Pseudo Citizens

Perceptions of U.S. Immigration Laws in Rural Michoacán, Mexico

Senior Thesis: Kate Bass, Sociology and Anthropology 2011.5
• Introduction
• Guiding questions
  o Findings
  o Historical Analysis
  o Two Social Contracts
• Conclusion & Thanks
“...They continually break the law in this country, and I don’t think that’s not something should be rewarded...

...If you want to be an American, you respect the laws of America...

We reward that kind of behavior. We don’t reward behavior where you don’t respect our laws in your initial act...”
Guiding Questions

- How do Mexicans perceive entering the United States to be legal and illegal? How do those perceptions influence decisions regarding migration?

- What are the implications of those beliefs for the relationship between migrant sending communities and the United States?
Santa Rosa
Methodology

Where: Santa Rosa, Michoacán

Me in 2006, in Santa Rosa
Methodology

Qualitative, Ethnographic Research

**How:**
- 16 Semi-structured interviews
- Informal interviews (house visits, meals, walks, cooking, etc.)
- Participant Observation

**Two Visits:**
- Second visit to share findings
In Santa Rosa, a variety of structural forces have, over time, constructed migration to the United States, in whatever way available, as necessary and ethical.

There is a strong belief that if you migrate the correct way—working hard and not lying—you will be eligible for amnesty and granted legal immigration status the United States
Major Developments in Immigration Policy in the 20th Century

1917 Immigration Act
1924 Immigration Act
1942-1964 Bracero Program
1965 Immigration Act
1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act
1993 Operation Blockade, El Paso; Hold the Line
1994 Operation Gatekeeper, San Diego

Major Developments in Immigration Policy in the 20th Century

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Bracero Program

1942-1964
• Emergency war program for agricultural labor
• Intended to recruit 200,000 temporary guest workers every year
• Extended in 1947
• Became legalization program

Legacy
• Institutionalizes migration, encourages it further
• Establishes the idea that if you enter the U.S. illegally and work, you will probably be rewarded with legal immigration status
1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act

1986
• Included five provisions, but most importantly: legal status for about 3 million undocumented immigrants in the United States

Legacy
• Provided paperwork for huge numbers of people from Santa Rosa
• Reinforced the idea that if you go to the United States correctly (even if that means illegally), you can probably get paperwork eventually
Take Away From Findings and Historical Analysis

◆ Migration became institutionalized through the Bracero Program

◆ The expectation of amnesty, even after illegal crossing, became institutionalized through the Bracero Program and the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act

◆ For people in Santa Rosa, illegal crossing isn’t ill informed or uneducated; it’s perceptive.
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Two Social Contracts?

- Benefits
- Obligations
- Consent
The Point
(Conclusion)

- Stateless?
- Lawless?
- Rational?
THANK YOU!

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