

BORDERLESS CULTURES



"AN HONEST MOVIE ABOUT AMERICAN WORKING PEOPLE"

Salt of the Earth

[Michael Wilson & Herbert J. Gieberman, USA, 1954, 94 min.]



presented with Alex Rivera's Why Cybraceros?

[USA, 1997, 5 min.]

REFOCUSING LATINX LABOR W/
**IRENE MATA &
ALEX RIVERA**



BORDERLESS CULTURES festival film

Knowing that popular culture constructs, informs, and reflects, *Borderless Cultures* brings together filmmakers and scholars to share films that are otherwise not in wide release to talk about Latinx peoples and film. Thus, we have selected films that can spark conversations about the U.S. racialization of Latinx peoples.

Conceived between collaborators and colleagues on opposite coasts, *Borderless Cultures* is our offering to gather across space, and share time and ideas. Bringing his talents as a content creator and art educator, **Emmanuel Ramos-Barajas** (*Unsettling Journeys*, Producer) thinks through narrative and artistic vision, while **Professor Annette Rodríguez** (UNC-Chapel Hill, Assistant Professor of American Studies) fixates on historical context and the value of scholarly analysis.

Our goal is to reframe Latinx histories— and by extension, the interlaced histories of Indigenous, Mexican, Black, Asian & Anglo peoples— in what today is the South and West of the United States.

This syllabus presents additional resources that might help audiences delve further after watching the conversation with **Alex Rivera** and **Dr. Irene Mata** about the screening of *Salt of the Earth* (Herbert Bibermann, 1954) in conversation with *Why Cybraceros?* (Alex Rivera, 1997). We hope that reading, watching and listening to some of the most influential and noteworthy versions of Murrieta's story will help paint a more complete picture in regards to what he has represented across different times and spaces.

By no means an exhaustive list, **this document is a starting point to rethinking the complicated nature of history.**



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Borderless Cultures Film Festival presented this conversation about Latinx Labor in the 1954 film *Salt of the Earth* and the 1997 short film *Why Cybraceros?* with the participation of director **Alex Rivera** and **Dr. Irene Mata**.

The history of *Salt of the Earth* is a long and complicated one, but it always overshadows the revolutionary content of the film, **effectively erasing Latinx labor.**

The film admirably tackles ideas of race, class, gender and national identity by rejecting the American dream in favor of basic human rights with an intersectional feminist challenge to white patriarchy and machismo. With such a potent legacy, this conversation begins by asking why many latinx representations in pop cultures during the subsequent 70 years have failed to uphold the messages of this film.

By pairing up the film with Alex Rivera's short *Why Cybraceros?* **we aim to refocus the conversation on the Latinx labor depicted in the film.** In his films, Rivera constantly plays with the push and pull of the U.S. being comfortable with cheap and expendable immigrant labor, but constantly undermining the humanity of those whose bodies carry it out.

Co-curators Rodríguez and Ramos-Barajas guide the conversation to delve into the themes of the films, the nature of history and what it takes shift the narratives that have been told about Latinx peoples in the US.

WATCH THE FULL CONVERSATION



THE HOUSE WAS ONCE OURS
REFOCUSING LATINX LABOR IN SALT
OF THE EARTH & WHY CYBRACEROS?
W/ ALEX RIVERA AND DR. IRENE MATA

PRESENTED BY

BORDERLESS CULTURES
film festival

GUEST SPEAKERS

DR. IRENE MATA ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR WELLESLEY COLLEGE

ALEX RIVERA

FILM DIRECTOR
SLEEP DEALER

Director Alex Rivera is a filmmaker who's been telling ground-breaking Latino stories about labor, immigration, and politics for more than twenty years. In 1997, he directed the short film **WHY CYBRACEROS?** Inspired by 1950s U.S. propaganda, the short was the precursor to his first feature film, **SLEEP DEALER**, a cyberpunk



thriller that won multiple awards at Sundance and has screened around the world where migrant workers in Tijuana, Mexico remotely control robots who carry out the labor on the other side of the border.

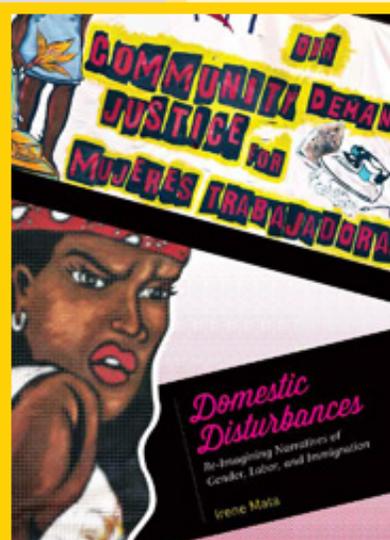
In her research, Dr. Irene Mata, an Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Wellesley College, investigates how women of color, especially immigrant women and their labor, are represented in contemporary cultural productions, literature and pop culture. Her current research continues examining popular culture and how Chicanx & Latinx performance engages with movements of resistance and social activism.



