

Videos with a Conscience

The curriculum materials in *The Line Between Us* attempt to engage students in the social dynamics surrounding border and immigration issues, and in the lives of the people affected by these issues. Videos and DVDs can be another way to trigger students' social imaginations. Those included below are ones that I either have used with my students or would consider using. Those marked with an asterisk are available from www.teachingforchange.org (800-763-9131), the best U.S. source of social justice teaching materials.

BORDER/IMMIGRATION ISSUES

**Death on a Friendly Border*

Rachel Antell. 2001. 26 min.

The death in *Death on a Friendly Border* is Yolanda Gonzalez-Martínez's — hers and thousands of others who could not survive the increasingly perilous journey crossing from Mexico to the United States. Yolanda lived with her young child, Elizama, in the village of San Pedro Chayuco, in the southern Mexico state of Oaxaca. She died in the desert attempting to join her husband living in the United States. Miraculously, Elizama lived. It's Yolanda's personal story that helps humanize the thousands of border deaths. Yolanda's mother, now raising Elizama, movingly tells the story.

The video also introduces us to migrants at the Casa del Migrante shelter in Tijuana, border justice activists with the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego, and a U.S. Border Patrol agent. In different ways, all reveal an increasingly militarized Mexico-U.S. frontier.

I've used this video with my students and found it helpful because it offers compelling images of the border and a quick but powerful overview of the effects of U.S. immigration policy. It's less analytically ambitious than, say, *New World Border*, in that it does not discuss the free market reforms that continue to create huge numbers of economic refugees. It offers no fur-

ther explanation than migrants complaining about a "lack of work, lack of jobs," and farmers lamenting low prices for crops. Nor does the video highlight resistance to the current state of affairs, other than a family on the U.S. side of the border that offers humanitarian aid to migrants, creating water stations in the desert. Despite its limits, this is an excellent classroom resource.

New World Border

Casey Peek. Peek Media, 2001. 28 min.

New World Border is a short, but big-picture look at the causes and consequences of immigration from Mexico to the United States. The video discusses the economic roots of migration, the militarization of the border, and the growing anti-immigrant hysteria in the United States — "Mestizos, go back to the swamps and jungles of your country!" shouts one demonstrator in the video — and ties these together in a way that helps teachers think about how we might frame border and immigration issues in class. As Cathi Tactaquin of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights comments in one segment, there is a "connection between globalization policies and immigration;" hence immigration is not purely a domestic issue but needs to be approached in a global context. *New World Border* also exposes how the media have conflated illegal immigration with drug smuggling, legitimating the war on immigrants as part of the war on drugs. In the post-9/11 era, the drug threat has been largely replaced by the terrorist threat, but both justify the criminalization of immigrants.

Paradoxically, the video's strength in bringing in so many dimensions of the border issue is also its weakness as a classroom resource. For example, it asserts that "free trade integration" and NAFTA and GATT are responsible for throwing Mexican farmers off the land. We're told that, "NAFTA changed the Mexican constitution so agribusiness could buy up land." This is all crucial background for understanding the exodus of poor farmers to the United States. But it simply goes by too quickly for students to grasp the relationship between economic policy and immigration. This is complicated

stuff, and what's here is too thin either to educate or convince.

Still, as an overview that touches so many vital aspects of the border/immigration issue, this is a very helpful resource.

Everyone Their Grain of Sand

Beth Bird. *Women Make Movies*, 2004. 87 min.

Years ago, poor people moved onto the dusty hill-sides east of Tijuana and established the community of Maclovio Rojas. They paid for the land, but never received formal title. Since then, as Tijuana inexorably sprawled eastward, the Maclovio real estate became more desirable. The Baja government sought to evict this community and set its sights on "development." *Everyone Their Grain of Sand* tells the story of Maclovio residents' difficult but inspiring struggle for land and dignity. The government refuses permission to build a school; the community builds it anyway. The government refuses to pay the teachers; the community organizes to demand full recognition for the school and that teachers be paid. The government refuses to connect electricity or water; the community strings its own power lines and taps into the local aqueduct. The community's leaders are imprisoned or driven underground; the community protests and rallies for charges to be dropped.

