

Katy Young  
 Farm Labor Living Newspaper  
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[katy.young@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:katy.young@mail.utexas.edu)

Si, Se Puede!  
*A Living Newspaper Play*

Characters

NARRATOR (multiple actors)  
 TOMÁS VILLANUEVA (longtime labor activist)  
 CÉSAR CHÁVEZ (historical labor activist)  
 ARTURO RODRIGUEZ (current UFW president)  
 MIGUEL CASTILLO (farm worker at Giumarra Vineyards Corp., Kern County, CA)  
 BARACK OBAMA (D-IL, Democratic presidential candidate)  
 GEORGE W. BUSH (current president of the U.S.)  
 ELISEO MEDINA (current executive vice president of the SEIU)  
 ANA AVENDAÑO (associate general counsel for the AFL-CIO)  
 FRANCISCO FERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ (immigrant worker from Zacatecas, Mexico)  
 CACOPHONY OF EMPLOYER RESPONSES & LEGISLTATION (McDonald's, Purewal  
 Blueberry Farms, USDA Office of the Chief Economist)  
 STEVE SCARONI (California farm owner)  
 JOHN EDWARDS (Democratic presidential candidate)  
 DIANNE FEINSTEIN (D-CA)  
 POLITICIAN #1  
 ART HERSHEY (Pennsylvania State House of Representatives)  
 POLITICIAN #2  
 STEPHEN LEVY (an economist at the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy)  
 ROB VALICOFF (owner of Valicoff Farms)  
 WISIT KAMPILO (guest worker from Lampong, Thailand)  
 MARY BAUER (Director of the Southern Poverty Law Center)

NARRATOR (introduction)

From 1942 to 1964, millions of Mexicans came to the U.S. as “braceros.” Under the Bracero Program they could work temporarily on contract with United States growers and ranchers.

NARRATOR

*(Other actors start “chasing a rumor” action into “Mexican hands” action)*

More than 4 million experienced Mexican farm workers came to work the fields of the United States. They left their own lands and families to chase a rumor of economic boom.

## NARRATOR

America became the lushest agricultural center in the world through Mexican hands.<sup>1</sup>

*(Start “burden of agriculture” action)*

But the Bracero program did not provide workers with protection from manipulation and abuse by their employers. Tomás Villanueva, longtime labor activist.

TOMÁS VILLANUEVA (longtime labor activist)

This is an industry that is addicted to low-wage labor and always has been. It has always been argued that farm workers should be excluded from labor regulations because it’s too expensive. Why should farm workers be the ones to carry the burden of the survival of agriculture?<sup>2</sup>

## NARRATOR

*(Move into “secret elections” pose)*

In 1968, after decades of struggle, organized farm workers won the right to hold secret union elections, paving the way for the rise of the United Farm Workers union, among others. The leader of the UFW was César Chávez, an organizer born in Yuma, Arizona, raised in California, and committed to radical ideas of non-violent protest.<sup>3</sup>

## CÉSAR CHÁVEZ

Our opponents in the agricultural industry are very powerful and farm workers are still weak in money and influence.

*(Move into “we will overcome” pose)*

But we have another kind of power that comes from the justice of our cause. So long as we are willing to sacrifice for that cause, so long as we persist in non-violence and work to spread the message of our struggle, then millions of people around the world will respond from their heart, will support our efforts...and in the end we will overcome.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Mexican Immigrant Labor History.” On-line at <http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/17.html>. Accessed September 21, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Stuteville and Alex Stonehill, “Guest Worker Program Isn't the Labor and Immigration Panacea It's Cracked Up to Be.” *Seattle Weekly* June 27, 2007. On-line at <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2007-06-27/news/guest-worker-program-isn-t-the-labor-and-immigration-panacea-it-s-cracked-up-to-be.php>. Accessed September 23, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> “Cesar Chávez and the UFW.” On-line at <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/fightfields/cesarchavez.html>. Accessed September 22, 2007. Also appears in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States* (2004).

<sup>4</sup> UCLA Chicano/Latino/a website. On-line at <http://clnet.ucla.edu/research/chavez/quotes/>. Accessed September 22, 2007.

## NARRATOR

But following the death of its charismatic leader in 1993, membership in the UFW began to fall. As of 2006, membership had dropped to only 5,500, from 26,000 a decade ago.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the number of farm workers seeking jobs in the U.S. has risen. Many are here illegally and have little power to protest unfair labor practices. Arturo Rodriguez, current president of the UFW.

