

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS
LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES**

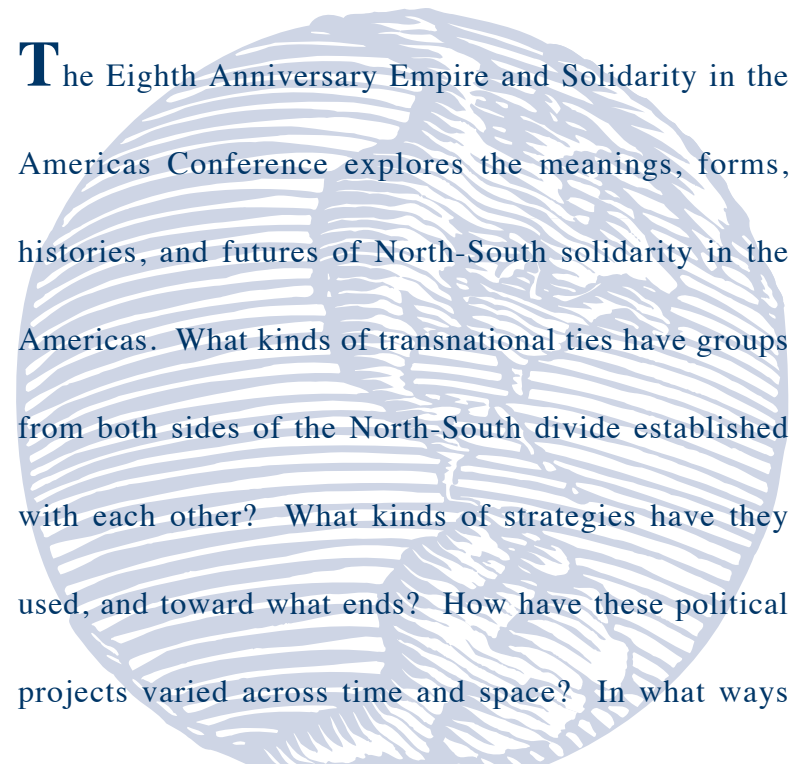


**EMPIRE AND SOLIDARITY
IN THE AMERICAS
CONFERENCE**

**International Center
Room 122**

October 16 & 17, 2015





The Eighth Anniversary Empire and Solidarity in the Americas Conference explores the meanings, forms, histories, and futures of North-South solidarity in the Americas. What kinds of transnational ties have groups from both sides of the North-South divide established with each other? What kinds of strategies have they used, and toward what ends? How have these political projects varied across time and space? In what ways have cross-border solidarities shaped and been shaped by imperial power?

The conference organizers, Steve Striffler (UNO, Latin American Studies), and Aviva Chomsky (Salem State, History), thank the University of New Orleans, Salem State University, and the Doris Zemurray Stone Chair in Latin American Studies for sponsoring this conference.

Friday, October 16th, 3:30 – 6:00 p.m.

**Session One:
TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND CORPORATE POWER**

CHALLENGING THE CORPORATION, MAKING THE STATE:
ACTIVIST NETWORKS IN LA GUAJIRA, COLOMBIA

Emma Banks, Vanderbilt University

Over the last thirty years, Cerrejón, the world's largest open pit coal mine, has violently displaced Afro-descendent, indigenous, and campesino communities in La Guajira, Colombia. Mining has dramatically restructured social relationships and territorial order in La Guajira, prompting communities in Cerrejón's impact zone to defend their rights to communal land, dignified work, and political participation. This paper explores the types of relationships and networks these communities have built in order to "scale-up" their claims from local territorial struggles to national and international debates about natural resource sovereignty, indigenous rights, and global warming.

This paper explores what political resources these communities have, how they build alliances via shared interests, and how their relationships with diverse actors have informed their political strategies. Taking a historical approach, this paper explores how shifting state policies and international norms that incorporate human rights, resettlement standards, and ethnic identity had changed communities' political vocabulary over the last thirty years. As part of my larger dissertation project on state formation, I will explore how solidarity networks both rely on the state as an important social referent and question the lack of state institutional support in the region. Via this study of La Guajira, I will illuminate how solidarity networks that challenge natural resource extraction projects generate alternative and complex ideas about state and corporate responsibility.

