



Central American Migration to Mexico and the United States

January 30–31, 2020

UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

Room 2355

Message from the Organizers



Central American migration to Mexico and the United States has attracted significant media and political attention in recent years. These migrants, often portrayed as asylum seekers at the border, are forced into overcrowded and inhumane conditions in detention centers throughout both countries. This narrative suggests that they are newcomers and outsiders. However, Central Americans have been migrating through this region and, especially, settling in the United States for at least a century. They have had an enduring presence, establishing families and weaving themselves into the social and economic fabric of their new communities.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Hondurans who worked for US corporate growers began arriving in New Orleans, where bananas and other imported fruit from Central America entered the United States. Shortly thereafter, Salvadoran and Nicaraguan coffee producers began to settle in San Francisco, which was the primary processing center for Central American coffee. Later, during and after World War II, labor-scarce shipbuilders and other wartime industries recruited more Central American laborers. Southern Mexico also has a long history as a destination for Guatemalans who arrive as refugees and find work on coffee plantations. And cataclysmic changes in the Central American region—the result of civil wars and military campaigns in the last quarter of the twentieth century—have propelled the largest migratory flows from the region.

Central American migration to Mexico and the United States is not new. What is new is the large scale we see today, the legal and policy conditions under which it is taking place, and the attention it has received from politicians and the media. While addressing the urgency of the present moment, this conference also seeks to shed light on the presence of Central Americans in Mexico and the United States over a longer historical period. Panelists will underscore Central Americans' contributions by focusing on key aspects of these migratory flows, including the variety of family formations and their integration into local communities; migrants' participation in social, economic, and political spheres; and migrants' steadfast work as organizers to create change in their communities.

Leisy Abrego

Rubén Hernández-León

Cecilia Menjívar



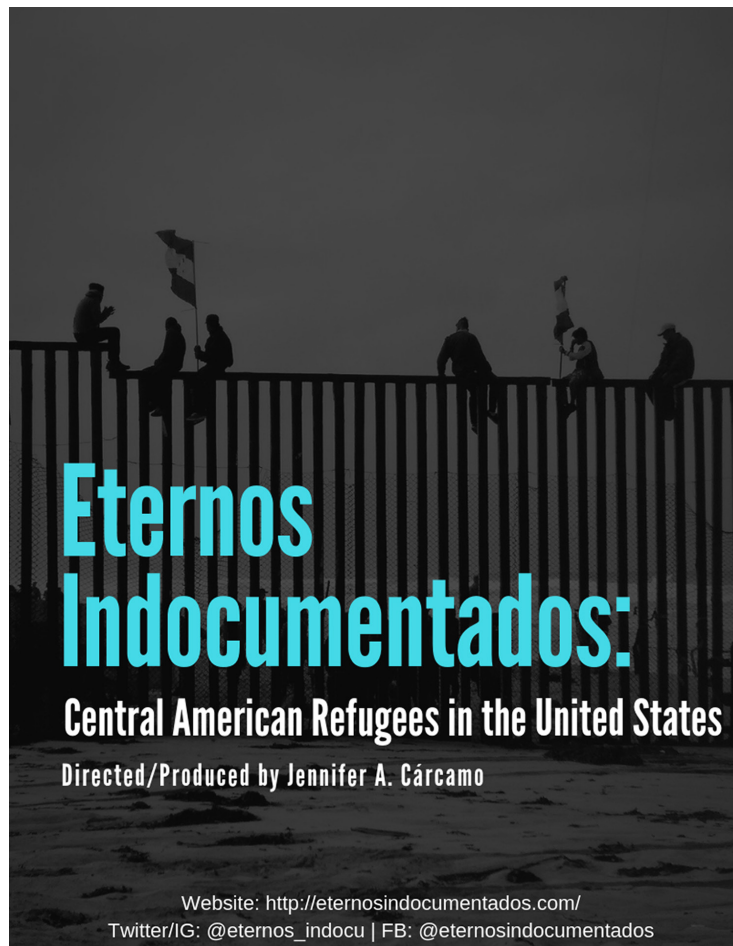
Program



Thursday, January 30, 2020

7:00 pm

Screening of *Los Eternos Indocumentados* and Conversation with the Filmmaker,
Jennifer Cárcamo



Friday, January 31, 2020

8:30–9:00 am

Registration and Continental Breakfast

9:00–9:15 am

Welcoming Remarks

Cecilia Menjívar, UCLA

9:20–10:50 am

Panel 1: Central Americans in Mexico and the United States: An Overview

Leisy Abrego, UCLA

Nestor Rodriguez, University of Texas, Austin

Amarela Varela, Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México

11:00 am–12:30 pm

Panel 2: Family in Mexico and the United States

*Carmen Fernández Casanueva, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores
en Antropología Social (CIESAS)*

Floridalma Boj Lopez, California State University, Los Angeles

Martha Luz Rojas Wiesner, El Colegio de la Frontera Sur

12:45–1:45 pm

Keynote Address and Box Lunch

María Dolores París Pombo, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

2:00–3:30 pm

Panel 3: Political and Economic Integration in Mexico and the United States

Juan Herrera, UCLA

Arely Zimmerman, Pomona College

Rodolfo Casillas R., Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)

3:45–5:15 pm

Panel 4: Organizations

Martha Arevalo, Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)

José Palma, National TPS Alliance

*Representatives of Unión Centroamericana de UCLA (UNICA) and UCLA Central American Isthmus
Graduate Association (CAIGA)*

5:20–5:40 pm

Closing Remarks

Leisy Abrego, Rubén Hernández-León, and Cecilia Menjívar

6:00–8:00 pm

Cocktail Reception

Plateia, UCLA Luskin Conference Center

Biographies



LEISY ABREGO is professor of Chicana/o and Central American studies at UCLA. Her work on Central American migration, Latinx families, and the production of “illegality” centers the role of US foreign policies and immigration laws in contextualizing and determining migrants’ well-being. She is the author of *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders* (Stanford University Press, 2014), and *Immigrant Families*, co-authored with Cecilia Menjívar and Leah Schmalzbauer (Polity Press, 2016).