ARTURO RODRIGUEZ (current UFW president)

Times have changed. We need new tools to fight for better working conditions. The big companies are intimidating their workers to vote the union out.<sup>6</sup>

## NARRATOR

Miguel Castillo, farm worker at Giumarra Vineyards in California.

MIGUEL CASTILLO (farm worker)

We were intimidated. The supervisors would not let us organize.<sup>7</sup>

## NARRATOR

Growers and labor unions say that as much as 70 percent of younger field hands are in the country illegally, making them less likely to join a union.<sup>8</sup>

Many politicians argue for the expansion of the guest worker program to ensure adequate oversight of agribusinesses. President George W. Bush.

GEORGE BUSH

I propose a new temporary worker program that will match willing foreign workers with willing American employers, when no Americans can be found to fill the jobs.<sup>9</sup>

## NARRATOR

Democrats agree that the government must address the issues concerning the vast number of workers crossing the border illegally. Illinois Senator and Democratic presidential hopeful, Barack Obama.

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<sup>5</sup> Marc Lifsher, "Agriculture; UFW Seeks New Way to Organize." *Los Angeles Times* September 14, 2007, C1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Julia Preston, "Short on Labor, Farmers in U.S. Shift to Mexico." *The New York Times* September 5, 2007, A1.

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, "President Bush Proposes New Temporary Worker Program." Press Release January 7, 2004. Accessed September 23, 2007 on-line at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040107-3.html>.

BARACK OBAMA

We must create legal avenues for people to work here, to increase the number of people we allow into the country legally to a level that unites families and meets the demand for workers for jobs employers cannot fill.<sup>10</sup>

NARRATOR

But worker unions are split over this idea. Executive Vice President of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Eliseo Medina.

ELISEO MEDINA

We support a guest worker program. We need to recognize the reality of the marketplace and the economy. A guest worker program would provide labor for businesses and give immigrant workers the right to unionize and eventually petition for citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

NARRATOR

AFL-CIO associate general counsel, Ana Avendaño.

ANA AVENDAÑO

The guest-worker program exploits workers. It encourages employers to pay less and drives down working conditions for everyone. These are only modern-day Bracero programs.<sup>12</sup>

NARRATOR

A guest worker program already exists in the United States. But even those who have come to the U.S. legally under this program are vulnerable.

NARRATOR

*(Begin “picking oranges” action)*

Meet Francisco Fernández Sánchez. He made little money as an electrician in Zacatecas, Mexico, so when a recruiter for Romero Harvesting offered him a job picking oranges in Okeechobee, Florida for \$11.05 an hour, Fernández jumped at the chance. Four weeks later, he left the job, \$500 poorer, humiliated, and angry.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [www.barackobama.com/issues/immigration\\_and\\_the\\_border/](http://www.barackobama.com/issues/immigration_and_the_border/)

<sup>11</sup> Krissah Williams, “Unions Split on Immigrant Workers,” *The Washington Post* January 27, 2007, D01.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Dana Harman, “Guest Workers Vulnerable.” *Christian Science Monitor* April 25, 2006, 6. All of Fernández’s lines from this article.

## FRANCISCO FERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ

*(During FERNÁNDEZ's line, a social justice song in Spanish plays on CD. When FERNÁNDEZ says, "So they are quiet," music shuts off.)*

I knew something was wrong almost from the start. I had to pay all of these unexpected costs: \$15 for the visa, \$70 for the passport and paperwork, \$115 for the consulate, a Mexican government tax of \$100, and the bus to Monterrey where the company bus was supposed to pick us up. Plus, I had to pay for my hotel and food waiting for the bus, a blanket because the bus was so cold, and border fees! I spent more than \$440 before even setting foot in Florida!

After two workers died in a car accident, and they had them in coffins, the boss said to me, "This is how I would like to send back all of those from Zacatecas – so they can't move. So they are quiet."<sup>14</sup>

CACOPHONY OF EMPLOYER RESPONSES & LEGISLATION  
*(#1 begins and others join in until all are speaking over one another)*

*(Like robots)*

#1 (MCDONALD'S) *(repeat once)*

McDonald's Corporation holds our suppliers to the same high standards of conduct we observe. Our Code of Conduct for Suppliers establishes our expectations for their practices as employers. Continuous improvement is encouraged by training and by onsite assessments, with enhancement plans required to address opportunities for improvement. We have launched a cooperative monitoring project to help our suppliers achieve sustained improvement and self-reporting.<sup>15</sup>

#2 (PUREWAL BLUEBERRY FARMS) *(do not repeat)*

While Purewal Blueberry Farms exerted its best efforts to meet all of the guidelines for the migrant workers program, it is true that complaints did arise during the course of the growing season on the part of both the employer and certain migrant workers. Most of the complaints were dealt with internally or were referred to the attention of the Mexican Consulate. Problems with certain living conditions were brought to our attention by some migrant workers and we were endeavoring to remedy those living condition issues on an on-going basis.