At 87 minutes, the video may be too long for most high school classes, although it offers rich teaching possibilities. Producer/director Beth Bird presents the kind of intimate portrait of daily life that a filmmaker can offer only after spending long hours gaining people's trust. Through her camera, we're in people's homes, in their meetings, with them visiting loved ones in prison, watching parents care for their children. It's spontaneous and authentic.

As one resident explains, "I'm active here — this is a community of resistance, and when you're involved,

you come to love your community." The entire video brings these words to life.

Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos

Saul Landau and Sonia Angulo. *Cinema Guild*, 2000. 55 min.

The "two Mexicos" referred to in the title are the countryside and the industrial border zones, home to numerous maquiladoras. Although the video's portrait of maquiladora-centered urban life is much fuller than its depiction of rural life, this is an important resource. As one observer points out, the maquila boom may represent economic growth, but it is not genuine development. Using as a case study Ciudad Juárez, just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas, the video demonstrates

how maquilas cheat workers out of wages, undermine unions, pollute surrounding neighborhoods, offer miserable health and safety conditions, and abuse the largely female labor force. Interviews with workers offer glimpses into the intimate humiliations they confront. One woman maquila worker says that factory managers fire any worker who becomes pregnant; they require women to take pregnancy tests and go so far as to demand to see their sanitary napkins to make sure they are menstruating.

Another startling feature of the video is its investigation into the huge number of disappearances and murders of poor women in Juárez. A crime wave that might be portrayed as horrifying but inexplicable by the

mainstream media is here given economic and social context. Be aware that there is an especially gruesome scene of a murdered young woman that could upset some students. But this segment is not unrelievedly grim. The video features a large and inspiring demonstration of hundreds of women waving white handkerchiefs, chanting "Ni una mas!" (Not one more!)

Although we don't learn about conditions in the countryside in as much depth as we learn about urban



BETH BIRD

From *Everyone Their Grain of Sand*: Maclovio Rojas community leader Hortensia Hernández, who later went into hiding, addressing community members before a rally to petition for running water.

life, there are effective scenes of peasants in Chiapas resisting the militarization of their lands, and interview segments with the Zapatista leader, Subcomandante Marcos.

Maquiladoras depend on a ready supply of desperate people willing to trade their freedom and sometimes their health for a regular, if inadequate, wage. This video begins to ask why and to locate sweatshops in a broader process of globalization.

The Ties That Bind

Maryknoll, 1996. 56 min.

Divided into three sections, the first of these is too narrator- and interview-dense for most students. But part two, “Just Between Us,” and part three, “The Common Bond,” are more accessible. Through the story of two women who emigrated from Mexico to the United States, “Just Between Us” humanizes the issue of “illegal” immigration. It points out the contradiction between the rhetoric of openness and so-called free trade on the one hand and the militarization of the border on the other. But it does this concretely, through story.

The final part, “The Common Bond,” features the inspiring story of Carmen Anaya, a feisty former teacher from Monterrey, Mexico, who immigrated to the United States and worked in the fields. Anaya became a community organizer and leader of Valley Interfaith, a multi-ethnic, church-community alliance that boasts membership of 60,000 families in the Rio Grande Valley. Through a translator, Anaya narrates a story that recalls the “conductors” on the Underground Railroad of an earlier era:

It was two in the morning. How can I forget it? The doorbell rang and I saw all these men. “What’s the matter?” I asked. They were with Immigration. “Open the door,” they said. “Are you Carmen Anaya?” “Sure. How can I help you?” I said. “We want you to go open the church.” I asked them, “Why? Do you want to pray?” They said, “We’re not joking around. We’ve been told that you’re hiding many undocumented persons in there.” I said to them, “I will never open that door if you’re going there with any other intention than to pray. So you do whatever you want with me. But I’m not opening that door.” And I didn’t. — We suffered a lot. Because not everyone agreed with us, but we knew that God agreed with us.