LINK: DOMESTIC DISTURBANCES: Re-Imagining Narratives of Gender, Labor, and Immigration

Irene Mata, UT Press 2014

In *Domestic Disturbances*, Irene Mata dispels the myth of the "shining city on the hill" and reveals the central truth of hidden exploitation that underlies the great majority of Chicana/Latina immigrant stories. Influenced by the works of Latina cultural producers and the growing interdisciplinary field of scholarship on gender, immigration, and labor, *Domestic Disturbances* suggests a new framework for looking at these immigrant and migrant stories, not as a continuation of a literary tradition, but instead as a specific Latina genealogy of immigrant narratives that more closely engage with the contemporary conditions of immigration. Through examination of multiple genres including film, theatre, and art, as well as current civil rights movements such as the mobilization around the DREAM Act, Mata illustrates the prevalence of the immigrant narrative in popular culture and the oppositional possibilities of alternative stories.

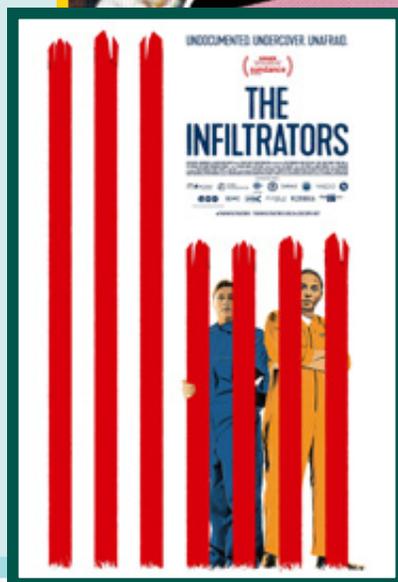


LINK: THE INFILTRATORS

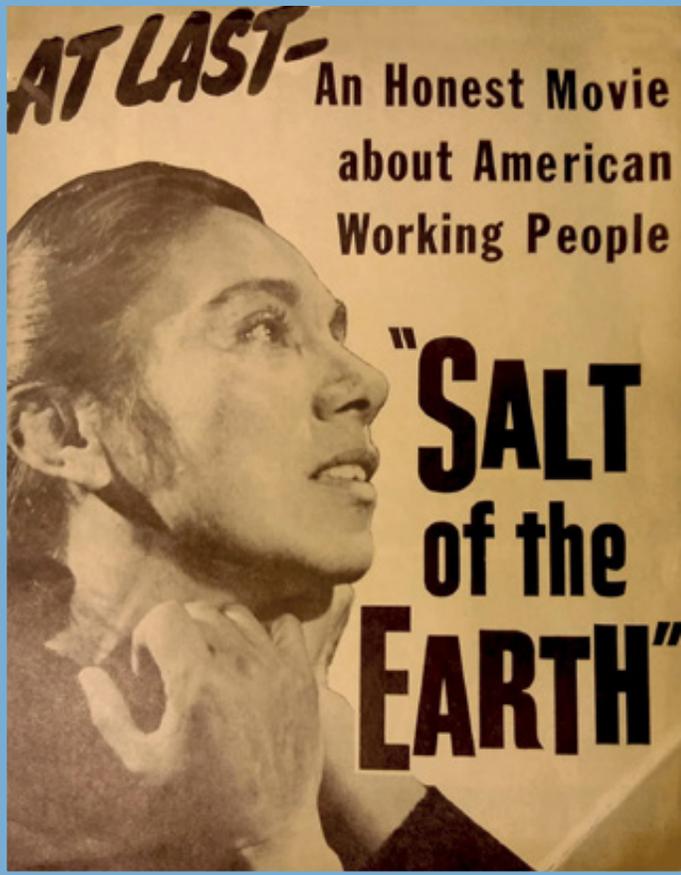
Cristina Ibarra, Alex Rivera, 2019, 95 mins)

A docu-thriller that tells the true story of young immigrants who get arrested by Border Patrol, and put in a shadowy for-profit detention center – on purpose. Marco and Viri are members of the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, a group of radical Dreamers who are on a mission to stop deportations. And the best place to stop deportations, they believe, is in detention. However, when Marco and Viri try to pull off their heist – a kind of 'prison break' in reverse – things don't go according to plan.

By weaving together documentary footage of the real infiltrators with scripted re-enactments of the events inside the detention center, *The Infiltrators* tells this incredible true story in a boundary-crossing new cinematic language.



SALT OF THE EARTH (1954)



(Herbert J. Biberman & Michael Wilson
US, 1954, 92 min)

Set in a small mining community in New Mexico, *Salt of the Earth* was written by Michael Wilson and directed by Herbert Biberman, both blacklisted Hollywood filmmakers during the Red Scare, the film chronicles the true events of a 1951 Mexican American miners' strike in the area using local people and non-actors to re-enact their experiences. The film centers on Esperanza Quintero (Rosaura Revueltas), the wife of a protesting miner, who must combat sexism and racism on both sides of the conflict to build a better future for her family.

Completed against all odds (including Revueltas' deportation to Mexico), the film was denounced as Communist propaganda when it was completed in 1953. Distributors boycotted it, newspapers and radio stations rejected advertisements for it, and the projectionists' union refused to run it. Ultimately screened in less than 12 theaters nationwide in 1954, the film highlights the complexity of gender, labor, and family relationships during a hostile political climate.

