, ill treatment on the camps, drugs, uh, problems with the wages, that is, uh, in dealing with the crew leaders. It just, it just don’t work. And, and then too that pertains to both groups. Of course we have the seasonal farmworker too, now They’re local people. Um, some problems with housing with the seasonal, and low wages, you know, on the farms.

E: Is there just lack of affordable housing or . . . ?

C: Yeah. That’s it. Lack of affordable housing.

E: Do you have any kind of regulations of who you see? Are you required to ask for legal documentation?

C: Yes. Everyone. Citizen. You know, a person walk in here, you know, looking at it from this perspective. A black person walk in here, in my mind he’s a citizen, you know, a white person, they’re a citizen. You see, uh, we have to ask them to, just the same as we would another person of another race or color, you know. And that’s not, that’s to avoid discrimination. Sometimes we just assume certain things, you know, and that’s not the way it is. So, everyone is asked for documentation.

E: How important is English to farmworkers jobs?

C: You mean the non-English speaking? or

E: Okay, or those whose first language is not English?

C: Yes. It is very important. Uh, if they want to get a job paying above, well above minimum wage, they, it is good, it would enhance their ability to get a good job if they attend ESL classes. I forgot to tell you about that program. We have a ESL program, English as a Second Language and, uh, Mr serge Morales is, uh, he’s not heading that project but he’s helping with it. He works in this office but right now he’s working in the state office in Raleigh. And they visit the camps and they have classes in the evenings, three or four hour classes in the evenings after everyone comes in from work. And, uh, they teach English. Or the community colleges have those programs, too, English as a Second Language. But it’s becoming ever increasingly necessary that they do learn
English if they want to get a good job. Of course, the pick and shovel is gone, although you might need it around the house. But the pick and shovel and the mule don't exist anymore. If you understand what I mean.

E: So, do you feel that society is pushing people to learn English or do you feel that the community themselves is wanting more English classes to improve their lives?

C: Well, the Hispanics themselves are expressed the fact that they want more English classes, you know. Not that they want to abandon their language, you know. They know it's necessary to speak English, you know, to get ahead.

E: Tuesday I interviewed a woman who is a farmworker. She works in the tobacco fields and I was asking her why she came to the United States and within our conversation, two or three times she said, you know, my kids are learning English, and that's really important. It's really important to us that they learn English. And I said, Well, why is it so important? and she said she wanted them to learn English so they'd have and easier job that farmwork. I thought that was really interesting. Do you find that farmworkers or non-English speaking people whose English Proficiency level is higher, receive easier or higher paying jobs?

C: In my opinion they do. If you speak English

E: Do you kind of gear them towards different jobs according to

C: Well, we give them all the chance. We try to set up interviews no matter whether they speak English or not and we let the employer tell us that this job requires that a person speak some English, or English well, be able to read and write English, whatever the requirements are. So we refer them all to the same jobs and we let the employer tell us what the qualifications are.

E: How often do those ESL classes run? Are they seasonal or yearly?

C: Now the yearly, year round classes are given at the community college level. Uh, Telamon, uh, ESL classes are seasonal. But there's a ESL, uh, coordinator available all the time.

E: Do they set up tutoring sessions?

C: Right. Yeah. Well, however they do it. We have a full time person for those special projects.

E: What seasons are most prominent or what times of the year

C: From, say, May to December
E: What are some of the goals, um, that the organization is trying to achieve in the future? What projects are you working on right now, currently?

C: That everyone in the field office be able to, uh, be, uh, to occupational fluency in Spanish?

E: Really? Are you all taking classes in Spanish?

C: Well, there is a program set up through the organization. We had, uh, you can order program Expresso and things like that. Of course that one didn’t do me as much good as the program that Telamon had itself. Telamon paid for that. But, uh, in house or training from the state office or the corporate office we have a trainer and, uh, that did me more good than listening to the tapes. So we have that project. They also have funds to, if I want to take any other courses, they will pay for that to better myself. All case managers has to have, uh, I think it’s thirteen hours of sociology and psychology, you know. And the, actually the job description calls for a degree. But, if you have the required courses then you are also eligible for the position. This is something that came about five, less than five years ago I’d say. Anyone that we hire now, if they have some of the required courses they give them two years to finish. And if they make a B average then they reimburse up to fifty percent, A, I guess, one hundred percent.

E: Well, I guess that is really all I have. Is there anything you’d like to embellish on or anything you wanted to add? Questions for me?
"Pesticide Educational Training/Fiesta on July 26, 1998" (top) and "Soccer/Futbol", Candice Stringfield, Newton Grove, North Carolina.
Daniel Hill
"Tobacco Field Blues"

Manuel woke with a start as the bus took another rough turn, bouncing him in his uncomfortable seat. He glanced at his watch. Shouldn't be more than a few hours now. The American highways were wide and well kept, but the roadside trees kept him from viewing the towns that crawled by. He closed his eyes and reached back toward the half-sleep he had been in for hours.

It would not come. Marta flashed before his closed eye lids every minute. Would she have enough money to survive for these five months while he was away? Was his brother going to serve her needs as he had asked? Already he missed her smile, her spicy enchiladas, they way she held little Liliana. And Liliana, how much would she grow up while he was away? His new baby girl, just born. She had her mother's eyes. How big would she be when he got back? Would she even recognize her papá?

Manuel sighed. He had no choice but to come to the United States to work, like many in his home town did every year. This was his first year, but some of his countrymen had been coming for five, ten, twenty years. He had heard stories of America, with the big shopping malls and restaurants everywhere, the people that were always watching television and eating hamburgers, living in their nice, big houses. He had also heard of the work under the hot sun, long hours spent in the fields. And he had heard of tired nights spent on porches, living in the woods alone with only a few friends to keep you company. But
what must be done, must be done.

A sharp pain in his left side snatched him from his worries. That damn pain in his guts! It had started a few weeks ago, and was not going away. It came for a few minutes and left, but it got worse every week. It had best go away, because he had work to do.

Manuel looked around the bus. He knew a lot of these men from his small pueblito in the south of Mexico. They were all going to farm tobacco in North Carolina, wherever that was. All Manuel knew was that it was over a fifty hour bus ride. Luckily, he was good friends with the three other men that he would live with while working in the fields. At least he had friends. Unfortunately, between them they knew almost no English, and none had been to America before.

Hopefully, learning English wouldn't be as difficult as Manuel had heard. He had done fairly well in school, and figured that he could learn a lot in a short time, if he practiced. He just needed confidence.

The bus took another turn, jostling several men from their sleep, and slowed to a stop. They had arrived.

* * * *

Manuel straightened his aching back, blinking as the late afternoon sun hit him in the eyes. Sweat stung his forehead, and it felt like he just been swimming in the brown lake by the trailer. The others were digging and pulling weeds, just like
they had been doing for weeks. It wasn't so bad. After these few weeks, he was used to being tired all the time. If only it weren't so damn hot!

As he turned to bend down again, his stomach erupted in another cloud of pain. Manuel gasped and shut his eyes, waiting for it to pass. Thankfully, it lasted only a minute or so. But it worried him for many more minutes. The pain came several times a day now, and sometimes lasted for many minutes. He could barely stand up straight when it hit. So far, the patron hadn't seen him take breaks to stop working, but sometimes he couldn't go on. It hurt too much.

Manuel shook his head, banishing the worry from his mind. He must keep working, for Marta, and for Liliana. His family was the only reason he came, to be able to care for them. There were many months left to go. Besides, he didn't speak much English, and he certainly couldn't pay an American doctor for a visit. He needed to save the money. That was the most important thing.

* * * *

Manuel leaned back against the wall of the trailer, stretching tired legs. Only two more months to go before he returned to Mexico. If he could survive.

The pain in his side hadn't gotten much worse, but it came more frequently. The last week, he hadn't been able to sleep well because it came at night and woke him up. He was so tired, getting up in the morning was a terrible struggle. A photograph
of Marta was his only inspiration every morning to go back into that hellish green maze of waist-high tobacco, to cut leaves or flowers or dig trenches. But without sleep, he could barely move his body in the mornings.

To make things worse, since they had been cutting tobacco leaves, he felt sick and didn't even feel like eating after work. Two of his friends had even vomited from touching the plant. The patron said it was normal, and would pass within a few days.

Manuel could feel his body weakening every day. If not for Marta and Liliana, he felt he could lie down in one of the trenches he had dug and never get up again.

The sound of a car coming up the gravel drive roused Jose from his doze on the porch. He looked over at Manuel and said "Quien es? No es el carro del patron."

Manuel looked. It certainly wasn't the patron's big red truck coming up the road. It was a car he had never seen before. To make things even stranger, when the car stopped, two gringos he had never seen before got out and came walking up. Manuel and Jose looked at each other as if to say "You talk to them."

All of a sudden, one of them began speaking Spanish to them. "We come from the health clinic nearby," she said. "We're here to tell you about a health program for agricultural workers here in North Carolina."

Manuel thought it odd that two doctors would be here at his trailer early in the evening to talk to him, but listened attentively to what they had to say.

They explained a program for farmworkers that only cost five
dollars for a visit to their clinic. They also talked about why his friends had been sick from working in the tobacco, and that there were medicines that would help with the nausea. The others seemed interested in this medicine, but Manuel was more interested in the five dollar program. Maybe he could go to the doctor, if it only cost five dollars.

After the gringos stopped talking, Manuel approached them about his pain. They seemed very concerned, and rapidly agreed to make an appointment for him. Relief settled over him for the first time since he had come to America. In this strange and hard to understand place, there were people who would help. Even if their Spanish accent was a little funny, they were here to help. Manuel thanked them, and they said they would return the next day to bring him to the clinic.

* * * *

Back in the fields a week later, his life in America was much better than before. Manuel was able to sleep, the pain in his stomach was almost gone, and he didn't feel sick from the tobacco anymore. The others had asked him about his visit to the clinic, and he had told them. He had said there was a very nice woman who interpreted for him at the desk, and that she also interpreted for him when he went in to see the doctor. The doctor examined him, and he was given a receipt for some medicine. Now that he had been taking it for almost a week, the pain was almost gone. It had worked out well, and it was cheap.
too. Now he could work hard and get rest, and soon, he would be home to his wife and daughter. He also knew that if he decided to come back next year, there would be someone waiting to help him, if he needed it.

As the weeks went by, it became easier to get up in the morning. He felt strong but tired from all the work, but each day brought him closer to home. Now he had money to feed his family, friends here in America, and a job for next year. Yes, America was a strange place, but not all bad.
"For Migrant Rent Only", Rosa Cruz, Benson, North Carolina.
"Home Sweet Home", Rosa Cruz, Benson, North Carolina
"It's a hard life, but a good life"

I made the initial call a week in advance, through Regina Luginbuhl’s recommendation. I arrive at Dewey Ogbern’s farm on a Wednesday afternoon as storm clouds are finally rolling in. His aging wood frame house is surrounded by tall tobacco plants. Dewey wears jeans and a straw hat. He plays with a stick as he stares up at the promising sky.

He sits at a picnic table under a shade tree, waiting for me. We introduce ourselves and I spend some time reassuring Dewey that this is only for educational purposes. I ask him to sign the release form and I show him last year’s documentary project booklet and explain that I want a farmer’s point of view to be included in this year’s.

D: I need for it to rain, I’m waitin’ on it to rain.

K: Yeah, it needs it. First I’m going to ask you what they call autobiographical information. Where you live, how many children you have, that kind of thing. Do you have children?

D: I have three children, I’m divorced.

K: Do they live here?

D: No, I live by myself.

K: Do you have any grandchildren?

D: One.

K: Where were you born?
D: I was raised right here on this farm. I was born here in Wake County and I’ve lived here all my life.

K. Wow And you farm tobacco and.

D: Small grain.

K. Now for my questions. So, you were raised on this farm. Your father farmed it?

D: Right, father and grandfather

K. Do you know what year they began or what year they got the farm?

D: No, back in the 1800s.

K. Wow

D: I could probly look it up, but I couldn’t quote it off the top of my head.

K. That’s okay Do you think any of your children will be farming it?

D: Yeah. Course I have two sons and ah...and ah...my daughter helps me out now I have two sons and a daughter. One of my sons works in Raleigh but my other son, he’s still in school and a course the daughter’s married. But one son and daughter helps me out now.

K: Great. And do you have migrant workers now?

D: Yeah, well, I got two families right now staying with me.

K. Where do they live?

D: They live just down the road here about half a mile.

K. Okay. And how long have you had migrant workers working for you?

D: I been working migrant workers since ah... in the 80’s, mid-80’s.

K. Did you always house them?
D: Yeah, I've always housed them.

K. Why did you start hiring them?

D: Why did I start working migrant workers?

K. Yeah.

D: American people are lazy. Don't want to work.

K. Did you try working local people?

D: Oh, yeah. I've worked local people but, ah. I just, I have better luck workin' migrants. Like I said, American people that work on a farm. what you used to get on a farm. they're lazy now. Our tax dollars keep em up, they'll tell ya they don't have to work. If our tax structure and ah, food stamps and everything else, if all them programs were done away with farmers could get more labor. These Mexicans wouldn't be here. Guatemalans and they wouldn't be here, we'd have plenty of workers.

K. And how did you first find the Mexicans, the migrant workers, to work for you?

D: Well, I think ah, maybe the first ones that I worked I probably didn't, I probably didn't, if I remember correctly I probably didn't house the first ones that I worked. The first year that I was experienced with em is. I believe I got a crew leader to help me out late in the season because the local people that I had, the local families that I had, you know, I wasn't workin' child labor kinda situation but I was workin' high school and ah. and ah the school system starts back in August and that's when we're the busiest. And I think I got a crew leader maybe to come in with some four or five people and help me finish my crop one year. And then the next year I think's when I went to maybe housing and workin' Mexicans, migrant labor.
K. Okay Um, was it cheaper for you to move to the migrant labor? How did the money change?

D: Naw, I don't think it was cheaper. About the same circumstances at the time I started, course I was furnishing housing for local labor at that time and ah hourly rate, based on what they was makin' an hour is about the same. You know, if I remember correctly when I started I was payin' the migrant labor about the same thing I was payin' the local labor.

K. How much do you pay them now? Does it depend on time of year?

D: Laugh Well, how'd you come up with that question? What I'm payin' now?

K. Well, the other part of this project is the theme "Economic Justice" so we're kinda looking at the economic side.

D: It'll run from five to ten dollars an hour

K. Really, wow

D: Five fifty, lemme change. From five dollars and a half to about ten dollars an hour, based on what we're doin'

K. And that's for about ten workers? Or less?

D: How many workers?

K. Yeah, about ten or eight?

D: Well, I'll average workin' probaly half a dozen.

K. Um, how much does the housing tend to cost you? Is it kind of like it's there and you put em in and it doesn't cost you anything?

D: Laugh Well, it's hard to put a price on what the housing cost. But, you can. I'd probly say .say you were payin' six dollars an hour to the worker, the house is costin'
you six dollars an hour. I’d say it’d be about a double situation there. Course I furnish
the electricity and the water and the gas and keep the housin’ up. They don’t have to pay
any rent. And when I was workin’ local labor it was the same thing, basically
K. Are there other expenses that you have with the migrant labor that you didn’t have
with the local labor?
D: Well, I’d say, ah, with the local labor, they probably paid the electricity bill, the
additional expense with the migrant was probably the electrical and the gas, you know,
they stay here in the summer time. Course, if they stay year round, now, course they
don’t do it all the time, but I like for ‘em to help me pay the electric and the gas in the
winter time. But, I’d say the majority of the time I wind up payin’ for it myself, about all
the time. And with the local labor, if you have local labor helpin’ you out, they’ll borrow
money from ya to pay the gas bill, the electricity, so ya wind up paying for it for the local
labor So, ya know, it’s tit for tat, I reckon’
K. Um, do you know anything about how much the workers send home or how much
they spend when they’re here?
D: I’d say they send the majority of what they make home. Western Union or money
order And, ah, cause really the only thing they have to do here. Course they bring some
clothes. Course they’ll buy ‘em a shirt or something like that or new pants at the flea
market or at Rose’s or somethin’ like that, you know, or maybe a new pair a shoes but
they send the majority of their pay checks home, back to Mexico.
K. Um, you say you have two families right now How big are the families?
D: Well, one family they have three children, both families have three children.
K: And do you spend any time with them when you’re not working? Any kind of social activity?

D: *Laugh* Well, at dinner today or somethin’ like this right here, when we quit work or somethin’ like this, I may go down the yard and talk to ‘em, ya know. I don’t speak any Spanish and course, you’re gonna find all of ‘em speak a little English and they understand a little bit of English but they don’t really. These boys been with me a long time here and they don’t do very much talkin’. And, ah, but, you know, I’ll sit down and joke with ‘em, somethin’ like that, I’ll spend a little time with ‘em. You know, I won’t say every day, not like it was when I had, I’d say total migrants. When I had total migrants here I’d try to go down there every day, you know, twice a day and make sure the place was clean, make sure everything was all right.