Although it includes the use of Mexican story-songs to effectively illustrate points, the video also features an unfortunate soundtrack with soap-opera-like music that will annoy some viewers, matched by a narration that occasionally dips into the well of God-family-country boilerplate. *The Ties That Bind* is big-hearted but lacks a sustained analysis about why people emigrate

from Mexico and what economic and political changes would address the Mexican economic crisis — a crisis that the video largely takes for granted.

Free Trade in Mexico

Segment from *TV Nation*, Vol. One. Michael Moore, 1994. Approx. 15 min. (Available in some video stores and from amazon.com.)

Michael Moore spoofs the era of free trade in this amusing segment of his now-defunct NBC show, *TV Nation*. He travels to Reynoso, Mexico, to pretend to explore the economic benefits of relocating TV production there. In Reynoso, he visits a Whirlpool factory that produces washing machine parts formerly made in Indiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. The workers there make 75 cents an hour, and don’t have Whirlpool machines of their own, because, as the manager tells Moore, “One of the problems is that a lot of the folks don’t have plumbed-in water.” Moore’s Reynoso tour guide shows off life across the border in McAllen, Texas — home to mansions and 20 golf courses — where U.S. managers of Mexican factories can enjoy the quality of life they are accustomed to. The episode is a lighthearted vehicle for Moore to drive home his point that in practice, free trade means freedom for corporations to export jobs to low-wage havens with lax enforcement of environmental protections. However, Mexican workers are as silent in Moore’s video as they might have been were this episode produced by a U.S. corporation.

IMMIGRANT WORK AND LIFE

***Viva la Causa! 500 Years of Chicano History**

Elizabeth Martínez and Doug Norberg. Southwest Organizing Project, 1995. Two parts, 30 min. each.

This is the only video I’m aware of that offers a panoramic history of the Chicano people, stretching from the Spanish invasion to the mid-1990s. “All those faces in the past haunt us,” offers the narrator. With 500 years of history to cover in an hour, the video is not able to pause very long on any one episode. *Viva La Causa*’s strength is that it offers a compelling framework of *la raza*’s resistance to oppression. It’s hard to overestimate the enormity of injustice: from the theft of huge swaths of Mexico by the United States after its war with Mexico, to the lynchings of Mexicans in California after the war, to the deportations of Mexicans in the 1930s, to attacks on farmworkers in the 1960s. But this profoundly hopeful video concentrates at least as much on resistance as it does on oppression, surfacing seemingly countless episodes of activism. As the narrator offers late in the second half of the video: “The farmworkers taught us a valuable lesson: Progress is made when people mobilize,

organize, and demand change; it doesn't come from the goodwill of the government or the upper classes, but from the strength of the people — *la gente*."

Viva La Causa is partisan, even polemical, and students who are accustomed to the lifeless narratorspeak of so many school documentaries may find this jarring. In an important respect, this video is as much an artifact of Chicano struggle as it is a chronicle of it.

***Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary**

Laura Angelica Simón. 1996. 53 min. (Broadcast on the PBS series *POV*, and available in some lending libraries. Also available from Teaching for Change.)

On the day that California voters approved Proposition 187 denying "illegal" immigrants public education and access to health care, one of Laura Angelica Simón's students asked her if she was now a "cop" and was going to kick them out of school. *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* is Simón's first-person look at the emotional pain caused by Proposition 187 in one California school: hers. Hoover is the largest elementary school in Los Angeles, enrolling 2,700 kids, 90 percent of them from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The video "stars" Mayra, a precocious Salvadoran fifth grader who takes us on a tour of the school and invites us into her home — a one-room apartment across from crime-plagued MacArthur Park that she shares with her mother, uncle, and sister. Mayra and other students we meet represent living criticisms of the dehumanizing term "illegal alien," and their humor and intelligence offer viewers an opportunity to rethink lingering stereotypes. But the video is not content to confront anti-immigrant attitudes simply by introducing us to sweet kids. We also meet Dianne Lee, a seven-year teaching veteran whose grandparents immigrated from Russia; Carmen Arcote, a conservative Mexican-American parent who voted for 187; and Mr. Peakmeyer, the Anglo librarian who engages Hoover students in an impromptu debate about the causes of the neighborhood's decline, and with help from these astute youngsters trips over his own contradictions.