WATCH THE FILM

WATCH THE TRAILER

WHY CYBRACEROS? (1997)

This short sarcastically uses the form of a promotional film. It is based on a real promotional film produced in the late 1950's by the California Grower's Council, titled 'Why Braceros?' This film was used by the Grower's Council to defend the use of Braceros, or temporary Mexican farmhands. Rivera recycles footage from this short to lay out the history of the Bracero Program in the United States.

At the half way point the piece takes a sharp turn as the narrator advocates a futuristic Bracero Program in which only the labor is imported to the United States. This dystopic concept, visualizes a world in which immigrants can labor in America but never live in, or become the responsibility of American society. The workers themselves (Cybraceros) are left at home in Mexico, as they tele-commute to American farms over the high-speed internet. The narrator explains that in this imagined future there is no difference between rich and poor on the internet, this is a future in which truly everyone can work from home, even braceros.



(Alex Rivera, US, 1997, 5 min)

THE FILMS



WHY YOU SHOULD WATCH THESE FILMS

Opening Statement from Professor Rodriguez

Thank you all so much for sharing this time and this space with us. Thank you each and all of you on the other side of the screen for inviting Alex Rivera’s short *Why Cyberbraceros?* and my home spaces and my elders as seen in *Salt of the Earth* into your homes. Thank you also to Emmanuel, our curator who brought together Alex Rivera and popular culture scholar doctora Irene Mata.

Doctora Irene Mata grew up around the corner from me in El Paso in the shadow of the three ASARCO (American Smelting and Refining Company) stacks, the tallest smokestacks in the United States—where mining companies refining ore also pumped dangerous metals into the air, land, and water, contaminating central El Paso. Doctora Mata’s expertise in stories of immigration in popular culture offers so much to today’s conversation as we work through *Salt of the Earth* and *Why Cyberbraceros?* with its filmmaker.

In the opening monologue of *Salt of the Earth*, Esperanza (and Esperanza means hope), Esperanza explains “the house is not ours, but the flowers are ours.” And thus, begins our first signal that the film will be

“THE HOUSE IS NOT OURS, BUT THE FLOWERS ARE OURS.”

expansive—about the full lives of Mexican and Mexican-American people, who are laborers. The film will reveal the brutality of the company towns where Mexican miners were put into a dual wage labor system, paid less, put in dangerous and deadly conditions in the mines, and...

Also had deductions taken from their paltry pay to pay for their houses, which they were misled by the mining companies to believe they would one day own. Miners would agree to paycheck deductions, believing proudly they were buying their homes. Only later would those miners and their families—like my grandfather Isabel Rivera Doñez—find out that after sometimes decades of deductions from their paychecks, at best they may own the house, but not the land on which it stood.

And so in 1963, my family lost their home, which my grandfather had surrounded with plots of subsistence vegetables, a thriving milpa, and hollyhocks of all colors higher than the roof (as my mom and her sisters beautifully describe), and ... these Mexican folks learned, as Esperanza explains in the film’s opening monologue, “the house is not ours, but the flowers are ours.”

It is a stunning and mournful beginning to *Salt of the Earth*, and the film is purposefully didactic. Some critics have said it is less art, less cinema, than union teaching tool. And I am always happy to have union teaching and recruiting tools! But as we dig into (pun intended) the mining community's representation, we are so grateful to have filmmaker **Alex Rivera** here along with scholar Doctora Irene Mata. They'll help us think through aesthetic and artistic choices, the context of the film's production and its persistent relevance. My brilliant co-curator **Emmanuel Barajas-Ramos** came with the idea of paring two films together—*Salt of the Earth* and *Why Cyberbraceros?* a pointed short by Alex Rivera, which recreates a real promotional film produced in the 1950s by the California Grower's Council to defend the exploitive use of braceros in U.S. agriculture. Rivera reimagines the film for a wireless present in his short.

As we look at the brutality of labor systems in the 1950s, and the dystopian futures, as in *Why Cyberbraceros?* (and later in the Sundance award-winning *Sleep Dealer*), we might return to the echoes of and the whispers to the brilliant Toni Morrison in *Beloved*, which was to come decades later, when in her opening monologue a pregnant Esperanza, when a pregnant Hope, explains "I wished that my child would never be born... no... not into this world."

This world, for instance, where my widely smiling and laughing and singing Uncle Jessie, QEPD, was born into—my Uncle Jessie was born into this world, he was born into the very mining town of the film about its time of production, and he returned after the Vietnam War to work in the canneries of Kansas, and later as a southern Californian landscaper.

The impact of borders flexible for labor (as shown in both *Salt of the Earth* and *Why Cyberbraceros?*) but hostile to the full, laughing and singing lives of people, of laborers, is just some of what filled our conversation.

And speaking of the full lives—if you've seen the lovely graphics of this event of the women of *Salt of the Earth* framed by the Sheriffs, you've seen Señora Sanchez, fourth from the right, fiercely looking ahead. Monday, March 1st was Señora Sanchez's 105th birthday (her daughter Elisa let us know), so feliz cumpleaños Señora Sanchez, your heroic fight for a better world is remembered and is celebrated, and for every time "Las Mañanitas" played in our homes across space and time for Esperanza in *Salt of the Earth*, I hope you know it was playing for you, too. Thank you.