But, ah, with the family situation, you know, I sorta back off a little bit, when you’ve gotta family there, I sorta back off from it a little bit, but I spend time with ‘em. I make sure they got a way to the grocery store every week and a course I furnish ‘em a washin’ machine for ‘em and a dryer. But I make sure they’re able to get to the grocery store and if they need to go somewhere else, you know, I try to make sure they have some way to go. A way to go.

K. Why do you have families right now?

D: Well, these boys been with me a long time and their families just came and stay up with ‘em. And it works out all right, I don’t use a lot of help, I don’t use a lot of labor. I have a small operation and I’m able to still get a long, you know, the way I want to.

K. How long have they been with you?
D: Well, I don’t know the exact years but one of these boys been with me over ten years.

K. Wow  Do you know where they’re from in Mexico?

D: Without going and lookin’ up the town, I couldn’t tell you. You know, I have it written down up in the house, but I couldn’t tell you, I can’t remember it.

I’ve carried ‘em back to the border before.

K. Really?

D: Oh yeah. They go home every once in a while and the last time they went home, I carried ‘em all the way to the border To Brownsville. That’s where they crossed, it was at Brownsville.

K. How? You just took ‘em in your truck?

D: Yeah, I just took ‘em in my truck and carried ‘em down there.

K. Wow.

D: They called a cab. I don’t know how but the guy had to get a cab to get across the border. I wouldn’t cross the border, you know. They got a cab to get across. I don’t know how they managed from there to home, I reckon’ a bus, ya know.

K. Why do you do that?

D: Why do they help me? Laugh I just. I think a lot of ‘em. They’re smart, they help me out a lot and I appreciate. I show that appreciation for what they do for me in a year’s time, ya know. They just, I don’t know, I just never put up with no mess and I ain’t gonna start today, that’s why they hang around. not hang around, they stay with me. I do other things, I carry ‘em out to eat sometimes to show I appreciate what they do for me.
K. Great. Do you see other farmers doing that? Having that kind of relationship?

D. Do I see other farmers having that relationship? Oh, yeah. Yeah, there’s some other people, now don’t ask me to name ‘em, but I see other people doin’ the same thing. They’re smart people and good workers.

K: Have you ever had [migrant] workers from anywhere but Mexico?

D: I worked Guatemalans. I had some Guatemalans when I had a few more migrants. Sometimes you run up with, ah, a Guatemalan livin’ with some Mexicans, you know, and they’re good workers, too. But, maybe a long time ago, I can’t remember exactly when, but I think I got some Haitians a long time a go. One day, I worked a crew of Haitians.

That’s been a long time a go, gosh.

K. How was that different than the Mexican workers?

D: Well, I couldn’t explain it. You don’t see many of them up here, ya know. And like I said that’s been a long time a go. Most of what you have up here, that majority of ‘em is Mexicans.

K. And do they, in Willow Springs, the flea market.

D: The flea market’s in Fuquay

K. That’s right. Is there a Mexican store in town, or, um, restaurants, things like that?

D: Ah, yeah, there’s a Mexican restaurant in Fuquay. I don’t believe there’s a Mexican store there.

K. One of the things I’m interested in is how the Mexican culture has been brought to North Carolina and how that impacts communities, how it changes things. Have you seen changes since you’ve been here in this area because there are a lot of Mexicans living here?
D: No, you know, I can’t say that I’ve seen any changes. What are you lookin’ for?

They just sorta blend in with the surroundings and with the public. Course, ya know, they sorta like… a lot of their activities… they just get together like on Sunday afternoon and but, I don’t think it’s had an impact/change on the community

Is that, ah. that’s okay

K. Now I want to shift a little bit and ask you a little bit about tobacco.

D: Okay

K. How have the changes in the tobacco politics affected your farm in the last couple of years?

D: How’s the tobacco politics changed my farm in the last couple years. It’s about to drive me out of business.

Along with all the other tobacco farmers.

K. Could you talk a little about that. How would it eventually drive you out of business, do you think?

530 D: Well, see, we’re lookin’ at probably one of the most uncertain years that we’ve really had. We’ve got a crop in the field right now that with a good rain, within two weeks we’ll be ready to start harvesting. And, ah, to the best of my knowledge the companies haven’t committed to buy this tobacco crop. And if that’s not a big uncertainty, I don’t know what is.

K. Yeah.

D: You really, you just don’t. you move along like everything’s goin’ to be okay but when we get to the market the latter part of this month and next month, there may not be no buyers to buy our crop and then what are we gonna do? And if we didn’t have this
tobacco in this area, you wouldn’t have Mexicans in this area. You wouldn’t be
interviewin’ me. There’s not much produce. Now, when you get down to Johnston
county and those areas you have sweet potato farmers, but right here in this area, this
county, the sweet potatoes that are bein’ planted in this area that’s moved in here from
people movin’ up here from Johnston county. Farmers comin’ up in here and rentin’ the
land, plantin’ em up in here from Johnston county. Peppers and stuff like that,
cucumbers, you don’t have that right here in this area. Tobacco’s the main crop right
here.

K. Why is that?

D: Why is that? Cause we gotta good soil. This is a good tobacco growin’ area, the
soil’s good for tobacco here in this area. And, ah, we don’t have large fields. We just
got plots, small fields to put our crops in. It’s just, we don’t have a market place for
produce, really, in this area. No buyin’ places. I’ve never grown cucumbers and
vegetables like that. I tried sweet potatoes one year and I had to haul ‘em to the other
side of Benson to sell ‘em. You know, you get involved with a lot of freight. If you
grow produce you’d have to go down to . I want to say Wilson or Faison, or below
Dunn, that away to get rid of your produce. It’s . I mean, you just don’t have it.

K. What about it Raleigh?

D: They don’t have no buying stations in Raleigh. That’s one thing the commissioner of
agriculture needs to do. I have wheat. I grow wheat. The only reason I’m messin’ with
small grain is I use it for rotation with my tobacco. But I have to truck my wheat down
east to market it. I have to hire a truck to come in and haul it cause there’s nobody local
here who’ll buy it. You can sell it in Dunn. . I believe there may be a little guy in
Lillington that buys it but there’s nobody right here in the immediate area that’s buyin’ it. And that, it gets awfully expensive. Now soybeans, I try to double-crop my wheat with soy beans and you got one buying station. You got Cargill and they dominate and set the market in the United States just about.

You know, they the farmer…remember this. The farmer is the only man. I was interviewed here several years a go and I made this statement. The farmer is the only man that’s in business and that can stay in business. He buys everything at retail and sells everything wholesale. And he stays in business year in and year out. Even just, just today on the news there. I hadn’t had a chance to read the News and Observer real closely, but just catching it on the news there today, Washington has taken up the price that farmers is actually receiving for their products. It’s down. It’s down a percentage from 1996 to this year. Just in two years the price of farm products has just bottomed out. Everything’s just gettin’ cheaper and cheaper. And everything we buy is gettin’ higher and higher.

K. What have they done? They have a price support, or something?

D: Well, on tobacco we have a price support. But, if these companies don’t buy this tobacco crop, which they can use. They can use this tobacco crop. If they come in and don’t buy this tobacco and all this tobacco goes to stabilization, it’ll put us all outta business. The companies actually, they’re always in command. But this time, ma’am, they’re power to this airplane, they’ve got everything in their favor right now. They can dictate what they want and get it now. Cause you got all this tobacco in the field and they ain’t gotta buy it!
So, my life as a tobacco farmer, and the rest of us, could be over in just a few weeks.

K. How does it usually work, when they are buying?

D: When they buy...course we go to the market, carry the crops in to the market and it's graded and...ah...to keep it from goin' to stabilization they got to pay at least a penny above the grade that we get on our tobacco. The majority of the time, they'll pay more than a penny above the grade.

K. So, the settlement hasn't happened. What do you think will happen? To your farm, in particular?

D: They tried to tack too many things on the settlement. And, ya know, I'm no politician, I'm a farmer. And...ah...to tell you the truth, ma'am, I don't even want to talk about the settlement. Ah, I'll elaborate a little bit on it for ya. All these Congressmen and Representatives that we have in Washington tried to add too much stuff to this tobacco bill that we had, that Senator Kane had put together, the bill he had put together. And, ah, I think that's the reason what happened to the bill.

699 But, basically what's goin' to happen is the farmer's gonna come out just like always. He's gonna have a bucket and ain't gonna have nothin' in it. And tobacco is a legal product. It paid the first taxes on this country. It's not illegal. And I'd whole lot rather meet a man who's smokin' a cigarette than a man takin' a drink a liquor or drinkin' a beer. I think the farmer needs to...I think the farmer needs to be compensated and, ah, because of the investment and what he has worked for for all his years. His self and his family's worked for.

K. How many acres of tobacco do you have?
D: About 58 acres is all I have planted this time.

K. If you start needing to plant less tobacco, like next year, say, how would the farm work?

D: I can’t plant less, I can’t keep takin’ cuts. What they need to do is, they need to stop these companies from bringin’ this foreign tobacco into this country. Ya know, instead of lettin’ me plant less, let somebody else. I’m damn tired of keepin’ up the whole world! If they would make them stop, buy our product, we wouldn’t be growin’ less tobacco next year, we’d be growin’ more tobacco. We’re on like a yo-yo, we’re up and down. One year we’ll get an increase and next year we’ll get a big cut or a decrease. I don’t feel like I can grow less tobacco, in other words, to meet my obligations and try to make a livin’, I need what I got.

K. Why are they buying foreign tobacco now?

D: Buy it cheaper

K. How does the labor cost fit into that?

D: Well, I’m competin’ with a country, and I don’t. Ya know, I just know what I been told, I hadn’t been there and seen it or anything like this... but at five dollars a half an hour here, ya know, you’re competin’ with countries that pay five dollars a day! And they don’t have the taxes to pay that we have and all the other expense, it’s not in there. And it’s very hard to compete. Tobacco oughta be bringin us, our tobacco, everybody’s got an opinion, but our tobacco oughta be bringin us five dollars a pound. An average of five dollars a pound, instead of a dollar sixty-five or seventy-five cent a pound. When ya start lookin’ at what these other countries’ farmers are havin’ to pay for things, we
just. we’re regulated to death and still tryin’ to compete, ya know, with the world market.

K. So, would you consider changing crops ever? Is that a possibility?

843 D: Like growin’ what? There’s not another legal crop that I can grow that I can make the money I can make with tobacco. Ya know, I never figured out what liquor stills would bring me an acre. If I could put all these acres, fifty-some acres of tobacco, if I filled them all up with liquor stills and made liquor, what that would bring me. Laugh.

And I don’t think marijuana’s the answer. And I’d whole lot rather meet somebody smokin’ a cigarette than I had smokin’ marijuana, too. And I’m better than Clinton, I ain’t never tried it. And he can elaborate on whether he inhaled it or not, but I ain’t never tried it. I don’t think that’s the answer, ma’am.

If they’re gonna do away with this tobacco program, like I said earlier, they need to compensate the owner and the producer. And if they want to move to another tier program, then move on and let’s quit tackin’ everything else onto the bill and messin’ around, let’s move on. Course, that’s Washington. Laugh.

K. Do your workers know much about the tobacco politics and all that?

D: I couldn’t tell ya. Ya know, I’ve tried to explain a little bit of it to ‘em, but I could not answer for them. Cause like I said a while ago, I don’t speak any Spanish, ya know, so I don’t know. I’ve tried to explain a little of it to ‘em if they kill this tobacco program, ya know, I wouldn’t have any work for ‘em. And, but I would do this: if they did kill this tobacco program and I didn’t have any work for ‘em, I would carry ‘em back to the border.
I mean, I’d work with ‘em all I could, the best I could. I wouldn’t just, ah, I wouldn’t leave ‘em high and dry like the government’s tryin’ to leave me high and dry. I got family values and morals.

K. Are you involved in any, sort of, community activities that have to do with farming, tobacco politics, anything like that?

D: Yeah, I’m involved in some organizations that has somethin’ to do with that, that represents farmers.

K. What organizations?

D: I’m a member of Farm Bureau.

K. How does that work? Do they committees that deal with certain issues?

D: Various commodities and various issues. Legislative committees and labor committees, a right many committees.

I’d like to ask you a question.

K. Okay

D: Is your reason to comin’ out to interview me, is it strictly just to interview a farmer, and not anything else?

K. Yes, strictly for interviewing a farmer. Because I don’t have a lot of. Obviously I’m not from a farm, I’m not from North Carolina, I don’t know farmers. And I’ve been doing this work and I don’t feel like I understand all of it because I’m not from this kind of life. So, yeah, that’s my only reason. I have no other motives. I don’t even know the politics.

D: Like I said, I’m a farmer. I’m no politician, I’m a farmer. I didn’t know. The reason I asked the question is based on some of the questions that you’re askin’ me, see.
K. Yeah. Mostly I’m interested in economics of farming, because that’s what our project is on, but I’m also interested in workers. And since the tobacco thing is so recent and such a big economic thing, that’s part of it.

So, do your children work in Raleigh? Do they have career off the farm?

D. Well, my daughter works part time and helps me. Course I have a son that has a full time job is Raleigh. He was helpin’ me farm up till a few years a go. Course my other son, he’s in high school and helps me here on the farm.

K. Oh, okay

D. And I’d like to see farmin’ left to a family farm situation, ya know I’d a whole lot rather have him drivin’ a tractor or primin’ tobacco than runnin’ up and down the streets in Raleigh or somthin’ like that. If more children was exposed and was able to work on the farm, ah, I think you’d have less teen problems. It used to anybody worked on a farm. And a good honest days work never hurt nobody. And they learn a lot, they learn responsibility and they learn to watch how crops grow. There’s a lot a common since you can’t get in school, now. Or nobody else can get in school, you just don’t get it out of a book. I’d like to see my children keep the farm operation goin’

K. Do you think you’ll ever get bigger? I know a lot of farmers in recent years have gotten bigger as things have gotten more expensive? Do you think you ever will?

D. I used to tend more tobacco than what I’m tendin’. But the cost per acre is still there. Just cause you get bigger, the costs don’t come down. I can’t say if I’ll go back and tend as much tobacco as I have in the past. I don’t know what I’ll do.

With the situation like it is right now, ma’am, I’m just sittin’ pat, I wanna see what’s gonna happen. You know, there’s no need to go out and buy another tractor, more
equipment and this kinda thing, ya know. And we don’t know what’s gonna be here next year, much less next week. There’s not an equipment dealer yet that come out here and threwed off a tractor there and give it to me or give me one of them bulk barns either. And ain’t nobody brought a load a diesel fuel down here and donated it, either. And I’ll be glad to take anything that anybody wants to donate like that. That equipment is very expensive.

K. Did you ever do anything else besides farming?

D: Ah, I have public work. Been a long time ago.

K. This a really nice farm. I’ve enjoyed coming to farms this summer.

112 D: Well, there’s no place like home but there’s no place other than the country and bern’ on a farm. Gom’ barefoot, gettin’ your feet dirty, stubbin’ your toe, ya know. It all hurts a little bit, even the work, but it’s a different life. It’s a good life. And like I told you a right good while a go in the interview, there’s nothing wrong with a good honest day’s work, now.

K. Will your workers go home in December?

D: No, they been up here. I don’t know when I carried ‘em home. It’s been a couple years. They went home for a month or so, really I call it vacation. I can’t even afford to do that. They’re here year round, they stay here twelve months of the year.

K. That’s good, stability for you and for them.

D: Ya know, with Mexican labor, or migrant labor, you still have the problems there that you have with local labor. You can have a mess. I’ve seen a mess. And, ah, it’s basically left up to the person like myself not to have it, not to tolerate it. And when they learn that you just ain’t gonna have a mess, then things is a lot better.
K. Have you ever had to ask someone to leave?

D: I've never fired but one. I saw the boy day before yesterday that I fired, and that's been a lot a years a go. I don't allow any drinkin' on the job. I don't mind if they drink a beer, go home this afternoon when they get off a work and drink a beer. That don't bother me one bit but I ain't gonna have no drunkin' mess, now, I can tell you that right now. But this boy drank a beer at lunch and come back to work. I couldn't handle that. My policy is I don't put up with no drinkin'. When we work, we work. And so I had to let him go. I never had to do that to but one person. And I think that changed the tune. They found out that I meant business. He's a good boy, he's a good worker. I told him, go home at dinner and drink a beer and go back to the field, you can't do that.

K. It's too dangerous.

D: That's exactly right, see, and I, you gotta be careful and I don't want no accidents.

So, I let him go.

K. Do you know much about the H2A program?

D: Not much. A little bit about the H2A workers.

K. Do you have an opinion about the program? I'm just curious about your opinion because everyone seems to have an opinion about it.

D: Yeah. Well, it's ... I can't say I have an opinion about it or anything. I've never worked any H2A workers. I would probably check into the program a little bit more if I was usin' a lot of workers. That's about all I need to say about it.