My students enjoyed this personal video essay about immigration issues, and found lots to talk and write about. However, the video can't stand on its own. Although early on, Simón, the narrator, labels the students "economic and political refugees," that's the only hint of the forces that propel so many Latinos to move north. It was beyond the video's scope, but unless students explore the broader economic factors hurting poor countries, they won't be able to think deeply about the wrongheadedness of anti-immigrant crusades. Without this broader context, students may be left sympathetic to immigrants' plights but unaware of how economic and political choices made here create social disloca-

tions throughout Latin America. Limitations notwithstanding, the video is provocative and useful.

Echando Raices/Taking Root

Rachael Kamel/JT Takagi. American Friends Service Committee, 2002. 60 min. (Each videotape contains a Spanish and English version.)

Filled with personal and poignant stories, *Echando Raices/Taking Root* focuses on the struggles of immigrants in different U.S. communities in California, Texas, and Iowa. Many of those interviewed are themselves labor or community organizers, so a hopeful, activist current runs through each of the three episodes, which explore why people came to the United States, their process of adjustment, day laborer and undocumented rights, and tensions between immigrants and longtime residents.

A Mexican immigrant in the first episode describes how Latina and Hmong women have begun to meet together: "There are so many different people from different places living here, but I never stopped to think about why they came, or if their problems were similar to ours or about their way of thinking or living. ... And all of us are fighting for a better future." But a Houston day laborer also describes the excruciating isolation, with his wife and five children at home in Mexico: "We're always alone. We see each other once in a while — but what we had as husband and wife, that's all over now. Now we look at each other like a couple of strangers. ... And it's all because of the economy. It's destroying our families."

The video's final episode focuses on Perry, Iowa, where a shutdown at a well-paying Oscar Mayer meat-packing plant throws over 800 people out of work. In comes another company, IBP (a subsidiary of the Tyson Foods giant), which starts workers at \$6.50 an hour, for dangerous and difficult work. And, surprise, IBP recruits immigrant workers, mostly from Mexico, to fill these jobs. The video lays out the community tensions without trying to suggest simplistic solutions.

A teaching guide can be downloaded at www.afsc.org/takingroot/.

***Bus Riders Union**

Haskell Wexler. The Strategy Center, 2000. 86 min.

In this extraordinary video, Academy Award-winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler records the several-year-long struggle of the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union (BRU) to win better service and to challenge the race and class bias in city spending priorities. At 86 minutes, it's long for classroom use and drags in a few places for many high school students; but what a rich documentary this is. At the outset, Kikanza Ramsey, a young BRU

organizer, explains that the union is “a political, social experiment to see if we can build a multiracial, bilingual, gender-balanced mass movement of working class people that is willing to fight for a set of demands that challenges corporate capital.” And this is not mere rhetoric. The remainder of the video brings her words to life, revealing the twists and turns, highs and lows of this struggle as seen through the eyes of participants. We desperately need more classroom resources like this one. First, because in many respects the union is victorious; in the end they win lots more buses — and less polluting ones, at that — to ease overcrowding for their mostly immigrant, poor, people of color, working-class constituency. And students need to learn that struggle matters. But it’s how the BRU organizes — especially across lines of race, nationality, and language; with humor; with song; with determination; with an eye on the bigger systemic picture — that will leave a lasting impression. Hope is scarce in some of these “videos with a conscience;” in *Bus Riders Union* it plays a starring role.

*Salt of the Earth

Herbert Biberman. 1954. 94 min.