**SINTRACARBÓN: A COLOMBIAN COAL UNION
BETWEEN EMPIRE AND SOLIDARITIES**

Aviva Chomsky, Salem State University

Latin American extractive industry workers have been known throughout the twentieth century for their militancy. In Colombia, the legendary oil workers' union USO stood at the far left of politics, ideology, organizing, and organic links with armed revolutionary movements. When the country's new coal industry emerged in the 1980s, the coal union Sintracarbón drew on some of the same socio-historical sources.

Solidarity, for Sintracarbón, is multifaceted. The union was born in a complicated local, regional, national, and global context that has meant forming different types of alliances over time with organizations of varying goals and politics, while also elaborating and implementing a clear politics of its own. This paper, based on extensive interviews with the union's historic leaders, tries to untangle the ways that empire, solidarity, and politics shaped a radical Colombian union.

PREDICATE SENSORIA: CRUDE SUSPENSION AND TOXIC PROPOSITIONS

Suzana Sawyer, UC Davis

In February 2011, an Ecuadorian judge ruled against the Chevron Corporation in a longstanding lawsuit for environmental and health damages. The lawyers for the plaintiffs (30,000 non-indigenous and indigenous rainforest peoples) claimed that cancer pockets plagued the region where the corporation had produced petroleum for nearly 30 years, and that the cancers expressed were a consequence of the pollution generated by former oil operations. Central to the lawsuit and its ongoing appeal were (and still are) controversies over what constitutes plausible ways of reckoning the relationship between contamination and disrupted life forms. Both parties appealed to scientific expertise to found their case. However, conflicting toxicological knowledges produced divergent decipherings of the chemistry of hydrocarbons; and irreducible indeterminacy haunted an array of conflicting epidemiological studies.

Generating a notion of 'predicate sensoria,' this paper explores the chemical suspensions, the engineered sediments, and the embodied percipience of crude oil that proved consequential to the judicial rendering. It asks: in a place where the metrics of science—specific toxicological logics of calculation and epidemiological constructs of causality—offer scant traction, how can the relationship between crude oil and human and nonhuman bodies be made sensate and sensible. Specifically, I consider how the molecular function of hydrocarbons in liquids, the geophysics and engineering of industrial waste-pits, and bodily expression of disease became entangled to consequential effect in the lawsuit. I care about what intensities, proximities, and articulations—what chemistries, technologies, and compositions—produced compelling propositions on relations between hydrocarbons and deteriorating sentience.

Saturday, October 17th, 9:30 – 12:00 p.m.

Session Two:

**CITIZENSHIP AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM
IN THE UNITED STATES**

WALKING THE WALK: BLACK, WHITE AND LATINO CATHOLICS IN
THE CENTRAL AMERICAN SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT IN DALLAS, 1970-1986

Claudia Rueda, Tesam A&M - Corpus Christi

One night in mid-November 1983, a diverse group assembled at Holy Cross Catholic Church in south Dallas to welcome a Salvadoran family, the Martells, to the parish. A month before, the church had declared itself a sanctuary for Central Americans fleeing the U.S. funded civil wars in the region, and the Martells had arrived to accept their offer of shelter and work with them to publicize the conflicts in Central America. The Martells had left war-torn El Salvador for poverty-stricken Oak Cliff, one of the poorest areas of Dallas. There despite the devastation caused by white flight and urban neglect, they would find a diverse and welcoming community with a strong social justice inclination. This paper examines why black parishioners opened their doors to the refugees and how that decision reshaped their community. Using oral histories, church documents and other sources, I show how white, black and Latino activists in the heart of U.S. conservatism came together to protest social and economic exclusion not just at home but also abroad. I argue that their clergy's commitment to Liberation Theology engendered an activist religious agenda, which combined with the parishioners' personal experiences with and struggles against marginalization inspired solidarity with Central Americans.

SIN FRONTERAS POLITICS:
TRANSNATIONAL ARTICULATIONS OF LABOR STRUGGLES, UNIONS,
AND ACTIVISM, 1977

Myrna García, Indiana University

On May 1, 1977, International Workers' Day, Mexican activist Pepe Medina delivered a speech at an immigrant rights rally held in Chicago. He shared his vision of an international union of workers that would bring together Mexicans from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border to fight against global capitalism. This paper examines the political vision for the rights of undocumented workers expressed by activists of El Centro de Acción Social Autónoma-Hermandad General de Trabajadores [Center for Autonomous Social Action- General Brotherhood of Workers] or CASA, a Marxist-Leninist, immigrant rights organization co-founded in 1968 by Mexican American leader Bert Corona in Los Angeles. CASA activists drew on a "sin fronteras" [beyond borders] politics: a transnational imagining that brought ethnic Mexicans together, regardless of birthplace, generation, or citizenship status. Though undocumented workers in the United States rest outside a legal framework that has foreclosed their claims of rights, a sin fronteras politics broadened the scope of possibilities for better conditions. The inclusion of undocumented workers in protective measures in union organizing represented a transnational sensibility—one that was attentive to the global context that welcomed Mexicans and other Latinas/os as a cheapened labor force—but excluded them from social membership in the United States.