K. Do your workers ... is there a clinic or something they go to when they're sick? How do they get medical help when they're ill?
D: Like me and you. Laugh That sums it up. Here in Wake County they have...this year they have two clinics. One in Fuquay and oh, one towards Zebulon area. And, ah, I'm sure they're aware of. I got a mailin' on it and my daughter's daughter speaks a little bit of Spanish, not much, but then you have, ah, you got the clinic over there at Wake Medical Center. They go over there. You have the Catholic Church in Fuquay. The nuns over there comes and picks 'em up and carries 'em to the clinic. Course, Sister Kittie used to be there but she's no longer there, now it's someone else. I think they do a super fine job workin' with migrant-type labor. And I think, I believe, the lady's name over at the health department is Dawn Burton, if I remember. She does a real good job, too.

K: Yeah, one of the girls I live with works for them. I think that's about all I have laugh. Do you want to ask me anything else, you can.

D: Well, the only thing I got to say. I didn't mind if you taped it. I don't mind if the tape is used in educational kinda situations, I don't want the tape to be used for anything other than that. No court action materials or nothing like that, no law suits. It's just a friendly kinda interview situation to help out kids in school.

K: Exactly. I can leave you with one of these (copy of release form).

D: That's okay, I don't need it. I wanted to be sure we have a real good understandin'.

You referred to earlier there, ah, Mexican store and this kinda thing. Popped in my head this deal that happened in North Raleigh, when the INS went in, I'm sure you're aware of that. You need to read today's News and Observer. Mexican went down to Atlanta, he's gotta leave the country. I wouldn't want anything. this to contribute to it, good or bad, anything like that.
K. No, nothing like that.

D: It's, like I said, a friendly kinda interview. You know, I just. this day and time you can't be too careful, ma'am. I don't want legal aid usin' it or nothin' like that. *Laugh*

K. No, I understand.

D: Like I said, I don't mind helpin' you out with educational kinda situation, I'll do the best I can. That's all I want to say.

K. Thank you very much. This was great. I appreciate your time and openness. No, I understand, you never know.

D: That's right, you never know.

K. Plus, this year, all the politics going on. All the time, in the news. I could send you a copy of what gets made, if you like.

D: Please. Here's my card.

After the tape recorder was turned off, we chatted casually about the farm's past and Mr. Ogbern's children. He said that when he was young, all the neighbors used to help each other and work together. "The blacks" and everybody would come over and eat at the Ogbern's house after work. Now, he says, the local people "would rather draw welfare than work."

Mr. Ogbern talks of his son graduating from Wake Tech and being back on the tractor 45 minutes after graduation. He talks of how his son knows the value of work better than anyone else who graduated with him. "All children should be raised on a farm," he says.
We talk of the possible rain to come and he explains that it would cost him half a million dollars to irrigate his fifty-eight acres. We all need the rain, Dewey says, because every American farmer feeds 100 people.

Dewey asks me some about my background and I, jokingly, promise that I’ll get him Bulls tickets. We part on very amicable terms and I think we both were glad to spend the afternoon at his picnic table.
This summer has been a great experience I learned a whole lot and got to meet a lot of new people and make some new friends. It was a summer just full of surprises and challenges because there were just times when you didn’t know what to expect. I had the opportunity to work in the schools with the Migrant Education Program in Chatham County. There were good times as well as bad times. I experienced a little in a variety of teaching fields and it was a great opportunity for me to learn more about Migrant Education.

I had the opportunity to work with many kids. I worked in the computer lab for a couple of weeks. I was able to teach the children how to read, write and count through simple computer games. We used handouts and books that were relevant to what the teachers were teaching. These handouts were turned into software for them to be used on a computer. I really enjoyed watching these smart kids working and trying their best on the computers.

For the second week of the program, I had the chance to work with a professional dance professor from Columbia. He taught High School students as well as myself several dances. We learned three different danced, which were performed at a festival that was held at Silk Hope School, the school where I worked.

I had the experience to work teaching high school students, which is usually always a challenging group to work with, but we managed them. We taught a class which prevents high school students from dropping out of school. This was also known as “PROJECT LEVANTE.” We had the opportunity to work with these students and through what we taught them, it motivated and encouraged them to continue their education. We talked about what they would like to do in the future and what they could possibly do to get there. We also pointed out the different resources that were available.
to them in order to be successful during their college years. Resources such as financial aide, scholarships, grants, etc... We made a trip to a nearby Community College and invited several recruiters from other colleges and universities to talk to the students about their programs and about the procedures to get into that particular university. I felt this was important and very useful information for the students. I felt that this trip to the Community College helped the students see a bit of what college life is like. It really made a difference in these kids.

Through this internship I also learned that the schools also have their ups and downs and very stressfull moments. For example, when we were recruiting, one of the bad things was that there were so many programs trying to serve the hispanic community which was a real good thing, but we had trouble recruiting kids for our summer program. For a moment, I thought we weren’t going to have a summer Migrant Program. We also had problems on the first day of school. Many of our students ended up in another summer program.

Regular summer school sessions started the same day so there were like three different buses passing by the same houses. There was so much confusion because the students didn’t know which bus to get on. So many kids were placed in the wrong school. When school was over we had the same problem getting the students back to their homes. Many students got on the wrong bus and were lost for a few hours. We had a few parents coming into the office asking for their kids. So a few times Esteban and I were asked to make several phone calls until we tracked the kids down. Fortunately, we found those kids. Besides all of the bad things we faced, good things happened.

Our Festival was a great success. We had a multicultural night where we had people of different backgrounds perform something about their culture. Many people showed up and they all seemed to have enjoyed it. “Funga Alafya Ajea Ajea” was one of my favorite parts of the festival because everyone participated in their performance. This was an African American song that was sung, danced and played on an instrument. After
the performances we had a live band. Everyone was dancing. I really enjoyed it. After the performance we had a live band playing and everyone was dancing. I really enjoyed it. Another good thing was that I got to meet all the students and we got along very well. They seemed to have really liked the class because the following week that they came back they were asking me what we were doing in class that day and I told them that we weren’t doing anything because our class was over. I was really glad that through this internship I got to help all these people in this particular community where I was placed.
"Let Me See!", Alma Rodriguez, Reidsville, North Carolina
"Lizeth, Macaria, Abigail and Alicia", Alma Rodriguez, Reidsville, North Carolina.
"Velma and Rafael", Alma Rodriguez, Reidsville, North Carolina.
"Out of poverty, poetry;
out of suffering, song."
A common people joined
hand in hand.
A shared language, a rich culture.
Pride for their land.
Singing a uniting song of strength
and endurance as they
Plant down the rows,
Hoe down the rows,
Pick down the rows.
The chorus resounds across
acres,
Everyone adding a line
delivered from the soul.

The day crawls a little faster.

The fertile brown soil,
like the beautiful bronzed people,
produces everyday.

Through the children they
plant the seeds of knowledge that
sprout
the wings to fly.
The hope of the dawn of a new
light
to shine through the small cracks
in the seemingly
inpenetrable

wall of the
Language barrier.
Untitled, Esteban Echeverria, Siler City, North Carolina.
Donna Risteen

“Domestic Violence”

When I first started thinking about my documentary project I thought it would neat to do a project that would tell a story of a family through the eyes of the children. I became so excited because I immediately knew the prefect family. I went to the store and bought disposable cameras and I had the children start writing stories about their lives documenting their daily routines, feelings, and what they wanted to be when they grew up. I thought I had come up with the perfect documentary project. I believed everything would turn out perfectly. However, this turned out not to be true. I did learn the story of Emilo and Nadia but in the process I realized that this would be a story that would not be documented.....

I realized this one afternoon I went to Rita’s, Emilo and Nadia’s mother, house for my usual English lesson. As I drove into the driveway I could tell that something was not right. The door was closed and all the shades were down. Once I got to her house, I knocked on her door and noticed that her screen door was locked. I waited a few moments for someone to answer but no one did. I figured no one was home so I headed back to my car as I was getting in my car Rita opened the door. She looked at me and then went back inside. No smile, no hi how are you, nothing. My heart sank for this was not like Rita. What could have happened. As I was not heading inside I noticed the children sitting on the couch, they barely looked at me as I walked in the house. Finally the little boy said I don’t think we are going got be able to have our lesson today. My
dad said he was coming to get us and to be ready. Rita looked at me and said “I’m so sorry.” I stayed a few more moments and then Rita came and sat next to me. She looked at me and said “My husband no good. Last night we got in a fight. All he does is scream at me. He says I do not clean the house, but I do. He says I do not make dinner, but I do. I don’t know what to do.”

It was the most horrible thing looking into her eyes. She looked so sad and tired. You could literally see the deep black circles under her eyes where the marks of not sleeping laid. I asked here where they were going and she said she did not know. All she knew was her husband said to be ready. She went on to say that she wanted to leave and go to her mom’s with only kids. I can only imagine the effects this was having on Emilo and Nadia. Looking into their eyes you can see how sad they were. Whenever their mom started to talk about their father a silence came over the house and the children would look at her. They were hurt and confused.

You see Nadia and Emilo are living in an abusive household. Their father mentally, emotionally, and physically abuses their mother. It is a horrible situation for neither one of their parents are legal. When I first found out about the abuse, in the household, I immediately wanted to tell Rita to leave her husband. However, this might not be the best thing for Rita or her kids. There is no where for her to go if she does leave her husband. She might be able to stay in a shelter for a month, maybe two, but what is she going to do after that? She is not legal that means she cannot qualify for any social services and she cannot get a job. She has already lost one job because she does not have any papers and she is afraid to find another one. If she does not have a job how
is she going to support herself and her two children. These are all serious questions that Rita has and needs to answer before she leaves.

As I left Rita’s house I could feel a lump in my stomach. I found myself totally helpless. I did not know what to do or where to turn. I finally decided to go and talk with one of my social work professors. After listening to my story she found herself in the same situation I was in...stuck. She made a few phone calls and they all gave her the same answer. They all told her that there is really nothing they could do to help. I left her office frustrated, confused, and realizing what a serious issue domestic violence for illegal women is. For it is an issue that no one has answers for and no one wants to deal with.

I decided the next thing to do would be to make an anonymous call to the domestic violence women’s shelter. I figured they had to know what to do and if they did not they would at least be a sympathetic listener. After calling I realized that I was wrong about all my assumptions. They told me they could take her but were hesitant and they really did not like dealing with “illegals.” I became furious, for if the domestic violence center did not want to deal with her then who would. It is a shame to think that they, alone with the majority, of others do not care.

Illegal women, as well as their children, who are being abused are truly an invisible class. It is a class I never thought about until I meet Rita and her family. Everyone has always told me how hard it is for abusive women because they become dependent on their husband, but when people are talking about abusive women they are always talking about “American Women.” No one every talks about the women that are
living in an abusive household and are illegal. It becomes nearly impossible for these women to leave. The entire situation is horrible. I do not know what is worse that these women are being abused or that no one seems to care.

I think often of my new friends Rita, Emilo, and Nadia. When I think of them I see their beautiful smiling faces and hear their laughter that seems to brighten up the room. Then I think a little bit more and I hear her words of pain. I see the sadness on their faces and the bruises on Rita’s arms. Finally I hear Rita telling me “my husband no good. I want to leave. I want to go back to Honduras and never come back, but I cannot.” I can only imagine how many more Rita’s there are. I can only hope one day people will start to hear their cries for help and programs will be set up to help all the Rita’s, Emilo’s, and Nadia’s out there.
"Farmwork Irony at a Camp", Janeth Serrano, Johnston County, North Carolina.
"Las Hermanas"
by Alicia Doran

An interview with Sister Linda Scheckelhoff and Sister Andrea Inkrott about the conditions of Farmworkers in Yadkinville, N.C
I have worked for two months in the extremely rural and conservative area of Yadkinville, N.C. While I have been here many of my ideas about social justice and cultural understanding have been tested in all different areas from all types of people. The two women who I chose to interview for this documentary project, Sister Linda Scheckelhoff and Sister Andrea Inkrott, are the exceptions to this rule. As religious Sisters, they have exhibited to me and to the community of Yadkinville that caring, understanding, and friendship, can do wonders to heal misconceptions and stereotypes and bring communities of people together. They are a blessing not only to the Hispanic community here in the County but to the entire community of Yadkinville. In a summer that has been filled with so many challenges, I chose to focus this documentary on two people who were doing something positive in a world that is filled with so much negativity.

I dedicate this to the two people who have shown me this summer to never quit and to always have faith in the strength of the human heart.
Interviewer: Alicia Doran
Interviewed: Sister Andrea and Sister Linda (Catholic Community Leaders in Yadkin County)
Date: August 2, 1998, 8:00 p.m
Topic: Farmworkers in Yadkin County

Alicia: Can you give a brief summary of how you got involved working with the Hispanic population?

Andrea: You mean here in Yadkinville or just in general?

Alicia: In general.

Andrea: You can go back to the sixties. When in our community, from the mother house we would go out to the camps in Ohio. The ones near the mother house in Tiffon, Ohio. We would go out once a week. I think it was Tuesday nights. A big group of sisters would go out and visit the different camps. One group would go to one camp and then another group would go to another camp. That was in the early sixties.

Linda: How did we get here? Well, I think that was how my interest got started too. And that's how I decided to go to Mexico to work with the Mexican people. And then it just kind of flowed out from when I came back. I continued working with Hispanics. I worked in Fort Wayne, Indiana with the Hispanic population there. It was urban. Then I came here.

Alicia: What year did you all come here?

Andrea: 1990. I had worked in a bilingual parish in Toledo, Ohio for about five years and then I went to San Antonio, Texas to finish a Master's degree there. And then I came here in 1990.


Alicia: And you all have been at Cristo Rey since then?

Linda: Yes, and I have also done some outreach in Dobson and in North Wilkesboro as well, more in the pastoral area. Not so much with the migrants. I did some of that in Dobson with Father Joe Waters. I'm usually only there one afternoon a week and then on Saturday evenings we have church services, mass.
Andrea: By 1990, there were a good number of people who were settling out and that is why the Catholic Hispanic Center was established. Before most of the visitation and the outreach to the migrants came through the parishes either from Clemmons or Winston Salem. They would come over into Yadkin County and visit the migrants and also in Surrey County. By the 1990's, there were a good number who were settling out, staying all year round, full time. And that was when the center was built. I did some visitation with the migrants, but it was mostly done by the director of the center. It included more than the migrants. It included the migrants and all the settled out populations for the whole year.

Alicia: Can you describe the changes within the Hispanic population from when you first began working here. How has it changed or evolved? As far as seasonal versus migrant or an influx in population.

Linda. Okay, I think like Andrea said before there are many more people now established who stay here year round. And most of the migrant laborers are contract laborers through the H2A program. They are contracted for a certain amount of time and then they leave. And the vast majority of people now have jobs, like in the chicken plants, or in construction, in furniture factories, in Lee jeans and work full time year round and go to Mexico to visit but then come back here. And the population has tripled or quadrupled since 1990.

Andrea: This has been within the past five years. But what I have also noticed is the migrants formally were more families. Now, I think the majority of migrants in this area are like Linda said, the contract workers, which are men, younger men, middle-aged men and older men.

Alicia: Do you all have families coming to the church or H2A workers or just a mixture of both?

Linda: Well, I think we have more migrants now because we have this nice young man who works and he lives here year round. He goes in the van and he picks them up on a regular basis. And now some of them are coming every Sunday. Some of them do have their own transportation and they do come. The vast majority of the people that come to Church here on Sundays are the people that are settled here year round. There are a lot of families, many families, but there are some single guys.

Andrea. Guys that live together. Maybe four or five guys that live together. Maybe from the same town or they are relatives. But the vast majority, at least in this area, are families.

Alicia: Can you speak a little bit about the differences in incorporation between the settled out population and the H2A workers?
Alicia Doran
“Las Hermanas”

Andrea: I think the H2A workers' life is more controlled. It's based on the fact that they are here to work a certain farm or tobacco grower. And their life revolves around that particular farm or farms if they work for several. And they often come without transportation and they are contract laborers. So they depend on the ones that contracted them for transportation. Whereas people who are settled in the area, one of the first things they try to do is get transportation. Because we are here in a County that has no transportation. So if they want to get anywhere, they have to get a car.

Linda: That limits their participation perhaps in the community, the parish community and the community at large. They don't have the facility to move around. Some of the farmers are more...I’ve found...open. Some of them have telephones in their houses now whereas before they didn't have that. So some of the farmers do take some of the farmworkers to their different migrant activities; to the flea market, to the Health Fair. I know one did. Maybe some other ones did too.

Alicia: Just that one farmer. He was the only one.

Linda: Oh, okay. Steve Kirk, I think was his name. There aren't too many farmers who are open to bringing there farmworkers to other activities other than just to the store to get their food or maybe to wash their clothes if they don't have washing machine. That's about it.

Alicia: What do you all think about that? I mean what do you think of the H2A program as far as weighing the positive and the negatives.

Andrea: From what I hear, there are some places where there are lots of negatives. It all depends on the person who contracts them.