MARTHA AREVALO is director of the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Los Angeles.

FLORIDALMA BOJ LOPEZ is an activist scholar whose research primarily focuses on the organizing and cultural production of the Maya diaspora from Guatemala. As a Maya K’iche’ scholar, she relies on her academic training and her experience as a community member to conceptualize how Maya migrants and youth navigate and contest the racial histories of Guatemala and the United States.

JENNIFER CÁRCAMO is a doctoral student in the Department of History at UCLA. Her research focuses on the history of the mass movement of Central Americans in the isthmus and in the United States. She is also an organizer with the Human Rights Alliance for Refugee Children and Families. As a filmmaker, she has produced the documentaries *Children of the Diaspora* (<https://childrenofthediaspora.com/>) and *Eternos Indocumentados* (<https://www.eternosindocumentados.com/>).

RODOLFO CASILLAS R. holds a PhD in history from Universidad Iberoamericana. He is professor and researcher at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) in Mexico City. He has published extensively on international migration between Mexico and Central America, Africa, and Asia; human trafficking; and socio-religious processes in Mexico.

CARMEN FERNÁNDEZ CASANUEVA is professor and researcher at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) in Mexico City and the current regional director of CIESAS Sureste. She holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Essex. She is the author of the book *La vida en una orilla del sur: Inmigración hondureña en dos ciudades de la frontera Chiapas-Guatemala* (CIESAS, 2017).

RUBÉN HERNÁNDEZ-LEÓN is professor of sociology, director of the UCLA Center for Mexican Studies, and the 2019-20 chair of the Section on International Migration of the American Sociological Association. He is the author of *Metropolitan Migrants: The Migration of Urban Mexicans to the United States* (University of California Press, 2008) and co-author of *Skills of the “Unskilled”: Work and Mobility among Mexican Migrants* (University of California Press, 2015).

JUAN HERRERA is assistant professor of geography at UCLA. He holds a PhD in ethnic studies from UC Berkeley. He has research interests in race, social movements, queer of color critique, spatial theory, and women of color feminisms. He teaches courses on space and power, race, Latinx geographies, and migration.

CECILIA MENJÍVAR is Dorothy L. Meier Chair and Professor of Sociology at UCLA. Her work focuses on the effects of legal contexts of reception on Central American immigrants' lives and on gender-based violence in Central America. She is the author of *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America* (University of California Press, 2000) and *Enduring Violence: Ladina Women's Lives in Guatemala* (University of California Press, 2011).

JOSÉ PALMA is president of the National TPS Alliance.

MARÍA DOLORES PARÍS POMBO is professor and researcher in the Department of Cultural Studies at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Mexico. She holds a PhD in social science with a specialization in political science from Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales. Her research focuses on indigenous migration, interethnic relations, human rights, power relations, and the formation of the political elite. She is the author of *Violencia y migraciones centroamericanas en México* (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2017).

NESTOR RODRIGUEZ is professor of sociology at The University of Texas at Austin. His main areas of research have involved Central American migration and the impacts of US immigration policies on immigrant communities. His present line of research focuses on interregional migration patterns associated with intervals of heightened development in the capitalist world system. He is co-author of *Guatemala-U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* (University of Texas Press, 2015).

MARTHA LUZ ROJAS WIESNER holds a PhD in social science with a specialization in sociology from El Colegio de México. She is a senior researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR) in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. She conducts studies on the migration of Central American women to Mexico's southern border, focusing on issues of social inclusion and exclusion.

AMARELA VARELA holds a PhD in sociology from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. She is professor and researcher at the School of Communication and Culture at the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México. She is the author of *Por el derecho a permanecer y pertenecer: Una sociología de la lucha de migrantes* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2013), and co-editor the book *América Latina en movimiento: Migraciones, límites a la movilidad y sus desbordamientos* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños; Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2019).

ARELY ZIMMERMAN is assistant professor of Chicanx/Latinx studies at Pomona College. She earned a BA and PhD from UCLA in political science. Her research focuses on the political mobilization of undocumented immigrants. She is writing a book on how Central American refugee communities respond to legally sanctioned exclusions from US citizenship. Her work has appeared in the *International Journal of Communications* and the *Journal of Latino Studies*. She is co-author of *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism* (NYU Press, 2016).

Central American Migration to Mexico and the United States

January 30–31, 2020

UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

Room 2355

Made possible through a generous gift from Tamar Diana Wilson

PRESENTED BY

Chicano Studies Research Center



Center for the Study of International Migration

UCLA Center for the Study of International Migration

Latino Policy and Politics Initiative



Center for Mexican Studies

UCLA Center for Mexican Studies
Latin American Institute

CO-SPONSORED BY

Central American Studies Working Group



Central American Isthmus Graduate Association (CAIGA)



Unión Centroamericana de UCLA (UNICA)



The Promise Institute for Human Rights, UCLA School of Law



Cover image: Judith Baca, *Migration of the Golden People*, 2001. Mural located in Romero Hall at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Los Angeles.

Gabrielino/Tongva okla'akoot yaakni' mako apiisahánchi biyyi'kanattooka hachimanolili.

The conference organizers, presenters, and co-sponsors at UCLA acknowledge the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, South Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the honuukvetam (ancestors), 'ahiihirom (elders) and 'eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present, and emerging.

Design: William Morosi