— Annette Rodríguez, March 3rd, 2021

Why Cyberbraceros?



MEXICO

U.S.A.

WOMEN'S LABOR ACTIVISM

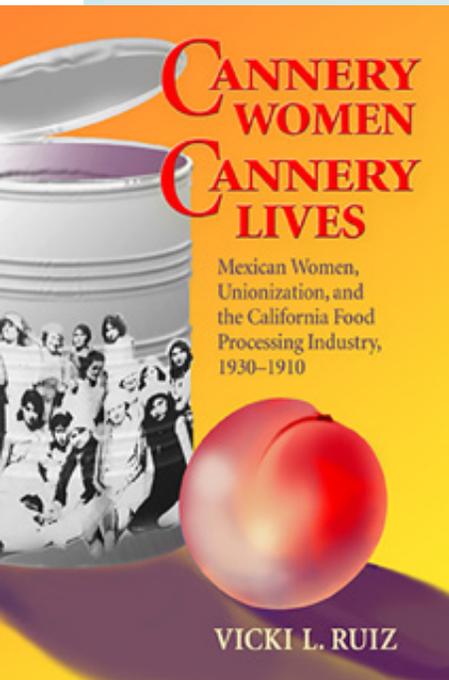
Women have been the mainstay of the grueling, seasonal canning industry for over a century. **Vicki Ruiz** (see page 9)

wrote their collective biography--a history of their family and work lives, and of their union: **a rare success story of women in unions.**

Thousands of Mexican and Mexican-American women working in canneries in southern California established effective, democratic trade union locals run by local members. These rank-and-file activists skillfully managed union affairs, including negotiating such benefits as maternity leave, company-provided day care, and paid vacations--in some

cases better benefits than they enjoy today. But by 1951, UCAPAWA lay in ruins--a victim of red baiting in the McCarthy era and of brutal takeover tactics by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

LINK: *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950*, Vicki L. Ruiz, UNM Press, 1987.



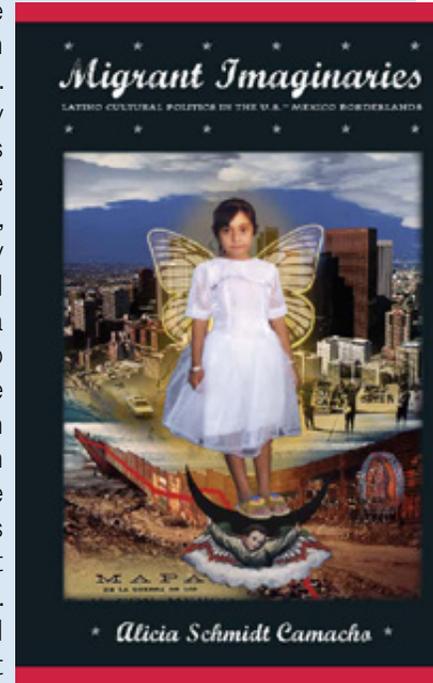
Migrant Imaginaries explores the transnational movements of Mexican migrants in pursuit of labor

and civil rights in the United States from the 1920s onward.

Working through key historical moments such as the 1930s, the Chicano Movement, and contemporary globalization and neoliberalism, Alicia Schmidt Camacho examines the relationship between ethnic Mexican expressive culture and the practices sustaining migrant social movements. Combining sustained historical engagement with theoretical

inquiries, she addresses how struggles for racial and gender equity, cross-border unity, and economic justice have defined the Mexican presence in the United States since 1910.

LINK: *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, Alicia R Schmidt Camacho, (New York: New York University Press, 2008)



CASE STUDY: LUISA MORENO

Making strategic choices regarding her class and ethnic identification for the cause of social justice, **Luisa Moreno was the most visible Latina labor and civil rights activist in the United States during the Great Depression and World War II.** Vice-president of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA-CIO), this charismatic Guatemalan immigrant organized farm and cannery workers across the Southwest, achieving particular success among Mexican and Russian Jewish women in southern California plants. In 1939 she was also the driving force behind *El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española* (the Congress of Spanish-speaking Peoples), the first national Latino civil rights assembly. **A feminist and leftist, she faced government harassment and was ultimately deported for her work as a labor activist organizing workers to unionize.**

READ MORE: "Una Mujer sin Fronters," Vicki Ruiz, *Pacific Historical Review* - Vol. 73, No. 1 (February 2004), pp. 1-20

Luisa Moreno in her Guatemalan University ID



WRITING WOMEN'S LABOR HISTORIES

LINK: “A History of Their Own: A Conversation with Vicki L. Ruiz,” Anupama Arora, Laura K. Muñoz, Sandrine Sanos

“As farm workers, flappers, labor activists, barrio volunteers, civic leaders, and feminists, Mexican women have made history. Their stories, however, have remained in the shadows”