Linda: Like some of the conditions I've seen are really poor. And the control that's what bothers me. The control, the lack of freedom that the migrant worker really has here. It's almost like they are slave labor. And that too that depends on the farmer. But, I don't think it is ideal.

Andrea: The other thing I think that has happened is that some of the families and some of the other people who are migrants who have migrated back and forth through Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina up to the apples in Virginia and then work their way back down again. Some of them are not finding work because their work has been contracted. Where they used to be, their work has been contracted because it gives the farmers more security...that they are going to stay. I think that was part of the attractiveness of the H2A worker program. They are brought here by the farmer, the farmer is responsible for them. When the work is finished then they have to go.

Linda: If they don't go, if they stay here, then they can never participate in the H2A program again. They are blacklisted then.

108
Alicia Doran
“Las Hermanas”

Alicia: Do you know how they go about applying for citizenship? Or can they after the H2A program?

Andrea: Right now, no. The doors are shut since about 1988, I think, when the Amnesty program was declared. And then only those who had worked for at least three months or ninety days within the period of May of 1985 to May of 1986 could apply. So right now there is nothing available. Only for people who were applied for by their relatives who were already residents. Even now, they can apply, but they can’t be here until their name comes up. And the list is at least five years long for close family members wives and children who are under 21 and not married. That’s five years. So if a gentleman were to apply for his family now, their names probably would not come up until the year 2003.

Linda: And they are not supposed to be here. The wives and the children aren’t. They are supposed to be waiting in Mexico.

Alicia: Do you all have any idea of the amount of people who are undocumented in this area?

Andrea: I don’t know percentage wise.

Linda. But I would say the vast majority

Andrea: I don’t ask that question. I don’t feel my job is to ask that question. I feel my job is to be of service of the people both spiritually and help as much as we can to help them fit into the society here.

Alicia. How do you see them fitting into the society here? How has Yadkinville reacted to them being here?

Linda: I think there is a lot of discrimination. A lot of fear because people here in Yadkin County tend to be more closed. So having other people here from another country that they don’t know and have never experienced before ...creates fear and kind of separates this population. They were only here before to work. They weren’t to rub shoulders with in the grocery store, the clinics. I think it bothers some people that they are receiving services from the government and from other agencies that Yadkin citizens feel they do not deserve. They’re are not Americans.

Andrea. But on the other hand, if you listen to any of the people who work in Social Services or in the health clinic, they will tell you that the vast majority of Social Services benefits do not go to the Hispanics. You can go and ask Mr. Black that and he will give you lots of statistics black and white. But I think in the county at least on the administrative level, like in clinics and Social Services, I think they have tried to be responsive by trying to make interpreters available. I think Linda was talking more about in general that is what you get. And there are a lot of good people who have been very open and are trying very hard to help the people to fit in. We have the tutors who have
helped with the teaching of English and people in the schools. They have been very good. Some of the people on the law enforcement (are good) and there are others who are like anyone else in the county who doesn’t really understand what it is all about. I think that it is a lot of not knowing or hearing stories. Not really knowing for themselves someone as friend and as a person.

Linda: And also stereotyping. Because of certain things that have happened with regard to arrests for drugs, drinking or whatever

Alicia. Like last Friday, did you hear about that? There were four Mexicans who got caught selling drugs. The officer said something like, “Mexicans are the cause of the drug problem in this county”

Linda. Which paper was that in?

Alicia. Probably the Yadkin Ripple.

Andrea. Just this last week? So it is probably still on the news stand?

Alicia. Yes, I think so. I haven’t seen the article.

Linda: Those things are what give the Mexican population a bad name. They are the very, very minority of Hispanics. The vast majority are here to make a living to make money to send back to Mexico to provide for their relatives and families.

Andrea: I think people come to Yadkin County because they don’t want to be where there are drugs. They come from California where it has been really rough.

Linda: With the gangs and the drugs.

Andrea: Hoping that their young people will be less apt to get into stuff. I think that if you look at the newspaper, the majority of things that are going on are not Hispanic folks.

Linda: I always check that. Lots of time with the drug thing it’s not always Hispanics. It’s lots of other folks like Anglos who are involved in it.

Andrea: Like if you talk to Una Graham who works with the Community Work Program, when you have to do community work from the court, she’ll tell you the best workers are Hispanic. It’s not that many, but I guess the majority are drunk drivers.

Alicia: How do you see all of this changing in the future? Or do you think it’s possible to reverse some of these stereotypes?

Andrea: I think if people learn more English. Like when the young people who are growing up now in school become the second generation. I think it will change. Also the
Alicia Doran
"Las Hermanas"

little group called Partners in Friendship, or something like that, are a group of business
people who are interested in bettering the relationship between the local population and
the Hispanic population. They have been meeting every month or so for over half a year,
just helping the Hispanic population be more visible in a positive way

Linda. There needs to be more personal contact between the Hispanic population and the
Anglo population where there is a one on one meeting. They need to know each other. I
know the tutoring has been a really good thing. A lot of friendships have been built up.
They can't talk very much English or Spanish to each other but there has been a lot of
communication there, you know...friendships.

Alicia: I wonder if we could talk a little bit about some of the economic problems that
you have seen that farmworkers face.

Andrea: Farmworkers as opposed to the settled out population?

Alicia. Either one, settled out or migrant.

Andrea: Most of the work that people have are not real high paying jobs. There are some
who do make good money They work like crazy. Especially the jobs where they have
production. Ask any of the business people and they will say, "Oh, they really do good
work." Because the pay is not so high, they have to work so hard. Some people work
two jobs. In a lot of the families, Dad and Mom and all of the older kids work. This gets
them away from their families, more than I think is good. Especially since they are so
family oriented. So, I think that part has not been very helpful.

Linda: They also tend to buy into our American way or whatever you want to call it. The
consumerism, materialism, which is not good. So that Mom and Dad and all the kids have
to work to have many things. The latest car, clothes to keep up with everybody else.

Andrea: Especially the young people.

Linda: They have been captivated by our so-called American averis.

Andrea: And I think too, the migrants, the job that they do, the hard work, they do not
earn enough... I don't think. They make like six dollars an hour but considering the work
that they do. It's backbreaking and hot and nobody else wants to do it. This is another
myth that people think, "Oh, those Hispanics are taking people's jobs." I think the jobs
that they do very few people are running to apply for

Linda: And some of them also have jobs that don't have any benefits. It's very difficult
for them when they get sick. A lot of them do not have a personal doctor. They can only
go to the clinic and that is only for their children's sake. They can't go after they are 18.
So a lot of them don't go and then they have to go to the emergency room which is so
expensive. And for the dentist, they wait to go to the dental clinics, let's of them do.
Alicia Doran
“Las Hermanas”

Which isn’t the best either. Because, what, they either take out teeth or whatever. There is no crowns put in or anything of that nature.

Andrea: It’s too late to see them. They need to get dental check-ups. Every six months would be ideal, but they don’t do that. Too expensive. Eyeglasses, same thing. But, they do usually eat very nutritiously. I was with a group of ladies that were taking part in a nutrition course with the Cooperative Extension in Yadkin with ladies from Wilkes County. They ladies were given questionnaires about what they ate and things and the ladies have good nutrition. They eat fresh produce, fruits, and vegetables. With that, the instructor said, “That’s good. That’s a good way to go.”

Alicia: How did that program work out?

Andrea: It was great. There are a few ladies who are in it this time around... when I was involved they had five of our ladies and one other woman from Wilkesboro who formed the class. Between she and I, we did the interpreting. It was good because most of the stuff they could see because it was a very hands on kind of thing. But, it was very nice because they would have transportation and also there was child care. That part was very nice. It gave the ladies who were not working out of the home a chance to do something together. From the original group two ladies continued with English program. They are very excited. They work really hard on their English. There is another lady who would have loved to have continued but she lived just a little bit out of the way...out of the route.

Alicia: Now, more back on the subject. Do you think that farmworkers will ever reach economic justice with the way the system is set up now?

Andrea: Do you mean farmworkers who are working in the fields or the Spanish speaking population?

Alicia: Farmworkers who are in the fields.

Andrea: The way it is right now...No.

Alicia: What things do you think would have to change for that to happen?

Andrea: That they would get a fair wage. If the conditions would improve for where they are staying. If their wages were high enough, and if there was enough housing, they could rent a place for them to stay themselves. There is very little housing in the area. That probably won’t change in the area. Probably if enough people are aware that it is very back breaking work and that they should be paid with more money.

Linda: I think some laws could be made or changed or whatever. They are supposed to be recognized. Well, it all depends on tobacco and which way the tobacco is going to go. Right now, all the places that are raising tobacco don’t know how far down the line they will be raising tobacco.
Andrea: And truck farming in this area, I don't think is that big yet...that the people in the tobacco farms could switch over to the truck farms.

Alicia: The what? What is truck farming?

Andrea: Where they grow vegetables and tomatoes and melons. There are a few The Taylor farm in Winston and the Frasier farm here in town. Other than that there is just a lot of tobacco. And the Christmas trees in the later fall in Sparta, Jefferson, North Jefferson, that area.

Alicia: Do a lot of the workers from here go up to that area in the winter?

Linda: Some do and we have some that work in picking up...like Gregorio...he's settled out. He works almost year round. They work like year round first in the tobacco, then in the Christmas trees. Then they might go to Mexico for a little bit then they return to work the next season. You know, with the farmer. They are more like...uh...and he goes out and gets men too. I don't think they must have contract labor at his farm.

Alicia: Like a crew leader?

Linda: Yes, maybe something like that. But he seems to be a good guy. There are some crew leaders that are...bad.

Alicia: I haven't seen that at all in this area. Are there any?

Andrea: Not in this area...no.

Linda: He's the only one that I know of and I don't know if you would consider him a crew leader.

Andrea: He's the contact. People know that he knows people that might need help with their tobacco.

Linda: People know him. I think the farmers know him. He speaks enough English. He's been here for many years. A lot of men go to him and see where they can go to find jobs.

Alicia: What kind of effect do you think that everything that is going on with the tobacco laws is going to have on the farmworkers in this area?

Andrea: It's kind of hard to say.

Linda: I think that if the farmers don't grow tobacco anymore and they don't change over to anything else that uses farm labor, they won't be coming here anymore. They will be
Alicia Doran
“Las Hermanas”

going elsewhere. Because I know that some of them go from like here to apples in Virginia or up North to New York to harvest apples. I’ve heard some of them say that. And then they go back to Mexico or to Florida to work in the oranges.

Andrea: And back up through Georgia and South Carolina in the onions and in whatever else they can find along the way.

Alicia: What kind of affect do you think it will have on Yadkinville if the workers stop coming?

Andrea: I don’t know because I don’t know if Yadkinville has that many migrant workers. Settled out people are much more prevalent. Much more numerous. If the tobacco goes, there would be farmers who would be affected by it. I think Yadkin County is very rural so it might affect a lot of the farmers. The farmworkers then, they won’t be coming.

Alicia: They will just find work somewhere else?

Andrea and Linda. Yes, yes. They will have to go somewhere else to find it.

Linda. But in regard to the whole Hispanic population, I think the settled out ones are going to continue spending their money here. In the grocery stores, gas stations, drug stores.

Andrea: It doesn’t take business people long to catch on where the money is. You look at any of the stores and you will see sections of products that cater to the Hispanics.

Alicia: I noticed that the first night I arrived here in Yadkinville.

Linda: We’ve got two car dealers. The one right here, Brown, who has signs in Spanish and the other guy over here on 421, he has a Hispanic guy who works for him. He is one of the salesman. And in commercials on TV, I’ve seen two advertising car dealers in Spanish. We finance and all this kind of stuff, in Spanish.

Andrea: Years ago, I had read that some Hispanics in the country were putting something like 93 million dollars into the economy and that was years and years ago. I’m sure that there is even more money coming out of them now.

Linda. You know, and they all pay taxes. A lot of them only recently have been able to do taxes. The IRS has issued what they call an I.T.N number.

Andrea: It’s an identification number.

Linda. They can only use it to do their taxes. It’s not a social security number.
Alicia Doran
“Las Hermanas”

Alicia: Just so the government can get their money?

Andrea and Linda: Yeah either that or if they need to receive money. Before that they were all paying and did not receive if they over paid.

Andrea: If you think about that then, a lot of Hispanics spend locally. They don’t go traveling to Charlotte or to Winston Salem to shop. A lot of them shop right here in Yadkin County. And two cents out of every five or six cent sales tax stays in the county.

Alicia: People don’t realize that here though. I’ve heard that comment about taxes at least five times. People think that they don’t pay taxes.

Linda: Then what do they think?

Andrea: They pay taxes. They pay social security. Who do you think is working to put a lot of money into Social Security so that people who are now getting to be older will have Social Security?

Linda: Because they are not going to be able to draw anything.

Andrea: Thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars go into that from the Hispanic population.

Alicia: And their population is so young too.

Andrea: Right...right. I think that the Catholic Bishop said back in the eighties that the Hispanic population is a blessing to our country. You know I think we need to take a look at that and see, how are they a blessing? And maybe Andrew Mackey...he is a historian here in the County...I don’t know if you have time to talk to him, but he is always very interesting to listen too... And he can see things so much broader because he knows the history and he knows that the population here. There are very few natives.

Alicia: People here would hate to hear that I bet.

Andrea: Most natives came from someplace. Right now I’ve only met one person who said she was Cherokee.

Linda: Most are all Scotch Irish or Irish or something.

Andrea: Yes, they came from somewhere else. And Mr. Mackey always says if the people would just wake up and say, “Let’s see what’s happening to the new immigrant population because what they are going through is what my relatives went through. Maybe a hundred or two hundred years ago.” It would be a very good hands on way to understand what is happening.
Alicia Doran
“Las Hermanas”

Alicia: What do you see in the future for farmworkers in Yadkin County?

Andrea: If all stays like it is, I think there would be less and less because I think there is a tendency for farmers to use more mechanization and that takes less farmworkers. If the tobacco industry gets smaller, I think tobacco companies will still sell tobacco products probably to Third World countries. If you look at their products and their commercials in other countries, they’re selling their products. I don’t know how much local demand or national demand that there might be, but I think we’ll have less.

Linda. Yeah, I think too that if there is trouble and they can’t grow tobacco anymore, the migrant population will just kind of disappear. But if things stay the way that they are they are going to have to use migrant labor. Some people are not going to use mechanization. Especially with the drought or anything like that, they will need people to put out those pipes and irrigation pipes and to take care of other types of jobs that you can’t do with machines. But there aren’t too many farmers right now who do use a machine to harvest their tobacco. It is still mostly done all by hand.

Andrea. There is a tendency, I think, nationally, for small farmers to be bought out by large corporation type organizations. I could see them disappearing.

Alicia. I think this is one of the few areas that still has small farms.

Linda. They do. Their plots of tobacco are very small. They are really not very large because of the land. The land is not conducive. It’s not flat and it has a lot of ravines and woods. So they have to just cut patches out wherever they can.

Andrea. Thank God that there is so much green. Actually I think that is what makes North Carolina such a lovely place. That’s there is green and trees.

Alicia: I know that is why I am here.

Andrea and Linda: Me too.

Alicia. Thank you for your time this evening. I really appreciate it.

Andrea and Linda. Your welcome and take care of yourself.
Untitled, Andy Smith, Durham, North Carolina. (top)
Andy Smith

This summer as an intern for SAF, I worked at NCOSH, the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project. NCOSH was formed in the early 70’s as a response to an epidemic of brown lung disease in North Carolina’s cotton mills. Since this time, NCOSH has expanded its focus to include many different types of workers in nearly all occupations. Most recently, NCOSH has begun to actively work with Durham’s Latino population in a cooperative community building effort. This has come in the form of ASTLANC, La Asociación de Trabajadores Latinos de Norte Carolina, or the Latino Workers’ Association of North Carolina. As North Carolina’s Latino population increases at an incredible rate, it has become obvious to NCOSH as an organization that simply giving information and assisting Latino workers in the state is not enough. Something more proactive, more empowering, and more indigenous must lead the way. And so ASTLANC was born.

ASTLANC was also been aided by other Hispanic organizations in the Triangle, including Centro Hispano, Farmworkers’ Project, and most notably, Casa Multicultural.

As the focus of my documentary project, I tried to capture the formation of this organization as an important moment for Durham’s Latino community and a valuable symbol of the changes at work. I have interviewed Tom O’Connor of NCOSH, Armando Carbajal, co-founder of Casa Multicultural who now works for NCOSH and ASTLANC, and Luis Alvarenga, the other co-founder of Casa who is a community activist and a close friend. Their thoughts on the need for this organization, the blossoming of the Latino population in Durham, and the larger issue of economic justice are as inspiring as it has been to work with them. The ideas of cooperation and empowerment flow through the words of these interview and are central in the minds of the people I have worked with.