Set in “Zintown, N.M.,” *Salt of the Earth* uses a combination of actors and nonprofessional community people to tell a great story. Sparked by a mine accident, the workers, mostly Mexican Americans, go on strike. Safety is the issue, but is inextricably linked with racial discrimination as Anglo miners work in pairs, while Mexican Americans are forced to work alone. The film consistently highlights the racial dimension to the class struggle. As one of the white managers says about the workers: “They’re like children in many ways. Sometimes you have to humor them. Sometimes you have to spank them. And sometimes you have to take their food away.” And the film also addresses racism within the union. The white organizer from the international union is committed to the workers’ cause and to union democracy, but his paternalism still creeps in. He is criticized

by one of the workers, Ramon Quintero: “When you figure everything the rank and file’s to do down to the last detail, you don’t give us anything to think about. Are you afraid we’re too lazy to take initiative?”

This is especially a feminist story, as women insist that their issues for indoor plumbing and hot water in the company-owned housing be included as a demand of the all-male union. This is the women’s story at least as much as the men’s, and they continue to push for equality the more they participate in strike activities. This struggle comes to a head as Esperanza confronts her husband, Ramon, about his determination to keep her in her place:

Have you learned nothing from this strike? Why are you afraid to have me at your side? Do you still think you can have dignity only if I have none? ... Do you feel better having someone lower than you?

Whose neck shall I stand on to make me feel superior? ... I want to rise and push everything up as I go.

As effectively as any other film in my curriculum, *Salt of the Earth* celebrates the possibility of people being able to create a very different, very much better society through solidarity and collective action.

When I first showed *Salt of the Earth* a number of years ago, I worried that students would be put off by a black and white film that had quite a bit of amateurish acting and melodramatic music. I was wrong. What the film lacks in polish it more than makes up for in substance. And most students recognize that. (See S. J. Childs’ excellent article on teaching with *Salt of the Earth*, “Resistance and Hope,” www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/16_04/Hope164.shtml.)

Bread and Roses

Ken Loach. Lions Gate Films, 2001. 106 min. (Rated R for some sexual references and lots of obscene language. Available at video stores.)

This is the fictionalized account of episodes in the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles. The film



A scene from *Salt of the Earth*.

opens with Maya's harrowing illegal entrance into the United States from Mexico and follows her travails as she secures a cleaning job in a large downtown office building. Perez, the on-site manager for the cleaning contractor, keeps workers in line through incessant haranguing. Maya bristles at this treatment, and is receptive to overtures from the cocky white union organizer, Sam, but her sister Rosa has learned hard lessons in self-preservation and wants no part of a risky union struggle, especially one led by this guy. "We, we, when was the last time you got a cleaning job?" she demands of Sam early in the film.

The best scenes in *Bread and Roses* are the tense conversations between workers about whether organizing is worth the risk. Maya's would-be boyfriend, Ruben, has a law school scholarship waiting, if only he plays it safe and keeps his job. Why would Maya want to endanger her job, Ruben wants to know. She snaps back:

What was it that you said when they fired Teresa [an older woman who worked with them cleaning the office building]? "She looks like my mother." That's why I'm doing it. I'm doing it because my sister has been working 16 hours a day since she got here. Because her husband can't pay for the hospital bills. He doesn't have medical insurance. I'm doing it because I have to give Perez two months of my salary and I have to beg him for a job. I'm doing it because we feed those bastards, we wipe their asses, we do everything for them. We raise their children, and they still look right through us.

Bread and Roses is engaging start to finish and can generate lots of excellent writing and discussion — about treatment of immigrant workers, tensions between immigrant and nonimmigrant workers, risks and benefits of organizing, and many others. But it's not without its flaws. This is supposed to be a struggle to reclaim workers' lost dignity, but the organizer, not the workers, decides every union tactic. They may be in meetings together, but Sam does virtually all the talking — deciding every move, making pronouncements about how he is going to "personally embarrass" the new part-owners of the office building. (Someone in *Bread and Roses* should have criticized him the way the Ramon criticized the organizer in *Salt of the Earth*, above.) And the romance between Sam and Maya was a needless and inappropriate — if predictable — insertion by writer/director Ken Loach. But these are not fatal flaws, and this is a valuable film.