— Vicki Ruiz, Introduction to *From Out of the Shadows*, xiii

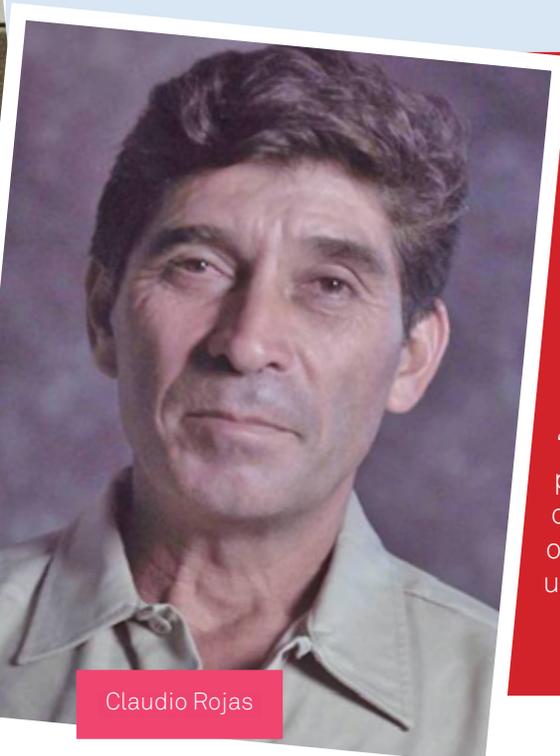
Ruiz has made it her life's work to recuperate stories that tell the rich history of Chicanas in the making of America. Making Chicanas visible as part of the United States, and writing them indelibly into the nation, has been Ruiz's ongoing political project, one that—**through placing colonialism, migration, and gender as central—seeks to decolonize history and higher education.** Drawing on a variety of sources—primarily oral and personal narratives, but also pamphlets, popular culture (including advertisements), newsletters, songs, poems, and even missionary reports—she brings “out of the shadows” the stories of Chicana and Chicano arrival, settlement, and survival in the United States, and most importantly their various contributions—**as historical actors, as resistant subjects**—to the social and cultural landscape of the US, whether through their unionizing work for good working conditions and better wages, their intra- and interethnic networks and coalitions, or their protests against racism.



Vicki Ruiz, Distinguished Professor of history and Chicano/Latino studies at the University of California, Irvine

LINK: “Pathways in Oral History,” Vicki L. Ruiz, *US Latina & Latino Oral History Journal* - University of Texas Press, Volume 3, 2019 (pp. 84-90)

In this interview feature, historian Vicki L. Ruiz discusses her life's work as an oral historian, president of academic organizations, and feminist mentor. Ruiz recounts her first oral interview experience with labor organizer Luisa Moreno, emphasizes the role of oral interviews in her scholarship, and provides advice to novice and veteran oral historians.



Claudio Rojas

ACT NOW! CLAUDIO ROJAS

As demonstrated by the case of Luisa Moreno, the deportation of immigrants due to labor organizing or criticizing the government has been commonplace in U.S. history. In the latest example, **Claudio Rojas**, one of the protagonists from *The Infiltrators*, was detained by ICE and deported days after the film's screening at Sundance Film Festival. He is now in the Krome Detention Center in South Miami-Dade.

“It is of grave concern to the documentary community that a willing protagonist in a documentary film may be punished for expressing his opinion within a film, and we believe that this will have a chilling effect on the work of journalists and their sources seeking to explore and understand issues of national concern.”

HELP US BY SIGNING THIS PETITION TO THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION



A vampiric U.S. keeps “sucking the energy” from Mexican laborers in Rivera’s 2008 *Sleep Dealer*.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

LINK: “Millennial Realism,” Mathis Gasser writes about *Advantageous* (2015) and *Sleep Dealer* (2008)

Science fiction imagines the future of our society and reminds us that the world we live in is not the only possible world. It’s a genre that reminds us that other worlds are possible. So, as crucial as it is that we participate in building the real innovation economy, **it’s equally important that we have a diverse set of voices, envisioning the future from diverse points of view that come from, and respond to, our communities.** If we can’t imagine it, how are we to actually participate in it? Fiction is not an escape from reality; it’s the first draft of reality. Tomorrow’s battle over real power tomorrow begins with today’s struggle over who gets to dream.

— Alex Rivera, during Platform Summit

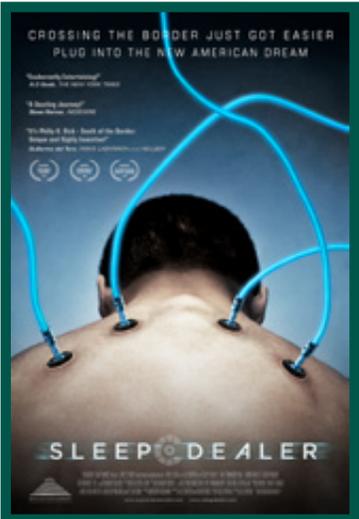
The characters in both films live in an economic regime that pushes them towards challenging decisions. In *Sleep Dealer*, the border wall prohibits new immigrants from South to North America, except perhaps high earners. Those immigrants vanish along with their foreclosed future. What they could bring to the country shall never exist. **Workers’ bodies vanish as they operate robots from other countries.**

LINK: *Race & Labor, Unplugged: Alex Rivera’s Sleep Dealer* Dale Hudson, NYU Abu Dhabi, Flow Journal UT Austin

LINK: *Rasquache Aesthetics in Alex Rivera’s “Why Cybraceros?”* Debra A. Castillo, Nordlit 31, 2014

“Rivera’s philosophical/ideological concern, overall, has always been how to think together issues related to morality, globalization, and the invisibilized peoples of the global south, who bear the brunt of globalization’s noxious effects.” Both *Why Cybraceros?* and **CYBRACERO.COM** “employ a variety of techniques and styles, related to a specific technological and ideological vision. Thus, *Cybraceros?* should not be viewed in isolation from **RIVERA’S OTHER SHORT FILMS**, and the fluid and evolving “cybracero” website in which it has traditionally been embedded and which created the original conditions for its viewability.”