It has been an inspiring and even aweing experience to have the opportunity to watch the humble, gradual, but undeniable growth of this group. I hope that this oral history “snapshot” will illustrate this sentiment while providing an accurate insight into the minds of three of Durham’s community organizers.
Armando Carbajal es un organizador comunitario en Durham y una parte de la comunidad Latina allí. Es uno de los fundadores de ambos Casa Multicultural y ASTLANC. Me ha enseñado mucho este verano por su trabajo duro y su dedicación constante.

Esta transcripción revisitada se ha sacado de una entrevista que tuvo lugar en la oficina de NCOSH el 23 de Julio, 1998.

AS: Entonces, primero yo quisiera saber...como conociste a Luis Alvarenga en esta comunidad de organizadoras en Durham.

AC: Bien, primero quiero decir que yo vine en 1976 aquí a Durham, de California. Al principio miraba que era muy pacífico, no me daba cuenta de cierta ola de crimen que se dio. Pues yo llegué en el mes de Septiembre de 1976 pero ya tres meses después en diciembre empezó a crecer el crimen en contra de los Hispanos propiamente. Así fue que conoci a Luis Alvarenga. Yo fui, leyendo los periódicos en español encontré que había un lugar que se llama el Centro Hispano. Me di cuenta de que había una reunión para hablar del crimen y cosas así. Entonces, fui allá y conoci a Luis. Pues, también el en para esos meses [Luis] estaba en el proceso de moverse de Chicago hasta Durham. Y de hecho participaba en algunos reuniones con el Centro Hispano para hacer algo para combatir el crimen y los cuales estuvieron presentes incluso oficiales de la policía. [También hubo una persona] con el city council (el ayuntamiento) de Durham, pero parece ser que el city counsel no le prestó mucha atención a esta reunión que se hizo para pedirle a la ciudad "¿que podía hacer para parar al crimen en contra de nosotros los Hispanos?" Específicamente porque se estaban dando con mucha frecuencia los asaltos, invasiones a los hogares, y robos en la calle, como sea. Allí nos conocimos con Luis Alvarenga y fue cuando empezamos hablar y un día me dijo "yo creo que nosotros deberíamos de crear una organización para luchar contra este mal que está afectando mucho a la comunidad. Porque vemos que el Centro Hispano no puede hacerlo todo. Son tantos nececdidades que una organización solo no puede hacer todo el trabajo.

AS: Y así nació Casa Multicultural.

AC: De ahí nació Casa Multicultural.

AS: ¿Entonces, que ha hecho Casa Multicultural en la ciudad de Durham, en esta área para mejorar las vidas de la gente?

AC: Bueno, por un tiempo nos estuvimos reuniendo no más Luis y yo, y otro compañero se retiró lamentablemente. Y ya en el mes de mayo de 77 participamos en lo que se llama El Foro del Pueblo. Allí conocimos a otros personas y [empezaron a] preguntar lo que estamos haciendo con Casa. Y este mismo mes hicimos la primera reunión del barrio, utilizando un método que se llama el método de Alinsky. Este método nos enseña de que el organizador y la gente del barrio se vienen juntos, se reúnen y investigan juntos, escudriñan juntos cuál es el problema que está afectando generalmente, o que más afecta la comunidad. Y después de eso, [la comunidad] se reúne para luego buscar una
solución. [Eso] es lo que hemos estado haciendo hasta la hora, que es lo que se llama organización de base, el poderamiento, y la enseñanza a líderes del barrio. Nos reunimos, no se hace lo que el organizador quiere si no lo que la gente del barrio quiere de acuerdo a la necesidad que les está afectando más.

AS. Entonces, recientemente hemos formado un grupo que se llama ASLTANC, trabajando con Tom O’Connor. Me gustaría oir también como conociste a él y como se desarrolló esta organización ASLTANC.

AC. Bueno, de hecho entre de todo que hemos venido haciendo como Casa Multicultural así fue a través de Luis conocí a Tom O’Connor en una reunión que tuvimos... creo que era el mes de Febrero de este año y nos reunimos con una persona que vino de Washington que manejaba una organización que ayuda a Latinos en Washington que es muy fuerte por cierto. Allí tuve la oportunidad de conocer a Tom pues, Luis había hablado de mi a Tom en el que yo fui organizador de sindicatos en mi país, en Honduras. Nos conocimos y Tom me dijo que “bien, me gustaría que conversásemos sobre la creación de una asociación de trabajadores Latinos aquí en el estado Carolina del Norte.” Concretamos una cita y luego a la sienta semana nos reunimos acá en la oficina de NCOSH. Y yo diría que así fue como empezó a nacer lo que ahora es ASTLANC.

AS. En el proceso del desarrollo de estas organizaciones, Casa Multicultural, NCOSH y ASTLANC- ¿como son parte de la adaptación a esta gran in migración de la gente Latina?

AC. La verdad es que para mí fue sorprendente pero maravilloso encontrar una organización como NCOSH que tiene tantos años de bregar, prestar nuestros servicios de información, para la seguridad ocupacional del trabajador. Específicamente con los Latinos, los Latinos. Entonces yo creo que ASLTANC los padres de ASTLANC serían Casa Multicultural y NCOSH. Pues, de allí surgió la idea. Y entonces NCOSH tuvo la visión de que no eran suficiente con dar información al trabajador Hispano si no que es más necesario crear una organización que luche directamente para poder encontrar el respeto a los derechos del trabajador Latino. Que pues acá, en este estado están siendo muy irrespetadas. Y no solo para el trabajador Latino, también lo es para el trabajador nativo que vive aquí en este estado. Porque existen leyes que son muy discriminatorias, y con notaciones racistas.

AS. ¿Entonces, que vemos en el futuro de ASTLANC y en el futuro de la comunidad de Durham?

AC. Yo creo que en el futuro inmediato ASTLANC será una organización que va a tener mucho trabajo. Pues más y más Latinos están llegando de nuestros países y incluso de otros estados. Entonces, van a ver mucho más problemas, la gente que se siente afectado y con la información que estamos distribuyendo. Entonces, muchas más personas, pienso que se acercaran a ASTLANC para encontrar una solución a estos problemas porque los explotadores están comitiendo muchas injusticias en contra del trabajador Latino.

120
AS: Otra cuestión sobre la inmigración- ¿Qué ves en cuanto a cambios culturales mientras cambia nuestra población en Estados Unidos? ¿Cómo va a adaptar todo el mundo en este país a este cambio cultural?

AC: Sí, yo creo que esto definitivamente es una de las principales barreras que tenemos que vencer, no solo como trabajadores si no como ser humanos que somos. Venimos de unas culturas totalmente diferente. Por diferentes necesidades estamos en este país, ¿unos pensando que venimos a la tierra de las libertades, no? Y con sorpresa nos encontramos de que al llegar aquí nos sentimos como prisioneros del sistema. Entonces, es un choque terrible. Es un giro de 180 grados. Porque a veces en nuestros países vivimos muy pobre pero gozamos de algunas libertades que aquí no las encontramos, el sistema y cosas como está. El idioma, la barrera del idioma. No tenemos la facilidad de comunicarnos porque no hablamos el inglés, la mayoría de las personas. Yo creo que es una de las cosas en que ASTLANC va a tener que trabajar mucho.

AS: Sí. Entonces, hablando del sueño Americano, como decimos y los cambios que están pasando en este país, ¿cuando viniste a este país era diferente que expectabas y además, estabas pensando en alguna forma del sueño Americano?

AC: Bueno, creo que particularmente yo no vine pensando en el sueño Americano. Desgraciadamente creo que inicialmente cuando vini a este país desperté entre una terrible pesadilla. Vine a trabajar primero a los compañías de barcos de pasajeros y.. yo creo que eso es el sistema de esclavitud más barbaro que yo he conocido. El trabajador tiene que cumplir pero no tiene derechos. Personalmente yo nunca soñaba con eso sueño Americano. Gracias a Dios a la poca educación popular que tuve dentro de lo que fueron las uniones en mi país estaba consciente de que esto no era un lecho de rosas. Sé que es difícil.

AS: ¿Entonces que piensas de la idea del sueño Americano? ¿Es realista? ¿Es posible en este mundo moderno?

AC: Bueno, yo creo que es posible en parte. Incluso hay personas que viven, que nacieron en este país y que todavía no son parte de este sueño Americano. Entonces yo creo que es una.. eso, solo un sueño.

AS: Entonces, me gustaría oír más sobre tu pasado como el nacer en Honduras y tu crecimiento allá.

AC: Sí, nací en la región sur de mi país. Son bastante pobre, la mayoría. El patrimonio principal ha sido la cultiva de la tierra, sea campesino. Mi padre tenía una pequeña porción de terreno y lo cultivamos para sobrevivir. Pero, nuestra vida era muy dura. No encontramos con medios económicos ni con estructuras que el estado, el gobierno proveería al campesino para poder cultivar la tierra. Entonces, sobrevivimos de acuerdo a lo que la naturaleza nos pudiera dar. Y mi infancia fue muy dura... no tuve lo que se llama juegetes para jugar. Pues el jucete que yo tuve en mis manos fue el hacha, el machete, o el azadón para cultivar a la tierra. Y pues, apenas asistía a la escuela, aprendí...
a leer un poco y a la edad de 18 años me fui a la gran ciudad como hay en todos los países con el fin de. soñaba con estudiar las carreras, ser un profesional. Pero, no, no pude porque no pudia encontrar un trabajo que me permitiera estudiar. Si tenía un trabajo no pudía estudiar y si estudiaba no podía trabajar. Entonces, tuve que trabajar para sobrevivir.

AS. Y [finalmente] te hiciste un organizador de uniones. ¿Cómo pasó?

AC: Sí, a los 18 años movi a la ciudad, soñaba con tener un trabajo por el día y poder estudiar por la noche que es una de las formas que se utiliza mucho en mi país, actualmente mucha gente así llegan a ser profesional. Pero no pude obtener un trabajo que me lo permitía. Empecé a trabajar con un programa de salud del gobierno y entonces allí fue donde empecé a ver la gran explotación, la corrupción del estado, del gobierno en mi país. Y ya existía, ya. De hecho, desde 1954 en mi país hubo un gran movimiento de huelga que fue donde se pudo conseguir la creación de un código del trabajo, sea la ley que regula la relación entre el patrón y el trabajador y la existencia de sindicatos o uniones y fue así que empecé volvencurar en la unión, ya existía una unión en dentro de esa programa de salud del gobierno en mi país. Allí fue que empecé a escuchar, por primera asistir a reuniones, y vergue a darnos cuenta de la realidad. Nos empezamos a hablar de esta realidad que se daba en nuestros países. Que casi siempre la realidad de nuestros países estaba relacionada con, y sigue siendo relacionado con las políticas internacionales del gobierno en este país.

AS Entonces, después de hacerse un unionista, un sindicalista por muchos años, tuviste que salir de Honduras. ¿Exactamente que pasó?

AC: Sí, pues, desgraciadamente en mi país cuando una persona se dedica a defender los derechos de los demás, de la gente que por una razón o otra no pueden defenderse, unas consideran un enemigo, una persona peligrosa para el gobierno y muchas veces hay que dejar su patria para poder salvar la vida. Yo conoci a compañeros de otros sindicatos, o federaciones sindicales, y participamos en algunos actividades, y fueron asesinados de una manera o de otra. Entonces, por esa razón tuve que dejar el país. Pues, por medio del sindicato hacen lo que se llama una lista negra donde esta persona no puede obtener un trabajo en ningún lado.

AS. Entonces, todavía hay familia para ti en Honduras.

AC: O sí, mi familia está allá. Pues, mis padres aún viven, hermanos, y pues, gracias a Dios, podría salir a tiempo. Por que no se trata solo de salvar la vida al venir de allá porque hay un régimen de corrupción y impunidad en nuestros países que se golpea aficianante- no puede vivir en ese ambiente. Porque el que es organizador de corazón quiere cambiar esta sistema de injusticia que hay y es una frustración terrible a ver que no puede hacer nada.

AS Entonces, entre trabajar como organizador en Honduras y como organizador en Estados Unidos, trabajabas, como dejimos, en un barco. [la misma línea en donde]
recentemente vimos el fuego infamoso cerca de Florida.

AC: Sí, después de eso fue cuando logré conseguir un contrato y trabajar en esa compañía, le llama un barco de pasajeros, o cruise ship. Y allí pues, encontré con una sistema de la mayor explotación que...entre la mayor...es que es algo inhumano. No se puede creer que eso suceda este país, en Estados Unidos. Yo lo comparto como lo que se podría decir...este es que allí se encuentra juntos lo que es la gloria y el infierno. Para el pasajero es una fiesta constante. La 24 horas del día es fiesta para él. Mientras que para el trabajador son 24 horas de trabajo y trabajo. Por un misero salario. A veces que al waiter, mecero, la compañía solo le paga 45 dolares de mes de salario. Esta persona sobrevive gracias a algunas propinas que obtiene del pasajero. Y que muchas veces el pasajero no da ningún dolar...Eso sucede muchas veces.

AS: Entonces, como cambió tus opiniones sobre Estados Unidos como y el mundo entero este trabajo?

AC: Bueno, sí, la verdad es que cuando uno está en nuestro país es que ¿escuchamos lo que dice la media, no? La prensa. Porque desgraciadamente, poderes económicos son los dueños de estos medios de comunicación. Y no todo es cierto. Sabemos que en este país ¿se respeta mucho las leyes, no? Pero que también existen muchas leyes para el caso, esta de los compañías de estos barcos de pasajeros no, nunca han podido de organizar una unión que luche para tener mejores condiciones de vida al trabajador en el centro de trabajo. Que dije antes que es casi una esclavitud.

AS: ¿Piensas que la gente en los Estados Unidos se dan cuenta de completamente de como funciona su país en esta manera?

AC: No, yo diría que no mucha gente están totalmente ignorante de esta situación de lo que pasa porque muchas veces con los que encontré en los barcos pero “oh,” nos preguntaban. “¿Cómo te trata?” y “¿Cómo te va aquí?” Pues, mucha gente dicen “bien,” pero es que tienen temor si la compañía se da cuenta inmediatamente pueden ser despedido.

AS: Entonces, después de volver a Estados Unidos has trabajado en varias otras profesiones, como...plumbing?

AC: Plomeria. Hecho de todo. No tengo un título, ni ingeniero ni nada se aparezca. Pues, he tenido que hacer lo que hay que hacer pues, tenido la necesidad de sobrevivir. Y he trabajado en todo, como haciendo instalaciones contra el fuego en los edificios, un tiempo en el área de plomería, y todos los trabajos que hay que realizar por la fuerza o con las manos.

AS: Entonces, como dijimos, te has hecho organizador. ¿Como compararías el trabajo que haces aquí y los dificultades de organizar en Estados Unidos a los en Honduras?

AC: Sí, lógicamente yo creo que hay algunas diferencias. Pues por lo menos aquí sí
hace una acción pública como una marcha de protesta, pues no corras el peligro de perder la vida por eso. Que eso en un tiempo sucedía en mi país, no? Y no solo en mi país, en Latinoamérica. Pasó en El Salvador y Nicaragua. Por el simple hecho de ser una persona que pelea por los derechos de los demás, de la gente pobre, podía perder la vida. Es poco la diferencia.

AS. ¿Entonces, todo es mejor?

AC: Bueno, para organizar aquí, creo que es mejor. Tiene libertad de movimiento en el área de organización laboral, [pero] aquí existen unas leyes que no te dan la oportunidad de organizar un sindicato, de hecho no. No existe una ley que lo permita en este estado. Por ejemplo en Honduras puedes formar un sindicato con 30, 40 personas, un sindicato de base, una unión. No importa si son 300, 400 trabajadores. Eso dice la ley. Puedes hacerlo.

AS. ¿Entonces, has encontrado que los leyes en Carolina del Norte a veces son peores que los en Honduras?

AC: Sí, aquí no existe nisiquiera es una ley que permite la organización de uniones y en mi país, sí, existe.

AS: Entonces, lo que hemos estado discutiendo indirectamente es la cuestión de justicia económica, economic justice. ¿Qué significa a ti la idea de la justicia económica?

AC: O, sí, en cuanto eso yo creo que se da la misma situación que pasa en Latinoamérica y el resto del mundo. El que tiene el dinero, más dinero quiere tener. Y de hecho, entonces los ricos se hacen más ricos, y la brecha entre los pobres y los ricos se hace más estensa. Tal vez en Estados Unidos pues exista todavía la clase media, alta, y la clase baja. Pues, en nuestros países ya no existe la clase media, solo existe la clase alta y la clase baja. Muy baja. ¿Por las políticas económicas que han impuesto los poderosos, no? Que son los países industrializados. Que uno de ellos es Estados Unidos.

AS. ¿Entonces, como podemos luchar para la justicia económica en nuestros comunidades, y aún más, en nuestros países, en todo nuestro mundo?

AC: Yo creo que la única manera y forma que hay es mantenernos organizados y seguir organizándonos, seguir luchando. Porque el sistema de opresión, que hay el sistema económica capitalista, ellos están muy organizados. Ellos preveen lo que va a suceder en diez, quince años. Entonces, ellos están planificando para que su economía mantenga su poder económica mantenga fuerte o creciendo. Y entonces ellos son los que nos oprinen, que nos explotan. A veces muchas personas guerren y pierden la vida por esto sistema de opresión. Entonces, la única forma de combatirlos es organizado, con la organización participativa del pueblo, de la gente, de todos.