By the way, Loach is a prolific filmmaker, underappreciated in the United States. Two of his films that would make valuable additions to a global studies curriculum are *Hidden Agenda*, about British repression in Northern Ireland, and *Land and Freedom*, about the Spanish Civil War.

The Fight in the Fields: César Chávez and the Farmworker Struggle

Ray Telles and Rick Tejada-Flores. Paradigm Productions, 1997. 116 min.

This is an excellent film about the life of César Chávez and the history of Mexican-American farmworkers — the best I've seen. *The Fight in the Fields* begins in the California fields in the 1860s and closes with the death of Chávez in 1993. In between is a solid history of the heroic farmworker movement, with a keen eye for the multiracial solidarity that weaves through the long struggle: Mexicans and Okies join forces in the 1930s, Filipinos and Mexicans later; an Arab-American striker was the first person killed in the grape strikes of the late 1960s.

Yes, it's largely a talking head documentary — at times, narrator-heavy. Yes, it's long. And, yes, some students may find it boring. But it's a fine film, rich in details, told mostly from the point of view of the organizers and farmworkers who made the history.

Although later sections on the grape and lettuce boycotts could be excerpted for use in class, the film draws its power from the panoramic view it offers of the farmworker struggle.

¡Aumento Ya! (A Raise Now!)

Tom Chamberlin/PCUN (Pinos y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), 1996. 50 min. (In English, some Spanish subtitles.)

"They look at us as if we're their tractor," says one farmworker organizer, describing the white growers' attitudes about their largely Mexican workforce. *¡Aumento Ya!* is the dramatic story of Oregon farmworkers' confrontation with those discriminatory attitudes, and the miserable working and living conditions that accompany them.

The video, presented as the personal narrative of a woman who came to volunteer with the farmworkers union, can be roughly divided into two parts: the first, a short overview of farmworker conditions in Oregon and the farmworkers union Pinos y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN); the second, the story of the strikes held over the summer of 1995 by workers in the strawberry fields. This is not a highly polished video, but its story is compelling, and my students have found *¡Aumento Ya!* engaging and moving. It's one of those "small" videos that allow students to encounter social forces as they manifest themselves in real people's lives.

Workers begin with the simple demand to be paid 17 cents a pound for strawberries rather than the 10 to 12 cents the growers are paying. Beginning with the first walkout from the fields, the video takes us day by

day through the strike. A few days into the strike, as workers gain confidence, they add demands about their housing — shacks of blue plastic walls that sleep six or more. Workers call for separate showers for men and women, heat in the cabins, leaking roofs to be fixed, cleaning equipment made available, locks on doors, one telephone for the camp. For my students, the modesty of these demands underscored the wretchedness of farmworkers' living conditions.

It's not easy to find teaching materials that show ordinary people taking action to better their lives. *¡Aumento Ya!* is inspiring without being romantic or overstating workers' accomplishments.

Bring some strawberries to class, ask students to write whatever comes to mind about the berries, and then show *¡Aumento Ya!* for a different point of view (see p. 130 in *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*).

MEXICO POLITICS/ECONOMY/CULTURE

*Granito de Arena (Grain of Sand)

Jill Freidberg. Corrugated Films, 2005. 60 min.

This is an ambitious and wonderful video. Freidberg — who also made *This Is What Democracy Looks Like*, about the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle — tackles the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on Mexican education, the history of teachers organizing in Mexico, government and union repression, reform movements within the teachers union and finally reform movements within the reform movements. Without lots of background, this will be tough going for

most high school students. But for teachers considering how our work and lives here connect to teachers' work and lives in Mexico, *Granito de Arena* is unparalleled. As Freidberg chronicles increased privatization, standardized testing, cuts in funding, and curriculum standardization, it's hard to escape the creepy feeling that here and in Mexico all of us are part of the same scheme to turn education into "human capital" development, in the words of Mexican President Vicente Fox.