In *Why Cybraceros?*, deploying the conventional arsenals of expository documentary—a rational, masculine, white-sounding-but-well-intentioned voiceover that unequivocally interprets meanings from a disparate series of visual images—the film attempts to convince U.S. citizens that “imported” labor from México benefits them. The film’s formal strategies erase racialization from technical solutions to the “age-old burden” of finding “stoop labor,” broadly defined as “farms jobs that are tough, dirty, or unpleasant,” through a lively montage of images of (male only) Mexicans not being exploited but receiving medical attention, food and water, live entertainment, and access to television.



SALT, LABOR & CENSORSHIP

In *On Strike and on Film*, Ellen Baker examines the building of a leftist union that linked class justice to ethnic equality. She shows how women's participation in union activities paved the way for their taking over the picket lines and thereby forcing their husbands, and the union, to face troubling questions about gender equality. Baker also explores the collaboration between mining families and blacklisted Hollywood filmmakers that resulted in the controversial 1954 film *Salt of the Earth*. She shows how this worker-artist alliance gave the mining families a unique chance to clarify the meanings of the strike

in their own lives and allowed the filmmakers to create **a progressive alternative to Hollywood productions.**

LINK: *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*, By Ellen R. Baker UNC Press 2007.

This impassioned history tells a story of censorship and politics during the early Cold War. Lorence recounts a disturbing episode that reflects the intense fear that gripped America during the Cold War and reveals the unsavory side of the rapprochement between organized labor and big business in the 1950s. For the book, **the author has interviewed participants in the strike and film such as Clinton Jencks and Paul Jarrico and has consulted private and public archives to reconstruct the story of this extraordinary documentary and the coordinated efforts to suppress it.**

LINK: *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America*, James J. Lorence, UNM Press 1999.

How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America



The Suppression of Salt of the Earth

James J. Lorence

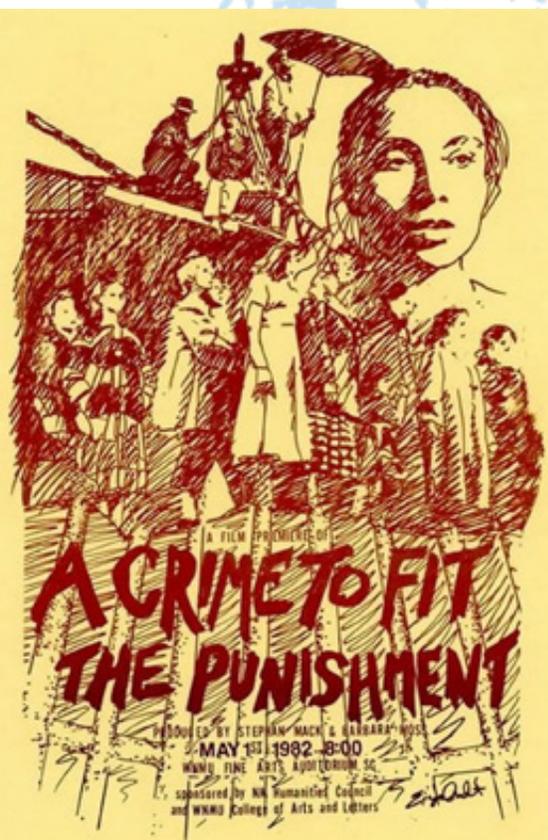
A Crime to Fit the Punishment
(Barbara Moss & Stephen Mack, 1982, 46 min)

Documentary that investigates the background and political atmosphere surrounding the production of the film, and movingly chronicles the filmmakers' defiance of the blacklist. It features interviews with the actors and clips from *Salt of the Earth* - which presciently championed the rights of workers, minorities, and women - that are interwoven with newsreel and broadcast footage from the 50s, **creating a fascinating examination of the relationship between film and politics.**

From the collection of the **CHICANO RESOURCE CENTER** at the LA County Library.

WATCH THE FULL DOC

LISTEN TO THE DIRECTORS





Director Herbert J. Biberman and producer Paul Jarrico testifying to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1951.

FRAUGHT PRODUCTION

Although the goal of this syllabus is to refocus on the actual Latinx labor depicted in the film, the labor of the blacklisted Hollywood filmmakers should be taken into consideration. Below are excerpts from the history of the production, as compiled by the **AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE** from a wide number of trade publications. We attach it to this document to highlight just how impossible the task of finishing this film was. **Indeed, the history is fascinating, but it should not be the only focus of the story of *Salt of the Earth*.**

Writer **Michael Wilson** based the film's story on a 1951-52 strike by the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers against Empire Zinc, a subsidiary of New Jersey Zinc, in which **Juan Chacón** and **Clinton Jencks** participated.