Purewal Blueberry Farms accepts the fact that some of its worker facilities were overmatched for the number of migrant workers that it employed. Given that this was the first year of Purewal Blueberry Farms participation in the migrant workers program, some logistical problems were to be expected. We were acting to redress the shortcomings we experienced and that fell below program guidelines. Notwithstanding certain legitimate living condition issues, Purewal

<sup>14</sup> Harman.

<sup>15</sup> "MisFortune 500 Companies." On-line at <http://www.misfortune500.org/Company/Show.aspx?companyid=21>. Accessed September 22, 2007.

Blueberry Farms emphatically denies any allegation that migrant workers were underpaid for work performed.<sup>16</sup>

#3 (USDA Office of the Chief Economist) (*do not repeat*)

The Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices (or the OSC), Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice, enforces the antidiscrimination provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (or IRCA). The OSC investigated and prosecutes employers charged with national origin and citizenship discrimination with respect to the hiring, firing and recruitment or referral for a fee, unfair documentary practices concerning the hiring process (document abuse), and retaliation under the antidiscrimination provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (or INA), 8 U.S.C. 1324b.<sup>17</sup>

NARRATOR

The unspoken rule that had guided this codependent economy for years was “Don't Ask, Don't Tell.” Through the black market for forged documents, undocumented workers can, for a couple hundred dollars, provide their temporary employers with Social Security numbers for payroll taxes.

NARRATOR

But for many employers, using illegal labor in a post-9/11 climate has become too much of a liability as promises of border crackdowns, rumors of intensified immigration and customs raids, and proposals for extensive electronic document verification make their way across the nation.<sup>18</sup> Meet Steve Scaroni, a farm owner from California.

STEVE SCARONI (farm owner)

I'm as American red-blood as it gets, but I'm tired of fighting the fight on the immigration issue. I made six trips to Washington to plead for more legal immigrants to work my farms, but they didn't pay attention to me.<sup>19</sup>

NARRATOR

Former Senator and Democratic presidential candidate, John Edwards.

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<sup>16</sup> “40 Mexican Migrant Farm Workers Stage Work Stoppage and Decide to Return to Mexico as President Fox Chats Business with Martin.” *Mostly Water* webpage. [http://mostlywater.org/40\\_mexican\\_migrant\\_farm\\_workers\\_stage\\_work\\_stoppage\\_and\\_decide\\_to\\_return\\_to\\_mexico\\_as\\_president\\_fox\\_chats\\_business\\_with\\_martin](http://mostlywater.org/40_mexican_migrant_farm_workers_stage_work_stoppage_and_decide_to_return_to_mexico_as_president_fox_chats_business_with_martin). Accessed September 22, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> USDA Office of the Chief Economist, “IRCA Antidiscrimination Provisions,” on-line at <http://www.usda.gov/oce/labor/ina.htm>. Accessed September 21, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Stuteville and Stonehill.

<sup>19</sup> Preston.

## JOHN EDWARDS

Our immigration system needs a fundamental overhaul. Our security is threatened by borders we cannot control.<sup>20</sup>

## SCARONI

So I rented some fields in Mexico. I have a customer base that demands we produce and deliver product every day. They don't want to hear the excuses. I have no choice.<sup>21</sup>

## NARRATOR

A sense of crisis prevails among American farmers who rely on immigrant laborers, more so since immigration legislation in the United States Senate failed in June and the authorities announced a crackdown on employers of illegal immigrants. An increasing number of farmers have been testing the alternative of raising crops across the border where there is a stable labor supply.<sup>22</sup> California Senator Dianne Feinstein.

## DIANNE FEINSTEIN

American growers are cultivating more than 46,000 acres in two Mexican states, Guanajuato and Baja California. Our farmers are renting land in Mexico but they don't want us to know that.<sup>23</sup>

## NARRATOR

While workers might be less vulnerable to mistreatment in their home countries, the wages in Mexico are far lower than in the U.S. Scaroni pays \$1 per hour in Mexico, as opposed to about \$9 an hour in California. The move of farms south of the border also hurts people in the U.S.