AS. Entonces, así hemos creado ASTLANC.
AC: Claro, para eso lo hemos creado.

AS: ¿Entonces, mientras hago mi proyecto sobre ASTLANC y el trabajo que se está haciendo en la comunidad, como parte y formador de esta organización, como quieres que yo lo presente? ¿Cómo quieres que la gente vean esta organización?

AC: O, bueno, de hecho lo que quisiera hacer yo y todos que saben de ASTLANC que sirva [para] promocionar dentro de la comunidad obrera, del trabajador. Hasta ahorita en Durham somos los primeros que estamos creando, construyendo una organización que es la que puede luchar para el respeto a los derechos humanos del trabajador aquí en Durham, en el área del Triángulo, y por qué no en el futuro en todo el estado? Entonces, necesitamos llevar este mensaje al trabajador Latino. Y no solo los trabajadores Latinos, al resto de la comunidad. Necesitamos mantenernos organizados permanentemente para poder luchar por ese respeto a nuestros derechos como trabajadores.

AS: Y un aspecto importante de ASTLANC ha sido la cooperación con la comunidad morena aquí en Durham. ¿Porque?

AC: Bueno, yo creo que este es muy importante porque creo que un gran mayoría de la población aquí en Durham es Afro-Americano, o negros. Y son personas que han salido primero de la esclavitud, luego han vivido fuera de la esclavitud pero siempre han sido oprimidos por el sistema, por los ricos hacia los pobres. Entonces, necesitamos decirle a estas organizaciones Afro-Americanos que somos hermanos en el dolor. Estamos sufriendo igual que ellos. Pues, como las clases minoritarias que somos tienen que estar unido para hacer un frente común, para defender estos los derechos que nos son obligados.

AS: Bueno, ¿Hay algo más que quieres decir sobre ASTLANC que no hemos mencionado o sobre el mejorar de nuestra comunidad y la lucha por los derechos del trabajador?

AC: Bueno, mi sueño es que ASTLANC sea una organización fuerte y poderosa. Pero que no sea una organización aparte del resto de la comunidad Latino, Hispano. Que seamos una organización que [represente] al trabajador y a todas las profesiones pero que también sea una organización que nos sirva no solo para trabajar dentro de los problemas laborales sino dentro de la comunidad también. Y que este apollo sea mutuo, o sea, de doble vía, de la organización hacia la comunidad, y de la comunidad hacia la organización. Creo que eso es muy necesario y eso la nos pueda ayudar a tener una organización con fuerza para pelear por nuestros derechos.
Tom O'Connor is the director of NCOSH and the person who first approached Armando Carbajal about the idea of creating a Latino Workers' Organization. As my boss for this summer he has been an inspiring and kept my work challenging. He has many valuable things to say about the birth of ASTLANC and the way he arrived at NCOSH.

Below is the edited transcript of an interview at Cosmic Cantina on August 4th, 1998. Imagine hip music in the background.

AS. All right, well the first thing was that you got involved with NCOSH through being a student at Duke for your undergraduate work.

TO. No, it was actually with Carolina.

AS. Really, it was at Carolina? Okay, so it was with getting your [master's in] public health degree.

TO. Right.

AS. And how exactly did that come about?

TO. Well, it came about because I was walking down Ninth Street one day, my first semester as a graduate student, and I saw a sign that said "North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project" and I thought "Huh. I wonder what that's all about. And I walked in and started talking to people and got hooked in as a volunteer right away

AS. Wow And here you are.

TO. Yeah...

AS. Amazing how much coincidences shape our lives, isn’t it?

TO. Yeah. I think I probably would have found it eventually anyways because occupational health and safety is sort of the...

AS: It was very much what you were working towards, wasn’t it?

TO. Well, I realized that it was one area of public health where there was a lot of interesting social action going on, and so that hooked into what I was looking for.

AS. All right. Now, your family is in Illinois, right? In Chicago?

TO. The Chicago area.

AS. And is that where you grew up?

TO. Yup.
AS. What in growing up moved you—speaking to your childhood and going to school at Duke—what moved you towards this kind of work?

TO: I think actually it was later on that I got an interest in working in social justice issues. The biggest influence was when I went to Colombia in South America when I was an undergraduate. And I was working with street kids there and I realized that this was a country that was supposed to be a model of development in the underdeveloped world and it was totally screwed up as far as distribution of resources and that there was this huge number of people who barely had enough to survive and there was other people who were super-rich and the U.S. government was saying that Colombia was a great model for other countries and so I realized that there’s something wrong with that picture. So that was a big influence.

AS: Now you traveled around a lot of Latin America as I recall, and it was part of your undergraduate work thereafter. What all did that include?

TO: Well, I spent the semester studying in Colombia and then I traveled around South America, from Colombia down to Argentina and back. I [also] had been in Nicaragua for a six-week kind of thing as a student. After I graduated from college I went and worked [there] for the better part of a year.

AS: What kind of work did you do there?

TO: I did two things. One was helping on a research project that someone was doing, a friend of mine was doing for his Ph.D. field work in anthropology. So, I did some of that and did work on a farm co-op, because I was interested in their system of distributing land to landless peasants and wanted to see how those co-ops were working, so I was picking tomatoes and stuff for several months, just learning how things worked there.

AS: Wow. Now, how long have you been at NCOSH now?

TO: Four years.

AS: Four years. Now what particularly has been inspiring about working here, about NCOSH that’s made it unique?

TO: Well, I think one thing that really I find inspiring is when you talk to people and tell them about their rights at work or something and then they say “God, I’m so glad I talked to you, I never knew about this before.” You find a lot of people who are pretty unaware of the laws and their rights, and really appreciate that you can help them out.

AS: Yeah, I find that really inspiring to be able to do too, just to be able to get that information to someone. Now of course what I’ve been focusing on as part of my documentary project has been the Latino Outreach Project and the creation of ASTLANC, specifically. How did NCOSH come to take that direction to really working directly to help Latino workers in the community?

TO: Well, we started a few years ago when we realized that there’s this really dramatically
growing Latino population and there was a real need to do more to reach out to them. And that...I think really in the last year we've realized that just giving information wasn't enough, that we needed to get beyond that to help Latino workers organize their own association for long-term development in community and health.

AS: Yeah, Armando and Luis have both mentioned that as something important- the idea of empowerment through this organization and indigenous leadership and that being part of the creation of ASTLANC.

TO: Yeah. Yeah, very much.

AS: I'd like you to speak about empowerment- why specifically is that important.

TO: I think its looking at the long term the way things are going to improve is that people from the community are taking an active role and developing organizations and promoting their rights rather than just having other organizations provide services. Developing leaders and developing organizations really strengthens the community, beyond just having a workers' association, but, you know, really building the strength of a community as a whole.

AS: Now of course, this is dealing with the issue of economic justice, which is actually one of our themes for the SAF documentary project this summer- Economic Justice and the American Dream. As someone who's traveled around a lot of the world, including a lot of time in Latin America, and is now been working with blue-collar North Carolina, what would you say defines economic justice and how do we work to achieve it?

TO: I would define it as people being able to make a living wage, and not only that very the very weak, minimal minimum wage laws and all those be complied with but also that people who are working, you know, full time jobs should be earning enough to support themselves and their families and that the resources of this society should be distributed such that everybody has enough to live on. And that...we're a rich country, we can afford to do that. Right now, we have a booming economy, and some people are getting really rich off it and not everybody's sharing the benefits. So that's what I think of in terms of economic justice. As far as how to work for it, I think that's a real long-term process of grassroots organizing. But I think one thing that we at NCOSH do that's sort of a different take on it is we try to bring people together...from different classes, really. We have a lot of professional people involved in the organization, doctors, attorneys, and whatnot. Sort of forming a coalition between them and more rank and file workers to promote our goals of economic justice.

AS: Yeah, that is something that I've become more aware of this summer- the importance of class and how we can supercede it to improve conditions, to improve life.

TO: Yeah.

AS: On a more general level, looking more at the bigger picture socially and economically, as we're talking about trying to achieve social justice, what kind of changes are we going to see as we continue to see this great immigration, you know...it almost could be termed I guess as a
third wave of immigration in this country, especially from Latin America. What do you think the future holds?

TO: Well, I think we’re gonna see, in places like North Carolina where there traditionally haven’t been a lot of immigrants, we’re gonna see some ‘difficulties in adjustment,’ some tensions in the communities where there are large numbers of immigrants that were never there before. And...I think we’ve been lucky so far in that with the economy is as good as it is now, those tensions are so diffused, but you know how in times when the economy takes a downturn people tend to blame immigrants. So, I think there’s gonna be a time where there will be a downturn in the economy, and that’s gonna cause some conflicts, some tensions. And I think eventually, you know, the state’s gonna have to adjust to this changing population and do more to accommodate the needs of Spanish-speakers and adjust to having two languages spoken in a lot of places. And I think that there has been some movement in that direction, you know, that the state government has recognized it, the need to do that, and that Latino advocacy organizations have been successful in making that happen, in putting the pressure on.

AS. Now, we’ve talked about the economic and social implications of... all the increase in immigration. What do you think it means culturally, just as we move towards a more multi-lingual, and well, multi-cultural America? How is this going to change things?

TO: I think it really enriches the country as a whole to have a substantial immigrant population and I think that’s always been true throughout our history, this is nothing new. And... there’s been waves of anti-immigrant feeling throughout our history, you know, my Irish ancestors were the target of it before.

AS. And many have said that we are a nation of immigrants.

TO: Oh yeah...And I think there’s always periods when there have had to be sort of cultural adjustments. That’s all playing out now in the battle over English-only instruction, this big fight going on out in California now about that. And its not gonna be a smooth process but ultimately I think we have to adjust to the fact that given the increasing globalization of the economy, that that means that there’s open flows of capital and there’s gonna be...not open flows of labor, but there’s gonna be big flows of labor. And there already are, and as long as there’s an enormous gap between what you can earn working in Mexico and what you can earn working in the states there’s no way, no matter how much fencing and how many border guards you put there, there are gonna be people, large numbers that are gonna come here. So, you know, its a fact that there’s gonna be a lot of Latino immigrants to this country for as long as that economic situation exists which is probably, certainly, the rest of our lifetimes. So, I think the country’s just going to have to adjust to it. And places already have. Texas, California, parts of Florida, you know, they are very much bi-cultural, bi-lingual places and its just gonna spread and is spreading more to other places where that hasn’t been the truth, traditionally

AS. Like rural North Carolina.

TO: Yeah, I think the people of Raeford, North Carolina didn’t expect that they would be like southern California.
AS. I've thought it almost comical at times, out in nowhere, North Carolina and suddenly having "all these Mexicans" coming in, as we've heard.

TO: Yeah, it is a huge change in a state. I was driving the ten or fifteen miles from Wallace to Rose Hill, North Carolina the other day in Duplin county and saw like four Latino restaurants and stores along the road and its just...a very different community than it was just a few years ago.

AS. Now you've also traveled down to Matamoros recently—what exactly did you see as far as people coping with the changes globalization had brought to Mexico?

TO: I just talked to a lot of people there, right on the border, across the border in Brownsville, Texas, and it just really struck me there that when I had gone out to have a couple beers and some chips, I realized that the bill was more than these people were making in a day. That, obviously, there's a huge incentive to come to work in the states, if people can make so much better money here. And people would rather stay home, they're much more tied to their home towns and feel much more comfortable there, but you just can't make a living. And the other interesting issue that I found there was that...the extent to which U.S. companies have penetrated the economy there. Now General Motors is the largest private employer in Mexico. And the whole UAW strike was really, even though the union wouldn't say this publicly, but it was really over the whole future of moving jobs overseas. And that also seems like an inevitable flow over time, that there's no advantage to GM or any other auto manufacturer to be paying people with benefits in the 40-50 dollars an hour range when they could pay five bucks a day or ten bucks a day in northern Mexico. The reality of that is that is...there's just no getting around that things are gonna move in that direction, more and more.

AS: And how do we respond to that? Do you think that really does, as many companies claim, improve the economy in other countries? What does it do and what do we do about it?

TO: I think the biggest thing we can do about it as activists is to try to form alliances between Mexican workers and workers from other countries and American workers. To try to raise the floor, you know, so that Mexican wages and working conditions rise to our level rather than our sinking to their level. And there's these side agreements to NAFTA which are supposedly intended to make sure that that's the case in labor and environment, but, you know, it doesn't say anything about wages. You don't have to pay the wages comparable to here, and that's the goal in the long run for labor activists is to try to make sure that we have a united front with workers in other countries. Just like the companies become international, we have to become international.

AS. I guess part of what ASTLANC is doing is trying make these connections between, you know of course now we're speaking a little more to Latino workers in this country, but between, Latino workers and black workers, between Latino workers and people who have grown up in the states.

TO: Right, right. Definitely
AS: And, as I put this project together, what do you want people to see? As I write this story of the birth of this organization, what should I be sure to include, and how do you think it should be put?

TO: I think one thing is just to be sure that there's an appropriate level of humility here, that we understand that we're not gonna make radical changes overnight. That it's a long road. We're taking the initial steps to try to help develop Latino leadership and Latino organizations, but it's gonna take long time, and we can't do it alone. We're gonna have to work with a lot of other organizations.

AS: All right. Well, that's what I was wanting to get through. Is there anything else you wanted to add, or wanted to speak to?

TO: I think just the point that you were just raising, to emphasize the importance of working with Latinos and African-Americans and white workers, and to make sure that we are always making an effort to bring people together and make that a real conscious part of what we do.
"A Neighborhood", Esteban Echeverria, Chatham County, North Carolina.
Irina Diaz

Across The Nation

Across the nation was a land completely foreign to me,
Where people cried with all their might
Yet, I couldn’t here their plea.

It was in North Carolina - the state of agriculture,
where I saw the closeness of work and human torture.

Migrant Farmworkers are the reason I write this piece with concentration,
For I feel the need to emphasize
And address the situation.

Yes, it hurts our pride to see how some Americans will treat
People who work our lands,
To make sure the nation eats.

Denial is what we’ve lived in and we have refused to see
The conditions farmworkers face,
As we live in jubilee.

It’s time to accept the fact not everyone is of our race,
And start vanishing discrimination at a more effective pace.

How to know my words are true and not words of accusation?
Because I’ve experienced that life,
And can detect their frustration.
These workers have come from far
With no mischief or evil plan,
But with the intention to earn some money
And return back to their land.

Now, it doesn’t happen that easy once they come to the US,
For we take advantage they’re foreigners
And instead of helping, we oppress.

As a worker what do you do when a farmer is ready to withdrawal
Any worker who has a problem,
And may cause their farm to fall?

Most farmers will not admit they have faulty sets of rules,
Because it’s to their own interest
To treat workers like their tools.

To describe the situation is easy,
For most of the nation contributes to the hate;
I’d call it modern slavery in 1998.

I’d hate to spoil the fun and be the one whose words are bitter,
But if you are part of the racism,
I’d suggest you reconsider

Remember these workers have come to do the US a favor,
Because if it wasn’t for them,
This country would be short of labor.

If one day you find that salads are within your daily plan,

Remember who cut those vegetables

And have harvested this land.
"Onions and Peppers", Shaundra Young, John's Island, South Carolina. (top)
"Out of Business", Shaundra Young, John's Island, South Carolina.
"El Mercadito", Shaundra Young, John's Island, South Carolina. (top)
"Population Zero", Shaundra Young, John's Island, South Carolina.
Please describe your community growing up in a farmworker family.

I don’t really consider myself part of a farmworker family, even though we did farm labor because we didn’t live in a camp, and my dad did other labor also. I identify farm labor as what we did, as a matter of fact I would always go back to that as I got older, even after my son was born, I did farm work for a couple years.

The community that I grew up in with the labor camp had a big impact on our school system. In the community that I grew up, kids could be pulled out of the school, like the growers would just come into the school. We never were, my father wouldn’t allow that. But growers would just come in and kids would be pulled out (of school) day after day or they just wouldn’t come. And I had people in class with me, my friends that were like three or four years older, and they were really embarrassed to be there. About half of our school was Hispanic and half were white, it wasn’t integrated at that point so we didn’t have any black people in our school. And its not like here in Durham where you have a big disparity in income level. I mean, people actually came to school without shoes and stuff, but no one thought it was weird, cause a lot of people didn’t have shoes.

In my own home, we never went hungry, we always had food, which isn’t the case for a lot of my friends. And we lived in a nice rental house, my dad would get construction sometimes and my mom would get other work like waitressing, but farm labor was what we did predominately.