According to Biberman's book about the making of the film, the role of "Esperanza" was intended for his wife, Gale Sondergaard, and the part of "Ramón" was also to be played by a non-Hispanic actor, but the filmmakers changed their minds when they realized that they subconsciously believed Hispanics were incapable of portraying leads. Ultimately, Chacón (president of Local 890 of the UMMSW) played "Ramón." The role of Esperanza went to professional Mexican actress **Rosaura Revueltas**. Many of the other characters were also played by miners and their families.

In Feb 1953, during filming, California Republican Representative Donald Jackson, a HUAC member, declared that the picture was "**deliberately designed to inflame racial hatreds,**" and was "**a new weapon for Russia.**" Jackson accused the producers as having ties to the Communist party, singling

out Biberman, Gale Sondergaard, Jarrico, Wilson and actor Will Geer, who had all been hostile witnesses before HUAC.

On 25 Feb 1953, Mexican actress Rosaura Revueltas, who played "Esperanza," **was arrested and held without bail** because her passport had not been stamped at the border. In response, Jorge Negreta, president of the National Association of Actors of Mexico City, threatened to bar Hollywood actors from Mexico unless Revueltas was permitted to finish the film. SAG then stated that the actress was working for "a non-union company not signatory to our contract." On 6 Mar 1953, Revueltas returned to Mexico, and her last scene was filmed near Mexico City. Her voice-over narration, modern sources note, was also taped there.

On 2 Mar 1953, the film's cast and crew were met by a citizen's committee in Central, NM, and ordered to leave town. The following day, in Silver City, NM, the company was warned to "get out of town...or go out in black boxes." **Jencks was beaten** and shots were fired at his car while it was parked outside his home. When the company did not capitulate to the demands, there was a "citizens' parade" led by a sound car blaring, "We don't want Communism; respect the law; no violence, but let's show them we don't like it." The UMMSW, which had been expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations for alleged pro-Communist leanings, responded that "we have the right to make and complete our movie." Then on 8 Mar 1953, the union hall in Bayard, NM was **set on fire**, and the union hall in nearby Carlsbad was **burned to the ground**, according to Biberman's book. Biberman also notes that cast member Floyd Bostick's **home was destroyed by fire**.

Pathé Laboratories in Hollywood **refused to process their exposed film**. Consequently, the filmmakers were unable to view the rushes. Soon other technical companies followed suit. According to a modern source, Howard Hughes of RKO stated, "**If the motion picture industry--not only in Hollywood, but throughout the United States--will refuse these skills [processing, dubbing, editing, etc.]...the picture cannot be completed in this country.**"



Marlon Brando in
On the Waterfront

CELLULOID CONNECTION

While *Salt of the Earth* was being suppressed by some of the most influential people in Hollywood and in the U.S. government, and subsequently struggled to be screened in theaters, another labor film was making waves around Hollywood. In 1954, **Elia Kazan** was premiering his latest film, *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando, in one of his most acclaimed performance as an ex-boxer who ‘*coulda been a contender.*’

Like *Salt of the Earth*, Kazan’s film was based on an actual labor situation, in this case, a whistleblower who testifies against the racketeers who ran Hoboken Docks, New York. Both movies were shot on location with the participation of those who had lived the real stories. And both movies shared a history in the Hollywood blacklist.

That’s where the similarities end.

Kazan and his writer, Budd Schulberg, had both **named names — identified movie people they said were Communists** — when questioned by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Some saw their movie as an allegory in support of informing. **Salt producers by contrast, were unrepentant blacklistedees who had been jailed after refusing to cooperate with the committee.**

The responses to both films could not have been different. *On the Waterfront* was a hit and is remembered as a classic film, winning Oscars for best film, best director, best actor, and best supporting actress at the next Academy Awards ceremony. As we saw in the Fraught Production history above (page 12), *Salt of the Earth* was barely finished and is mostly remembered in academic circles, not in the popular imaginary
Adapted from HistoryNet.

WRITING YOUR OWN HISTORY

LINK: Unbelonging: A History of Bodies

Annette Rodriguez from Reshaping Women’s History: Voices of Nontraditional Women Historians

Annette contributed to this collection of essays about the role of her family and community as historical actors, and recentering those stories.

And as I write this, I marvel at what it means to leave a record. While I am born to storytellers and historians, a people who meticulously keep family trees and draw maps of their migrations, while I am born to a people whose hands have filled Bibles with births and deaths and baptisms and marriages, while I am born to a people who save their documentation – IDs, records of crossing, rental agreements, receipts, business cards of the helpful, scratch papers with wages owed, full archives in bibles and boxes and kitchen drawers and wallets – while I am born to a people with precision of dates and locations for generations, **I have come embarrassingly late to call us what we are: historians.**

FOLK REVOLUTION

THE SALT OF THE EARTH RECOVERY PROJECT is engaged in preserving the local history of the strikes and film production by interviewing countless members of the community who participated.