## POLITICIAN #1

There are security risks when food for Americans is produced in foreign countries. We need to protect the health and safety of our citizens.<sup>24</sup>

## NARRATOR

Arthur Hershey from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

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<sup>20</sup> Kenneth R. Bazinet, "Straddling Border on Immigration Issue. Do Illegals Help – or Hurt?" *New York Daily News* July 3, 2007, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Preston.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

## ARTHUR HERSHEY

We are talking about more than just the jobs of the farm workers. These industries create thousands of good-paying jobs for Pennsylvanians that would cease to exist if we didn't have labor on our farms. I'm talking about jobs providing inputs and supplies, equipment, marketing, packaging and processing, transportation, lending and insurance. There are three to four such jobs for every single farm worker job. Without immigrant workers, we would not have a labor force. It is that simple.<sup>25</sup>

## POLITICIAN #2

Why can't these farms hire U.S. citizens? There are 6.5 million unemployed people in this country.<sup>26</sup> American workers for American jobs!

## NARRATOR

Stephen Levy, an economist at the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy.

## STEPHEN LEVY

The bottom line is that there aren't workers available to replace fired, unauthorized immigrant workers. Unemployed American workers don't have the necessary skills.<sup>27</sup>

## NARRATOR

Owner of Valicoff Farms, Rob Valicoff.

## ROB VALICOFF

The few domestic workers we have are not committed. They work hard, don't get me wrong, but last year they would get on their cell phones and figure out where the best pay was—and some would leave.<sup>28</sup>

## NARRATOR

Steve Scaroni prefers the reliability of the labor force in Mexico.

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<sup>25</sup> Arthur Hershey, "Immigration Issues," part of the Capitol Hill Hearing Testimony from July 5, 2006. Accessed via Lexis Nexis September 21, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Altman, "Shattering Stereotypes About Immigrant Workers," *The New York Times* June 3, 2007, section 3 page 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Stuteville and Stonehill.

## SCARONI

It's not a cakewalk down here, but at least I know the one thing I don't have to worry about it is losing my labor force because of an immigration raid.

## NARRATOR

But while farms move to Mexico, more and more immigrants are moving to the U.S. to look for work. And they're not all coming from Central America.

While 75 percent of guest workers are from Mexico, Asian workers are recruited for the program as well. Coming from countries with little economic opportunity, they are drawn to the comparatively high U.S. wages; a stint in America can potentially catapult a poor farmer in Central Mexico or Northern Thailand into a new economic class back home.

## NARRATOR

Despite this, human rights groups are arguing that the current guest worker program, with its lack of oversight, checkered history, and big-business benefits, could be laying the groundwork for exploitation on a national scale. Director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Mary Bauer.

## MARY BAUER

We have talked to thousands and thousands of guest workers over the years and what we see in real practice, in the real world, is that guest worker programs are abusive and exploitive. Before we expand this program, we really need to look at it.

The power dynamic is just fundamentally skewed. If we need more workers, we should bring them in as human beings, not just as people who are hidden somewhere, living in barracks, being abused and exploited, and then told to go home. They aren't just disposable.<sup>29</sup>

## NARRATOR

Wisit Kampilo, a farmer from Thailand recruited by the guest worker program to pick apples in the Pacific Northwest.

## WISIT KAMPILO

I want to work. I have to work. I am thousands of dollars in debt from flying to the U.S. I need to pay off my loan; I want to buy my own land; I want to send my sons to school. I can't go home without any money again.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## NARRATOR

Today, many of the gains César Chávez and the UFW made on behalf of farm workers have been eroded. In California, hourly wages of some farm workers, when adjusted for inflation, have fallen more than 50 percent since 1980.

## NARRATOR

A 2004 Labor Department survey found that illegal immigrants made up 53 percent of the U.S.'s 1.8 million farm workers.

## NARRATOR

This means that the future of the farm workers is inextricably linked to our ongoing immigration debate, which makes Chávez's words even more relevant today.<sup>31</sup>

## CHÁVEZ

If it could happen in the fields, it could happen anywhere -- in the cities, in the courts, in the city councils, in the state legislatures.<sup>32</sup>

## NARRATOR

What would Chávez say today?

Years before his death in 1993, Chávez was asked by a union member if he wanted to be remembered by statues and public memorials. He replied,

## CHÁVEZ

If you want to remember me, organize!

## NARRATOR

What do you say today?

## ALL

*(Raise picket signs, showing side with Cesar Chavez's photo)*

What will you do to remember César Chávez?

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<sup>31</sup> Raul Reyes, "Chávez's Hard-Fought Gains Are Eroding," *USA Today* March 31, 2006, 13A.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*