FINDING "HOME" AGAIN: MIXED-STATUS FAMILIES, RETURN MIGRANTS,
AND NEW DEPORTATION ACTIVISM ACROSS BORDERS

Almita Abigayl Miranda, Northwestern University

In recent years, U.S. mixed-status families have been placed in an impossible and precarious liminal situation as deportations under President Obama's administrations have reached an unprecedented high number, and families live under the constant threat of separation or forced relocation. But what happens to these families upon a family member's deportation? In this paper, I draw from long-term ethnographic research in the U.S. and in Mexico and follow cases of Mexican mixed-status families, as they return to rural communities of origin in central Mexico. I point to the unique challenges Mexican men, women, and U.S.-born children face during their resettlement process to a place they no longer consider home, as well as to examples of new local and transnational coalition-building assisting migrants to place demands on both the Mexican and U.S. nation-states. In Zacatecas, for instance, an important partnership is being formed among the Catholic Church, hometown associations (HTAs), and the academy to lobby Mexican government officials to create special programs for the successful labor and social reintegration of return migrants and their families. At the border cities of Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, immigrant rights organizations, such as LULAC and Chicago's Centro Sin Fronteras, are collaborating with Mexican civic groups to support cases of deportees with U.S. family members. By focusing on these cases of mixed-status families, return migrants, and immigrant rights activists, I explore broader questions of state power and liminal subject formations, state legal structures and grassroots organizing, and the new ways in which citizenship and "illegality" are being reconfigured within migrant kin and transnational networks in the U.S. and in Mexico.

Saturday, October 17th, 12:45– 3:00

Session Three:

SOLIDARITY, EXPLOITATION, AND IMMIGRANT WORKERS

DAIRY DANGERS AND POWER DYNAMICS
Margaret Gray, Adelphi University

Dairy farming is an industry that gives consumers little pause to consider workers since it prides itself on the wholesomeness of its products and romanticizes the small, family farm. Yet between 2007 and 2012, there were 34 deaths on dairy farms in New York State, which has an estimated workforce of 2,600. Farmworkers, with the help of labor advocates, organized and petitioned the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to institute heightened enforcement on dairy farms. Descriptive and exploratory in nature, this case study examines the dangers of dairy, OSHA's heightened enforcement, and dairy worker organizing. Drawing on government data, dairy industry materials, and interviews with farmworkers and their advocates, this paper explores the power dynamics at play among workers, farmers, advocates, and politicians. In addition, the paper argues that smaller farms—the ones glorified by alternative food movement—are more dangerous for dairy workers than larger ones.

MAKING AND UNMAKING CLASS SOLIDARITY AMONG CAPTIVE LABORERS
IN THE US SOUTH: COMPARING THE APPROACHES
OF FLOC, CIW, AND THE NEW ORLEANS WORKER CENTER
Tristan Call, Vanderbilt University

Employers seeking new sources of flexibility and profit have created multiple evolving categories of captive labor, including guestworkers on fixed temporary contracts, undocumented workers, and native-born workers with felony records. Each of these categories of worker is recruited and confined in different ways, and are often forced into competition with one another for access to increasingly degraded low-wage jobs in cleaning, agriculture, meatpacking, etc. The multiple processes of dispossession and displacement that force workers from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds together, can thus also isolate and divide workers from each other. I explore three emerging approaches used by US-based internationalist labor activists to re-make working-class solidarity after years of breakdown and fragmentation: the expanding Fair Food Program developed by mostly undocumented farmworkers in Florida's Coalition of Immokalee Workers; the AFL-CIO backed organizing drive of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in three mid-South states, which supports expanding the guestworker program; and the nationwide-right-to-organize campaigns of the New Orleans-based National Guestworker Alliance, which considers the guestworker program an institutionalized form of captive labor trafficking. These different approaches suggest the dilemmas facing US-based labor activists seeking to re-make working-class solidarity across borders and across different categories of criminalized workers within the United States.



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