

Taken for a Ride:  
Guestworkers in the U.S.

organized by the PARCC Labor Studies Group

Thursday, September 1st from 4-6pm  
Global Collaboratory in the Maxwell School

EVENT DESCRIPTION:

Recruited to the United States on H-2 visas, guestworkers are subjected to extreme labor exploitation. Bound to a single employer by the terms of their visas and embroiled in complex and costly recruitment and subcontracting arrangements, guestworkers lack the ability to organize, collectively bargain and otherwise challenge their working and living conditions. This event takes advantage of Syracuse's distinction as host to the Great New York State Fair, an event during which, in 2010, the conditions faced by guestworkers were brought to light after a food contractor was found guilty of wage theft and human trafficking of at least nineteen Mexican guestworkers. The speakers at this event will discuss the political-economy of U.S. guestworker programs, describe the conditions faced by guestworkers in the seafood processing and fair/carnival industries and highlight innovative local and transnational forms of organizing and advocacy aimed at improving the working conditions faced by these "excluded workers."

PARTICIPANT BIOS:

DAVID GRIFFITH, Ph.D. is a senior scientist and professor of anthropology at East Carolina University, with a joint appointment in the Institute for Coastal Science and Policy and the Department of Anthropology. His most recent book is American Guestworkers: Jamaicans and Mexicans in the United States (Penn State University Press, 2006). He has also published material recently in American Anthropologist and The Anthropology of Work Review and is currently preparing an edited volume (with Diane Austin) for the School of American Research Press entitled, "Managing and Mismanaging Migration: North American Guestworker Programs." He has been conducting research on managed migration, or guestworkers, since the early 1980s. His presentation, "Para Mis Hijos: Family and Managed Migration between Sinaloa and North Carolina," will focus on Mexican women who work in Mid-Atlantic blue crab processing plants, considering their experiences in light of global trends in the use of guestworkers. He will devote specific attention to North American guestworker programs that link Canada and the United States with Mexico and Central America.

RACHEL MICAH-JONES, J.D. is the Founder and Executive Director of Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (CDM), an innovative transnational organization operating on both side of the U.S./Mexico border that works to organize, and improve the working conditions for, migrant workers in the U.S. Prior to founding CDM, Rachel worked with the Migrant Farmworker Unit of Florida Rural Legal Services where she represented some of Florida's 250,000 migrant workers in employment, housing and civil rights matters. Rachel received her J.D. with honors from the American University Washington College of Law in 2003 and her A.B. from Georgetown University in 2000. Since 2009, Rachel has been teaching in the

International and Comparative Law Clinic at the University of Maryland School of Law. Rachel is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the Echoing Green Fellowship in 2005, the Peter M. Cicchino Award for Outstanding Public Service in 2006 and the Cordes Fellowship in 2010.

MARTÍN DÁVILA VENEGAS is a retired H-2B migrant worker and labor rights activist. Over the past decade, he has worked in landscaping and construction in Colorado as well as the traveling carnival industry in New York. After suffering a variety of abuses in the recruitment for H-2B employment and while on the worksite in the U.S., Mr. Dávila became an advocate for migrant workers' rights beginning in 2008, when he became involved in a legal action against the traveling carnival company Dreamland Amusements. Since then, he has joined the Migrant Defense Committee (Comité de Defensa del Migrante, or "Comité"), a group of migrant worker leaders dedicated to defending the rights of migrant workers in the U.S. through peer education and support. Through his participation in the Comité, Mr. Dávila has helped to carry the voice of migrant workers to the U.S. and even international policy arenas, which include the 2010 People's Global Action parallel forum to the Global Forum on Migration and Development. Generally, Mr. Dávila supports migrant worker advocacy efforts by imparting Know-Your-Rights trainings in his community and in sharing labor rights information with migrant workers and their families.

REBECCA FUENTES is the coordinator of the Workers' Center of CNY, a local member-based organization that supports low-wage and immigrant workers to fight economic injustice through education, organizing and public policy advocacy. The Center is a member of a network of Workers' Centers affiliated with the national organization Interfaith Workers Justice. She has been involved in social change work for over 10 years as a grassroots organizer, coalition builder, media activist and cultural worker in many organizations and grassroots movements, including the CNY Immigration Task Force and Solidarity of CNY. She is finishing up a Masters Degree in Education at State University of New York/Oswego. She was born in California, where her mother, who grew up in Tijuana, Mexico, worked as a farm laborer.