Freidberg opens with stunning footage of government attacks on a rural teachers college in the state of Chiapas. As one speaker says at a later rally in Mexico City, "All [the rich and the government] want is for schools to prepare a workforce that they can exploit in sweatshops." The video layers interviews with scenes of teacher and community resistance, resulting in a portrait both scary and inspirational.

Toward the end of the video, Eduardo Galeano suggests why, in the era of aggressive global capitalism, teachers of conscience must not merely be good classroom practitioners, but also social activists:

There is an old proverb that says it's better to teach someone to fish than to give them fish. But what if they sell the river or what if they poison the river? And what good is it to know how to fish if the owner of the river doesn't let us fish? In other words, education is unavoidably, fatally linked to all other aspects of life.

Granito de Arena concludes with activists calling for a "globalization of solidarity" and for the "radicalization" of the teaching profession. Capping a video where we meet so many dedicated teacher-activists but are also confronted with such relentless attacks on public schools, these calls sound more like common sense than rhetoric. As Canadian activist Maude Barlow wonders about today's teachers: "If they don't fight for public education, who will?"

Trading Democracy

Bill Moyers. PBS, 2002. Approx. 60 min.

Bill Moyers calls NAFTA's Chapter 11 provisions "an end-run around the Constitution." Chapter 11 is the science-fiction-like piece of NAFTA that allows corporations to sue governments, before secret trade tribunals, if they believe that a government has taken some action that threatens a corporation's investment. *Trading Democracy* features several Chapter 11 cases, including Metalclad's complaint against Mexico. In 1993, Metalclad bought an abandoned toxic waste dump near the village of Guadalcazar, in the state of San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Metalclad had no experience operating toxic dumps, and the community, suffering high rates of cancer, demanded that before the dump could be reopened it should be cleaned up. Metalclad refused, claiming it



JORGE ACEVEDO

From *Granito de Arena*: Teachers march more than 1,000 kilometers from Oaxaca to Mexico City, 1985.

SLAM POETRY

If you've ever been to a poetry slam or watched HBO's *Def Poetry Jam*, then you know what an extraordinary medium this is. Paul Flores and Amalia Ortiz, both of whom have appeared on *Def Poetry Jam*, deliver wrenching performances of poems that can leave an indelible impression on students, and serve as prompts for students' own writing.

Paul Flores's "Brown Dreams" tells a "true story about a brown dream, sinking to the bottom of the Tigris-Euphrates." The dream is U.S. citizenship. A young man is convinced by an army recruiter at his high school to join the military in order to gain U.S. citizenship when he receives his honorable discharge. He is sent to Iraq, where he drowns in a tank accident: "Now his soul is an ancestor in the Euphrates. Chicano blood mixing with Arab soil returning to the garden of Eden by way of the U.S. Army."

On most of our Rethinking Schools–Global Exchange trips to the border, we have met with Fernando Suarez del Solar in San Diego, whose son Jesús, was the fifth U.S. death in Iraq. As Suarez del Solar has told us, a similar promise was made to his son, who had been convinced by a recruiter that for someone born in Mexico, the military would be his only route to a hoped-for career with the Drug Enforcement Agency. Jesús stepped on unexploded ordnance dropped by U.S. forces, most likely a cluster bomb.

As a Mexican-American woman, Amalia Ortiz is haunted by the nearby murders of women in Juárez "who all look like me. I am a dead ringer for an army of the dead." Since 1993, at least 350 women have been murdered in Juárez. Ortiz lives on the "safe" side of the border:

safe
yet not quite out of earshot of distant cries
of families searching ditches and roadsides
bearing snapshot after snapshot
...
I am a symbol of those who survive
mouth open in defiance of their silence
spared by a line in the sand
drawn between their grandfather
and mine

Flores and Ortiz deliver their poems with passion and conviction. Both are just a few minutes long and can be watched online. "Brown Dreams" is at http://poetrytelevision.com/ptvmembers/paul_video_1.html. "Women of Juárez" is at www.amaliaortiz.com. Click on Poetry. Ortiz's web links offer a long list of articles about the Juárez killings. (Also see p. 111 for the complete poem.)

had a permit from the national government to reopen the site. But it had no permission from the state government or from the local community. Denied the "right" to profit from its investment, Metalclad turned to the U.S. embassy to try to bully Mexico into allowing the reopening of the dump. According to the governor of San Luis Potosí, the U.S. ambassador threatened to put his state on an investment blacklist unless the governor relented and allowed the dump to be opened. When he refused and had the region declared a protected ecological zone, Metalclad took its complaint to a NAFTA tribunal.