When I was young the community was so affected by whether it was a good crop or not. And that’s the thing that upsets me now, like right now with El Nino, and it’s
affected the strawberries so much, and other produce. The farmers are able to get insurance. And I’m not against the farmers, my dad tried to farm, it’s the big huge agribusiness. They get all this money from the government, but yet the farmworkers, you know, don’t get anything. And if they do, if they’re eligible for any kind of federal benefit, they are looked down on like welfare and stuff. But when they can’t work they don’t get any money, but the farmers do when their crops are bad.

We actually picked a lot too, in Florida in the groves, that work was hard for me as a kid, because a lot of climbing up and down and buckets and stuff so mostly what we did was my dad would hand the buckets of produce like oranges and avocados down to us because we weren’t able to climb up and down. The buckets weighed about fifty pounds full, like the oranges.

*What happened to the communities when the crops failed?*

A lot of people would move on (to find another crop). Or like we would end up, like if we worked basic produce like tomatoes or something, you would have to be at the field at a certain time, like five am and even if there wasn’t anything or they weren’t sure they were going to pick that field you had to be there at a certain time. Sometimes you would have to wait for two or three hours of if they just sprayed and they didn’t want to have you come in. I remember it and all through my adult life doing farmland labor I really resented it a lot. Everyone knew that we weren’t going to be pickin’ that early, but we still had to be there or you didn’t get to work. If there wasn’t work at that field you would go to another field if there was work, so it was a lot of scrambling around. Sometimes we worked in the packing houses too, which was more steady, you still had to
wait around a lot, like if you were grading beans or something and you are waiting for
track loads you were off the clock.

So we would do that at night. Sometimes we would be in the fields all day and
work the packing house at night. Sometimes the packing house was owned by the
grower, sometimes it wasn't. So a lot of times my mom would work in the packing
house and not work in the fields. And then when I got older, I did more packing house
work and less field work because you could do the packing house work at night and not
miss school or anything.

What age were you when you started doing field work?

I was 10 (when I began doing field work.) But my dad growing up, they were in
the fields when they were babies, because my grandma had to take them with her. And
she would have somebody to watch the kids, all the little kids, or else she would put up
metal around and plop the kids in there so the snakes couldn't get to them. But my dad
worked in the fields from the time he could walk. I was like 10, my little sister was much
older because my dad was doing a lot more outside work, so it wasn't necessary. When I
worked in the fields, there would be little kids everywhere, and whether they were
helping or not they had to be there because there was no day care or anything.

Can you describe your experiences working in the fields?

When I got older, as an adult, planting trees, I worked year round, but I remember
hot, I remember being really hot and not being able to stop. There was a lot of abuse, like
people yelling (crew leaders) always yelling at us. You know getting hit on the back on
the head, you know, work faster and stuff and I just remember it just seemed like every
day was hundreds of hours, you know, you just wanted it to stop. I remember I would
never use the bathroom, because it was so disgusting. When I was little it was not a big
deal to find a place when nobody was around to use the bathroom. Then of course as I
matured, as I got older, especially when I reached puberty it was really awful, you know,
because you’re really embarrassed, and there is no place to wash up. I think the
degradation of work itself, I mean, as an adult I still went back to it, even though I had
gone to college because I really liked the work a lot, but it was really degrading, just
filthy, and hot, and smelly. Sometimes the pesticides would make us sick to our stomach.
There was a lot of camaraderie, though, you know, we had a lot of fun too, we had a lot
of people laughing, we had a lot of fun too.

*Can you describe how and why you became involved as a farmworker advocate?*

Mostly because seeing kids that were 3 and 4 years older than me in my grade,
that made a big huge impression. I was really sad. They would be made fun of and
stuff, they never had an opportunity to learn, you know, and they went from one school to
the other. In Florida, there was actually a lot of white farmworkers, at that time. That I
think its predominately Latino now, and there was a lot of black people that did
farmwork. And they also, a lot of them were migrants too. And they still are. Like in
Alabama, when I was there, I saw a crewleader that worked in the fields, still making the
cycle, and a lot of them actually go to the same small farms, which the conditions usually
aren’t quite as bad, just cycle through. It was what awakened my sense of there was so
much injustice. Even when I was little, I thought why, when we are the ones doing the
work, we can’t even eat most of this food. And also, as I kid I remember, if you ever got
cought eating anything, like when we picked in the strawberries, you would get in a lot of
trouble, and your dad or mom would get in a lot of trouble. So that was like totally
forbidden. It seemed like the most basic needs, that people when they’re working, they should be treated decently. You know, people, when they labor they should be able to support their families. And I just remember, even little, just thinking, not even taking a bath, because I thought it was unfair having running water, and that my friends didn’t and they would have to come to school dirty. To me it’s the most basic right, all the other organizing I do around peace, justice and poverty issues, you know, other activists I’ve worked with don’t see labor as the most basic thing to fight for, but I do. That advocacy stuff that I do always comes back mostly to what power they have economically, and whether they have power, whether they have rights where they work. To me, it doesn’t make sense to not care about those issues. And farmworkers just don’t have any power, it’s really hard to organize them, and because a lot of it is transient, and people come and go. Like right now, the H2C program, like I just wrote my letters, everyone knows there’s too many workers and it’s just a way to keep people from being able to organize.

*What was your first campaign, your first advocacy action with the farmworkers?*

Well, I was 15, and I actually met Cesar Chavez. I was actually living for a while with this family, and she was a Mexican-American, he was a Jewish lawyer, he became a judge, and they really did a lot of poverty stuff. Cesar came to their house, they hosted him and I was living there. I don’t remember the campaign a lot. It was in the citrus, and I actually think workers were striking and it was in a grove in Homestead, Florida. And there was a strike going on. The workers refused to go back in. I’m pretty sure it was a pay issue, so I stood on picket line with them and stuff. Even then I knew that I had power, because I wasn’t totally dependant on that income. I knew that I was a good
student, that I was going to be well educated. Even now, I’ve been arrested a lot, and as a union worker, as a mail carrier, its going to be really hard for the post office to fire me.

And so I realized how much power I have, and being white. So, I’ve always been the boldest of the bold, because I feel really secure. And even then I realized, A, that I was a woman, it was going to be harder for me to be attacked, and I didn’t have support from my family though, and they still don’t support it. They’re pretty conservative about. They kind of feel like my dad was able to get out, that other people should. I mean it really kind of makes me sad, because that’s the stuff that we hear when we’re leafletting people, you know, let them get a different job.

But my dad, when he had other people working with him when he was trying to farm, he was really kind to them and stuff, he paid decent, piece rate, I think he may have paid them per hour, he didn’t keep people waiting, so the stuff that really bothered me must have bothered him, the kind of stuff not just around the wages but whether your time is treated decently. Yeah, I think it was a strike in the orange grove and it was a really vulnerable time of year that they really needed the workers in there.

I definitely consider myself part of the United Farm Workers, I mean I was a member for years. And I send them money now, I don’t say its dues anymore, you know I was a card carrying member for years. You know, like I said in the beginning, I don’t want to presume, you know I don’t want to say I’m a member of the United Farm Workers, because I’m not doing farmwork now, but I still consider myself a member.

United Farmworkers never, there’s so many things that make me angry that people say to us, like outside agitators, or whatever. And United Farmworkers never goes in when they are not asked. I mean people come to them, and its usually after there’s
been a lot of work stoppages, there’s been workers fired, you know, always some intense thing. Because the farmworkers don’t necessarily choose the United Farm Workers at the beginning because they know, I mean they want the help but they also know that it intensifies the campaign. And that it’s kind of an all or nothing thing, that there will be workers who loose jobs and stuff. So, yeah, United Farmworkers, I respect them a lot. All the people that I’ve worked with, a lot of people that worked with us in Washington state who were students went on to work with the United Farm Workers and they’re makin’ $50 dollars a month and then they would find them a place to stay. I mean no one is making, Cesar Chavez, his family lived in a two bedroom house, you know. No one is making money off of it, and I really respect that a lot. There’s never been a hint of corruption. There’s so much passion there that you don’t see in any other unions or labor movements in the United States.

*What do you enjoy most about working with the UFW?*

The fiestas, (laughs) no. Well, now I feel kind of isolated, because we had a huge network, like in Washington State. And of course when I did it when I was younger, I was right in the community with people. And here, even though Paul is involved with the North Carolina Farmworkers Project, its still not the workers that we’re advocating for, like with this campaign. So I feel kind of isolated, but you know that’s why your heart has to, I mean you just know that it’s the right thing to do, that no matter what.

Cause to me its like the purest kind of organizing there is. . With the UFW, what they’re fighting for is just so basic, you know, I mean people should be able to make enough to support their families and not have their kids in the fields, and have you know like decent drinking water. I mean people assume, like if the bathrooms are filthy or
there's no drinking water that it's the farmworkers responsibility. But, you know, you can't carry your water with you, I mean I worked in big huge fields. And the water, you're not allowed to bring it with you, so you're dependant on where the truck is, you know its just huge. You can't go to the bathroom when you want, if you do use them. You have to go when you're close to it or when they take people. I mean, sometimes we would work like eight hours before we would get any kind of a break to eat or anything. And there's no water around, and its just like really basic. and people like want to make fun of that, like, what's up with that, you can't bring your own water. Well you're not allowed to have it with you. You're totally dependant on everything, from the leader or from the grower, you know, you're not self contained at all. If you do own a vehicle, its way far away, you're not allowed to go back to it. We had to sit in the middle of the fields to eat, there was no place to get out from the sun. You know, Like in Florida, I mean there would be just huge open spaces with no trees anywhere. And there was no thought to having a place to eat, like a little tarp for people.

I think what the farmworkers want is just so basic its ridiculous. I mean, I think that's why people don't really get it. People either get it and they're into it or they feel no sympathy at all. And its because they don't get what it's like to not be able to take care of your basic needs. You know, like holding all day because you don't want to use the port-a-john, you know what its like. And to me that's the horror, it was never the work. I think everybody should want to organize the farmworkers.

What are aspects of being a farmworker advocate that you don't enjoy or that you find really challenging?
Well, right now, not being around the workers. Like the campaign in Washington state, I talk about that one because that was the most sustained one that I’ve worked on, we always had events at least once or twice a month with the farmworkers, the people, there was a way to always get new people or the people who were there reconnected. So they could see exactly what they were doing, you know, why it was important to do it, what the point was, and it was fun, you know, to stand with the workers. You know, we would have fiestas, or we would have press conferences or we would have marches, a lot of marches, and we always had people go, you know as much as we could. Most of the workers lived about four hours away. So, I liked actually being with the workers a lot.

_What do you find the most challenging about being a farmworker advocate?_

I guess making people understand, I guess the frustration, coming to a new city, Durham, not having contacts, because I lived about 18 years in Washington state, coming here and not having contacts, trying to reestablish, trying to make it visible in the community. I guess the part working with the farmworkers is the funnest and the most challenging is trying to find new ways of getting information out to people.

It’s challenging to actually be doing stuff against the growers or whatever. For years I would be afraid if anything happened, like the bad press release would come out or like a bad story in the newspaper. If workers gave in someplace, I would get freaked out. It took me years to realize that the workers aren’t going to give up, that it’s just a new challenge, and it might present a new way. So I feel really relaxed about what the whole outcome is, because there is always victory at the end. I mean even if like the workers appear crushed, you know, like if something just wasn’t successful at all, there’s always something that comes out of it. Like, it builds, even over the years, and having
the long view now, has really comforted me, and that came from working with workers as an adult, just seeing that they don’t give up, and that they’re the ones being brutalized, like being beat up right now, you know, and that they don’t give up.

The thing that’s frustrating too, is trying to keep people interested and to keep doing it. I mean, I feel as much obligation to the people that come out as I do the workers. Because I want people to care about labor and human rights stuff. And I think that’s the hardest part, which is kind of what I was referring to before about coming to a new community, trying to get people pumped about it. And it is harder because the workers are not right here, and so its hard for people to feel connected. I think that’s the most frustrating part, not anything to do with the workers, but trying to do the community outreach stuff, to keep people coming out.

*What changes in farmworker working and conditions have you seen? And what do you think is still needed for there to be economic justice?*

Well, I mean I touched on some of them. I mean, like kids aren’t pulled out of school anymore. I think what’s really bad in this country is so many, more than when I was young, and I’m not sure if its because I wasn’t aware of it, there were always a lot of single men on crews, but they were young men. And I assumed then, and I think its true that they were just young and weren’t married yet. But a lot of the workers coming up now are not bringing their families and they’re sending the money back home, and I think that’s terrible. And with conditions in Mexico getting worse, I have a lot of friends from Oxaca, and they don’t want to live here in the US. You know, there’s just no work. So I think, just the global economy is making it even harder, workers feel even more desperate.
But I think the positive thing, well, its never positive to think about people getting out of farm labor, because there always needs to be people growing it, growing the food, working in the field, and if people keep recycling through, we’re never going to be able to organize them. But I mean the positive thing is that a lot more workers are finding other jobs in the community, and they are more able to support their families. But it’s not happening in the fields. The real wages have fallen. I don’t think that economically its better for people. For instance, women don’t ever get to spray when I was growing up, because you get paid more, its a little more skilled. Some farms where I worked, they wouldn’t let non-white people drive the tractors because they got paid more. So those jobs were left exclusively to certain classes or people, so I haven’t seen improvement and

I don’t think it should be dependant on the growers, you know how they feel about it, how benevolent they feel either. I don’t think that the workers have more power. And I think its going to get worse, because more and more farms are being consolidated. My dad would be farming right now if he could. But its just getting bigger and bigger, there’s less that the workers can do. Plus, because there was kind of a feeling of, I mean smaller farmers, a lot of them did consider the farmworkers that came in some weird way a part of their family—not that they paid them enough to support their family I mean, it didn’t extend that far, but at least there was a sense of loyalty to each other, and there wasn’t as much abuse.

But, I don’t see, you know, without the organizing, I don’t see the workers—because there’s always excuses—people will tell you right now, you know, farmers can barely make it. Its true, but somebody is making a lot of money, like the strawberry workers now, Driscoll Company, they’re not loosing money, they’re making a lot of
money. And larger corporations buy up those farms and consolidate them and it goes on the stock market, I mean then it's all controlled, somebody has to make huge profits if its all on the stock market.

I don't see the workers being empowered anymore, every time I'm involved in a new campaign, and I actually meet the workers, I don't get a sense of anything but starting back at the beginning. You know, you just have to start over each time. It doesn't build on itself, like other labor campaigns. The workforce keeps changing and once they leave, nothing that's happened to them applies anywhere else. There's new people that come in.

The farmers are going to try to get rid of any people who have any kind of union ideals, you know, we'll never see those workers again in that community. And, yeah I guess basically recycling. I mean there's so many tricks to it, you know, to be able to close down farms or whatever, or fields, and not even have to honor any of the negotiated. I mean even if it's without a union contract, just to have negotiated with the workers that you work with, you know, when workers go to them and say, you know, we want this, this and this, I mean, even if that does work, it's never binding, and it never, you know, happens very long. I just think that you have to fight the fight all the time, I don't think people give up.

You know, the UFW used to be a lot larger, and they had a lot more contracts, now they're just like trying to get back to, well, no, I don't know that they had a lot more contracts, they had a lot more members and they were able to push through a lot more things even without contracts. Just the fear of what they could do shut a place down.
That conditions were better. Now that fear isn’t really there, that they could you know affect a place that much.

*What do you think it will take for farmworkers, you talked about keeping fighting the fight, do you think there will be a time when farmworkers don’t have to fight for their basic rights?*

No, I think all working people will, most of all farmworkers, because there’s so many things, you know, a lot of them are undocumented now and stuff, see when I was little, like I said, there was a lot more white and African-Americans and stuff. And now there’s a lot, not just Latino but Haitian.

People keep saying it’s the laws. But you know, California is the only place that has that California Labor Relations Board and look what its doing, that they’re going to allow that election to happen. I mean in some ways Cesar, he predicted that, I mean he wasn’t sure if the laws were the way to go. Because for one thing, that was how they weren’t able to do secondary boycotts, and that was part of that whole thing. Because, like in Washington state, we could basically do just about what we wanted to. We still got arrested, that was basically for trespass. But they couldn’t really sue us. You know a slap suit to scare us, but not like secondary boycott or anything, because the workers there weren’t covered under any labor laws. In California, they’re just so stymied by what the company can do to them now through the labor relations board. And same thing with all of labor you know, I mean. A lot of the laws, the good laws that happened to benefit workers, a lot of other bad things came with it.