They also preserved a corrido the strikers would sing as they marched in the strike.

LISTEN TO EL CORRIDO DEL EMPIRE ZINC

Galarza, Ernesto. *Barrio Boy: The Story of a Boy's Acculturation*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1971.

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During his career, **Ernesto Galarza** was a leading writer on the plight of Mexican and Mexican American workers and the abuse of farm workers. He wrote more than 100 publications and was a professor at the University of Notre Dame, San Jose State University, University of California, San Diego, and University of California, Santa Cruz. As an activist, scholar and organizer, it is hard to overstate the impact Galarza had on working-class Mexican American families and our broader culture.

LEARN MORE ABOUT ERNESTO GALARZA

The Bracero Program, which brought millions of Mexican guest workers to the United States, ended more than four decades ago. Current debates about immigration policy—including discussions about a new guest worker program—have put the program back in the news and made it all the more important to understand this chapter of American history. From **THE BRACERO ARCHIVE**



Domingo Ulloa, *Braceros*, 1960, oil on masonite, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Eugene Iredale and Julia Yoo, 2014.20

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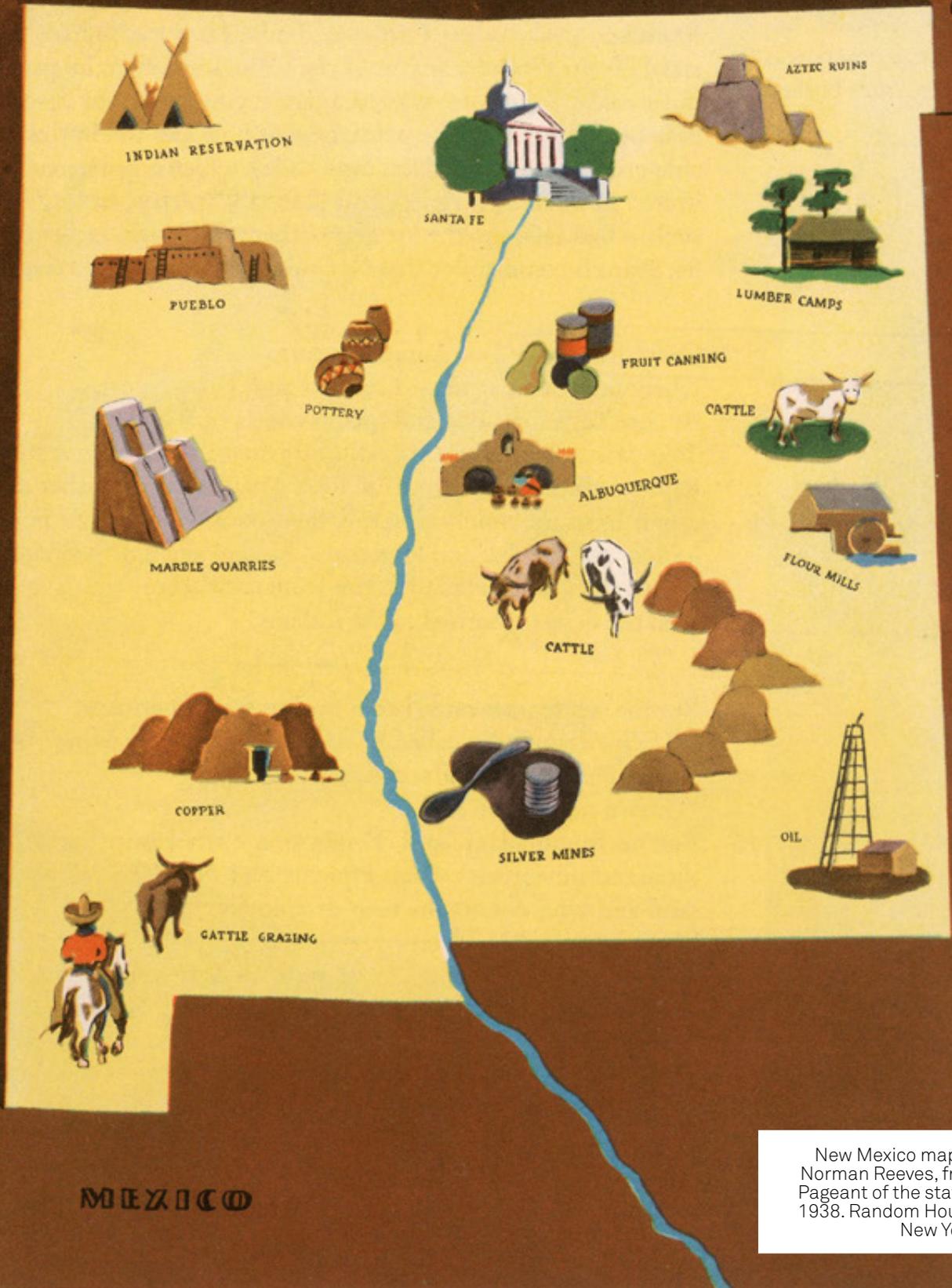
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New Mexico map by Norman Reeves, from Pageant of the states, 1938. Random House, New York.