Trading Democracy deals only with this especially egregious component of the NAFTA treaty, so it offers no discussion of the many other devastating consequences of NAFTA. Nonetheless this is a fine classroom resource. I've used the entire video in class, but at an hour, it may be more Chapter 11 than you have time for. Each segment in the video could be used separately — and the Metalclad piece is an especially accessible and engaging segment. One option would be to show both

the first segment, on the Methanex corporation's challenge to California environmental regulations, and the second, on Metalclad. Examining the Methanex case, in which a Canadian corporation targeted California state environmental legislation, allows students to see that for corporations Chapter 11 is an equal opportunity weapon. A complete transcript of the video can be found at www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_tdfull.html. Documents of the secret Metalclad tribunal have been posted at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB65/index.html.

Zapatista

Big Noise Films, 1998. 54 min.

"In all the world there are rich and there are poor. In all the world there is injustice and exploitation. This is what we want to end. We want democracy, justice, and liberty. These are our demands." This is the simple, startling, and radical vision articulated by one Zapatista soldier in this video. The strength of *Zapatista*, about

the Chiapas-based indigenous guerrilla army and movement, is the eloquence the video assembles. It strings together one powerful, poetic quotation after another. The insights of Subcomandante Marcos, Noam Chomsky, Medea Benjamin, Blase Bonpane, Zack de la Rocha (Rage Against the Machine), and many lesser-known peasants, soldiers, and global justice activists are layered over a hip musical soundtrack and some stunning video clips, culminating in a very sympathetic examination of the Zapatista movement.

But this is not great storytelling and we learn very little about people's lives in Chiapas. This limits the video's usefulness as a classroom resource. If students know lots already about the Zapatista uprising and the conditions in Chiapas that fueled the rebellion, this might be a helpful supplement. But we see so little of ordinary people's lives that, by itself, *Zapatista* is unlikely to hold students' interest or to help them grasp what animates the struggle there.

***The Sixth Sun**

Saul Landau. Cinema Guild, 1996. 56 min.

Part guerrilla leader, part pop icon, Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos explains a key moment from 1986 in their struggle: "We changed from teachers to students, meaning we didn't enter the communities to teach what a revolution is, but rather to learn what a social movement is." *The Sixth Sun* is a beautifully filmed and mostly captivating video about the Zapatistas and their relationship to the indigenous communities in Chiapas that they serve. It's an effective visual introduction to the land, people, and struggles of this, the poorest state in Mexico.

I wanted the film to slow down and spend more time in just one village, and explore the intimate meaning of "free trade" and the Mexican government's trashing of Article 27, collective land rights, and land reform — and how these macro-policies relate to people's allegiance

to the Zapatistas. *Sixth Sun* lists the socioeconomic underpinnings of the revolt, but does not really explore them in much depth. Still, the video offers an unprecedented look at the period before and just after the Jan. 1, 1994, uprising.

Landau saves his most stunning visual for the conclusion, as a determined indigenous community of mostly women and children turns back a heavily armed contingent of the Mexican army. This spirited encounter serves as a hopeful people-power metaphor. *The Sixth Sun* is a resource that could nicely complement the NAFTA role play (p. 63).

VIDEO/DVD DISTRIBUTORS

*All starred videos above are available from the **Teaching for Change** catalog, 800-763-9131 or www.teachingforchange.org. Distributors of the videos or DVDs not available from Teaching for Change:

Big Noise Films

www.bignoisefilms.com

Cinema Guild

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