No, I just think that the workers will have to continue to organize. Because its not going to be legislatively. I don’t see a shift in people’s sense of justice. My friends say
that it won’t be in our lifetime, that there will be big changes. But I tell you, you know, just like being discouraged sometimes. And whenever that I would go, like near the end of the campaign we would go and do house, we would do a lot of house, not near about a year, house meeting with the workers in their homes to talk to them about exactly what the union was and their fears and stuff and we talked about you know organizing stuff. Like in Washington state they burned the employment manual. You know they just had a big bonfire and they all marched in and stuff on the first day. So we planned a lot of stuff and then near the end of the campaign we would put posters in all the local establishments. And the thing is they’re so isolated, like in eastern Washington, I mean there’s just nothing. There might be a little tiny store, for like miles around there’s no place, you know, you might have to drive an hour to get gas and stuff. So we would go and put posters on the wall just telling people to vote yes for the union. And it seems weird, I mean that’s what people, like the growers can say is a form of coercion, like why would you have to tell the workers that, I mean why are you convincing them. Its like the workers know thy need it, I mean over and over and over they would talk about it, its like helping them to overcome the fear of what could happen to them, you know. And basically the workers did it for each other so our job was just to kind of to arrange those meetings. Because the UFW is really strong about not being in a positon of endangering workers’, you know job security, that they have to make that choice and to do, you know, what you can for it not to have to happen. That no one can. I mean over and over the UFW would tell me, don’t be in a position where you could lose your own job at the post office.
"FLOC March from Mt. Olive, North Carolina to the Capital in Raleigh, North Carolina", Jason Hicks.
"Marching in Support of Farmworkers' Rights to Organize", Jason Hicks, FLOC March, North Carolina.
"The Sole Member of The White Rose Resistance", Jason Hicks, FLOC March, North Carolina.
FLOC Rally at Mt. Olive Park

June 23, 1998
Across the street from
Mt. Olive Pickle Company

Speeches by:

Virginia Nismith: National Farmworker Ministry

Fernando Cuevas, FLOC Vice-President & Organizer

James Andrews, North Carolina AFL-CIO Vice President

Baldemar Velasquez: FLOC President & Organizer

Transcribed by
Jason Hicks: Student Action with Farmworkers intern for FLOC, 1998
Prayer before the March in Mt. Olive: June 23, 1998

Virginia Nismith: National Farmworker Ministry

You are not alone in North Carolina. We are not alone here in Mt. Olive and we will not be alone for the next few years. We will be with the farm workers and we will be together with those around the country.

We also walk in the spirit of our ancestors and those who have gone before us. In the spirit of St. Frances, in the spirit of Gaudì, in the spirit of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, who 30 years ago today were killed as they lived out their own commitment to this on behalf of those who are struggling for justice.

We walked today in the spirit of the farm workers. The farmworkers who die too young from malnutrition, from lack of medical care, from poor working conditions. We walk in their spirit and we ask their spirits to be with us.

We walk with a God and ask a God to be with us who has always walked with those who want to go from darkness into light, from slavery into freedom and from fear into truth. And we ask that God, as we go from here to Raleigh today, to be with us over the next few days to help us remain committed to integrity in this campaign, to respect one another, to help us remain committed to the larger vision of a kingdom of peace and justice, to give us strength and perseverance, and joy in each other’s company, both on our march to Raleigh and throughout this campaign.

Fernando Cuevas: Vice President of FLOC

It’s really sad that I’m met with conditions and abuses that I have lived myself. Abusements, like for instance, I’ve seen my own grandfather, as I was like 14 years old, getting kicked in the rear from an employer/grower because he [my grandfather] wasn’t satisfying the work he wanted. Instead of talking to him, like any other employee, and saying this isn’t the way it is supposed to be done, this is the way I want it done, he went ahead and felt like lord and master with his slaves and kicked him in the rear.
Any one of you that is going to school knows that that isn’t right. That is violating his rights, his civil rights and violating his labor rights. Any one of you would stand up for your rights. But this is what my grandfather done. Soon as they kicked him in the rear, I got angry. Remember, I was going to school, I was only 14, but I was going to school and they were teaching me different. I jumped that grower, and both of us fell down, because I loved my grandfather and I knew that what that grower was doing to my grandfather was not right.

We have to stand up when we see abuses like that. But my grandfather, instead of being happy with his grandson standing up for his rights, got up from the ground after the grower had kicked him, and comes to me and starts punching me. [He was] saying that I was a dumb, stupid macoso because I’m not supposed to stand up to my employer. We’re supposed to take it from our employers when they are right and we are wrong. That is the mentality that a lot of us migrant workers are born and raised with.

But then, a lot of us children, which I was a child at the time, get an opportunity to go to school right next to the grower’s sons or daughters, right next to the minister’s sons or daughters, and we’re getting an education about the same things in this country—about history in this county—about rights in this country—about civil rights—about labor rights. But evidently, because we are inheritance from our grandparents, our parents, [a life] of working in the fields all our lives, it don’t matter if we get an education, because it seems like they still want to treat us as slaves. We cannot practice our rights because we are born into the wrong race or we are born in the wrong kind of work force—which is an immigrant work force.

So to me, I call this a double standard system of education. They’ll treat a normal person from another industry equal, sometimes, but they will not treat and educated relative of an immigrant worker equal at all.

I’ve been comforted here in North Carolina by several persons, so called employers, growers that seem to even think that I have no rights, even now, coming into North Carolina to organize our brothers and sisters, to let them know of their basic civil rights and labor rights. [Coming] to let them know of the advances, that we have been able to succeed in the mid-west. [Coming] To let them know that it can be done in North Carolina also.
I am met with a lot of anger, a lot of hatred, from the industry side, the grower’s side, the grading station side—what are we trying to stir up in North Carolina. I used to get met like that in the Mid-West by a majority of the growers. [I’ve] Even [been] assaulted with rifles and shotguns because I’m trying to do the write thing, because I’m trying to do the same thing I tried to do with my grandfather when I was 14 years old. I’m trying to do it with all workers in general now in whatever state, but right now we are involved in North Carolina.

My God, this kind of conditions, this kind of situation should not exist when a worker is oppressed and scared to the point where he is afraid to talk with his fellow worker [The situation] that he is afraid to talk with another compñero because he comes and tells him that he should be getting a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work—that he should be getting trained, according to this new law in 1995 on pesticides if they are using pesticides. The law says that an employer has to train his employees before he sends them to work. When I ask questions about that, the majority of the workers, and I mean 100% [that I talk to], are telling me, “what are you talking about? What is that training? No, I have not experienced it, I don’t know what it is.” Why is it not important to comply with what law also, that the employer is responsible to make sure that any worker has to be trained on how to protect themselves or how to report violations or accidents on chemicals in the work site. It’s not happening ladies and gentlemen, it’s not happening.

To me, getting violated by those kind of chemicals is just as bad, and worse, than my grandfather getting kicked in the rear like he did when I was 14 years old. Total abuseesments, total not thinking of an employee’s health and safety. You know why? Because they treat the majority of our co-workers as disposable objects where they can bring them into North Carolina, use them, work them, over work them, and dump them right back to where they came from. I seem to think that that is the mentality of what they think of us by bringing us in here.

I got met with by another grower just Thursday and he tells me to get out of his land. I’m standing in the doorstep with the workers. I said, “I’m sorry sir, but I’m visiting with my co-workers. I’m having a meeting here and you are interrupting. I’m
doing my work. I need to let these workers know of their civil rights and labor rights and you are interfering with my work. It’s o.k.

But he keeps repeating, “But I want you to leave my land or I’m calling the sheriff.”

So I say, “Sir, if you want to call the sheriff, call the sheriff, but please don’t keep interrupting my meeting. This is the workers

“This is my land!” [he says]

I said, “Yes sir, this is your land, but you happened to build a house for these workers and as long as they are living there, now, while they are doing your crop, it is their home. It’s your land, I agree with you, but it’s their home and they have a right to receive visitors, like myself or anybody else that is a relative of theirs that needs to come and communicate with them. You should not be scaring them like you are scaring them right now, and like you are trying to scare me right now, about how I cannot meet with these workers.”

He got more angry, more brutal, and I just kept saying, “Sir, calm down, you don’t need to get that excited, you don’t need to get that angry. You’ve scarred the workers enough and you’re not scaring me at all. So you’re not succeeding with me but you are succeeding with your own workers. And remember sir, these workers came to work for you, so why do you want to scare your workers like that when you need them to work for you.”

He says, “These workers are owned by the Association [NC Growers’ Association]”

I said, “What? Excuse me sir?”

And he says, “These workers are owned by the Association.”

“Excuse me sir,” I said, “but they are not owned by anybody. They might be under contract by the association, but the association does not own any human being. These are human beings we are talking about sir, and they do not own these workers.

“They might have a contract,” I repeated, “and they are bind by their contract, [but] because this is not their working hours right now, this is 8:00 in the evening. And even if they are under contract, they have a right to talk. They have a right to go out. They have a right to go shopping. They have a right to have company and the association
does not own their freedom. These are free people, they have their freedom as long as they meet their contract—as long as they put in their time, and as long as they bring in the harvest. But they are free to do what they need to do and what they want to do after working time."

He got very angry at me and he says, "Well, I'm still calling the cops. I'm still calling the association."

"Well do what you have to do sir, I'm not done yet, I have to do what I have to do too."

I was very lucky. He must have told the cops, probably, the truth of what I'd told him, that he could call the cops if he wants to, but as long as the workers received me, they had no reason to arrest me. This is their home. It's your land, but it is their home, and as long as the workers receive me, I am welcome in their home, in your land, because you happen to make a camp in your land and it's their home. So go ahead and call the cops.

They didn't come. I did receive the experience where I was followed as soon as I left the camp. I counted at least 10 cars that followed me off and on coming towards our office. But I am used to that kind of intimidation. That's the king of intimidation we get from our tax dollar law officers because we are organizing—because we are trying to do a fair thing—because we are trying to get are workers to be able to have a say so of what their life should be—because we are trying to give those workers an opportunity to express their feelings and their needs and to be able to enjoy a collective bargaining agreement like any other industry in this country.

So I would ask for your support, I ask for your understanding, not for me, but for the workers. To myself, I'm already dedicated to do this for the workers. But this kind of condition should not exist to immigrant workers in this country. Yes, they are from another county. A lot of them come in on a program through the growers association, a lot of them come in on their own, and a lot of them are in the legalization process. But they are just as human as we are, as you are, and they have a right like you have and I have. We cannot stand still to continue to let this happen. This needs to change and this needs to change now!
Join me. This needs to change and this needs to change now! This needs to change now! ¡Viva la causa! ¡Viva la union ¡Viva la raza! ¡Y para delante con la marcha!

**Sister Evelen Mattern: North Carolina Council of Churches**

Buenas Dias mis amigos y mis amigas. Traigo la solidaridad de la concil de iglesias de Carolina del Norte. I have worked with the churches for 20 something years. (thud) and I do damage to microphones wherever I go.

The experiences that Fernando Cuevas was just describing as having happened to him in Texas and in North Carolina—I have seen very often with my own eyes in North Carolina. I have taken or helped to take beaten workers away from labor camps. I was a participant in the first anti-slavery trial where a crew leader was convicted of slavery in North Carolina. And I hoped, that after 20 something years of my involvement, things would be different, but all along I have known in my heart that they will never be different as long as those of us in the churches and in the health care system, and other systems are working for farmers. We must come to a place where farmworkers own voices are being heard and where they are working for themselves and for their families.

I am very pleased, it is an answered prayer for me that the FLOC campaign is well underway in North Carolina. Thank you all for being here and good marching everybody.

**James Andrews: President of North Carolina AFL-CIO**

Hello, hello! I bring you greetings from the 150 thousand AF of L-CIO union members of North Carolina. And I know some of you are saying, “WHAT! One hundred and fifty-thousand union members in North Carolina?” Yes that’s right, and we’re growing! We’re growing!

Brothers and sisters, I’m delighted to say to you that the North Carolina AF of L-CIO, brother Baldemar, will stand with you today, tomorrow, and as long as it takes to
get justice for those who work everyday in the fields picking the crops—providing food for the rest of us.

Yes, I grew up on a farm. But, there is something substantially different [about] growing up on a farm, picking cucumbers. At the end of the day I had a house to go to, a nice house to go to, food to eat. And I didn’t have to worry about but one person, and that was my dad, if I ended up doing something wrong. Here you are talking about workers that’s basic human and civil rights are denied, and the North Carolina state AFL-CIO will forever lend it’s voice to those kind of workers in those kind of situations.

The right to organize—let me just say I’m going to be very brief because I want to here you brother Baldemar. You know the plight that you face about the right to organize without intimidation and threat, let me just say, that I understand that. [There is intimidation for] all workers in North Carolina that dare to lift their heads, not to break the law, but do what the law says they have got a right to do, and that is organize unions.

Ya’ll may not know this, but the law is very clear—workers have a right to organize a union. And supposedly, according to the law, without intimidation and threat, without fear, without being fired, harassed. That is the law in North Carolina. That is the law in this country. But just as industrial workers and service workers dared to lifted there heads and say, “I want to do what the law says I’ve got a right to do—join together with my brothers and sisters to improve working conditions and my standard of living, and the standard of living of my friends,” the heavy weight of the employer, and often times in other ways, a decent employer, then become very mean and bitter when workers decide they want to join us.

I just say to you that if you think that that is happening in private sector and service sector, think about farm workers. Think about the differences that exists when a farm worker that works every day in the fields decides, “you don’t own me, but I’ve got some rights—labor rights, civil rights, and I’m going to join with my brothers and sisters to exercise that”

I understand that you face much more difficulty similar to those in the private sector and public sector when workers try to organize. So I just say to you, just as we have invited you and supported your organization, just as you have joined our state AFL-CIO—and a lot of folk’s don’t know this—but I’m here partly because you are my
members. The FLOC organization pays dues to the North Carolina AFL-CIO. You are part of our family, and I believe that family ought to look out for each other. That is the reason that I want to say to you today that the North Carolina AFL-CIO will stand with you, brother Baldemar and all of your members and all of your efforts here in North Carolina, as we try to organize and bring some dignity, some respect on the job and particularly in the fields, and say to employers, "We’re not going to take it anymore!" Wait a minute. Let me here you say it. We’re not going to take it anymore! We’re not going to take it any more! And we’ll do whatever it takes. God Bless you.

**Baldemar Velasquez: President of FLOC**

Hola mi compañeros y compañeras. Muchísimas gracias por haber venido aquí a acompañarnos. Thank you so much for joining us. What a great day this is. What a great day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it because it is another day to struggle. It is another day to fight a good fight.

But you know, let’s get one thing straight. This is not about over powering an opponent. This fight is not about doing someone else in. It is about reconciling the oppressed with the oppressor. It’s about reconciling the exploiter with the exploited for everyone’s own good. The oppressed and the oppressor, they both need to be reconciled because how great it is when the people at the top of the kingdom come down and deliberate and make peace with the people at the bottom of the kingdom. And that’s what we’re talking about.

We are not here to castigate anyone as an enemy. I’ve met with Bill Brian twice, the head of Mt. Olive Pickle Company. He is an amicable man, intelligent—doing his business. He wants to buy pickles as cheap as he can buy them. That’s what businessmen do. And we’re saying, well, you can buy them as cheap as you want, but we want to be part of the market consideration. We want to be able to make a living from what we eat and what we work. We want to be able to earn our living. Isn’t that the great American work ethic—a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. And that’s all we’re asking for, it’s all very simple.
Now all you people that are going to march with us, the time for talking is done now, it’s time to walk because talking can only go so far and sooner or later you have to do the walking, and that’s what FLOC does. We do a lot of walking. We act out, not just the words, but we live those words. We want peace, we have to fight for peace.

You know, God’s word says that his kingdom is not to eat nor to drink, but righteousness, peace and joy. But joy, there is none when there is no peace. And the reason there is no peace is because there is no justice. And there can’t be any justice unless there are those who stand up for righteousness—and that’s you, the people who in right standing with God, step forward and march in righteousness and demand righteousness in this world. And righteousness is about reconciliation—reconciling ourselves with the god that we worship, which calls us to love each other as ourselves. And that is what we are going to do.

So Mr Bryan, and the executives there, at some point, we are going to have to talk and reconcile the differences between us. You cannot say that there are no problems out there when Reymundo Hernandez dies in the fields and his bones are scattered by animals and found underneath a tree. There’s got to be something very wrong when something like that happens. And I think that when we get down to dealing with the issues, that we will be able to prevent those kind of things—we’ll be able to lift up those people whose voices have never been heard. And I think God watches over those things. God wants those things to be. So it is only with firmness and commitment that we step forward in this great struggle and say that it’s going to happen. Something good is going to come out of this.

Cesar Chavez told me one time, he says that in a fight like this, the farm workers have got nothing to lose. And the way I say it is that nothing is something very great because when you’ve got nothing to lose, the only thing you are investing in this fight is you time. And let me tell you, the opposition is going to fight you with money. They’re going to fight you with lobbyist. They are going to fight you with consultants. But you know what, that money is going to run out before time does, and there is a lot more time than there is money. So as long as we don’t give up, we’re going to win. Right?

So I say let us all go and hit the streets, get our flags, let’s start assembling and lets do some walking and may we also be able to wake up the people in the rural
communities of North Carolina and tell them to wake up and join the struggle. Somebody has got to take a stand. Somebody has got to do something to change the things that have occurred here for so long.

So my hermanos y mi hermanas, let us go forward and fight a good fight. Adios, until tomorrow, and we'll talk to you again every night of this march. Viva la Causa! ¡Viva la union!