

Wetback  
documentary analysis  
essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary is a 2005 Canadian documentary movie, made with the contribution by the Canada Council for the Arts and written and directed by Arturo Perez Torres. The filmmaker follows several migrants like Nayo and Milton, from Chinandega, Nicaragua, all along the crossing through Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and United States in their attempt to reach Canada. Along the way, he meets other migrants while they are held by Mexican authorities. Catholic human rights workers in Chiapas also submit their perspectives, especially about the exploitation of migrants by groups like Mara Salvatrucha.

It also features interviews with U. S. Border Patrol agents and Arizona Minuteman Project organizer Chris Simcox. These are just few of thousands of stories of immigration that could be told. Thousand of migrants every year die trying to reach the American dream. Some drowned in crossing the Rio Grande, some for dehydration, hypothermia or attacks by wild animals in the Valley of Death. The film highlights the problems that these people have to struggle. Problems like unemployment, poverty, malnutrition and lack of opportunities in several Central American countries pushing many people to consider emigration as the only viable option.

The observation of the long road that leads to the border with the United States makes clear that this boundary is just the latest in a series of obstacles that these people choose to face in order to move from despair. On the road, many will be robbed, injured, assaulted, raped and murdered. Some will be returned; some do succeed in entering the United States only to be treated with contempt and hostility. There are trains of death to which

people hung themselves, hundreds of them, to get a free ride to north. Many are so exhausted that they fell and are sucked under the train.

They lost limbs and are, therefore, unable to return home for the family who they were trying desperately to help. The coyotes, people who decide to take them across the border for a fee, abuse them. Even if someone pasts all the obstacles, there are still police officers and local officials, and the complex adaptation to a foreign culture and language. Torres shows the dark side of immigration and exposes it through his camera. The braveness and determination of people, who are in difficult circumstances not for their guilt, is strong and clear.

Torres has given a uman face to an issue that too often is limited to be discussed in abstract terms such as fear and racism issues. Immigration in the United States, especially in the last decades, has created strong clashes between the Republican Party and Democratic Party. In fact, the Democrats are interested in acquiring the consents of naturalized Latinos, while the Republicans refuse to admit that they also are children of immigrants and do not want to mix their “ purebred” with people from other countries, the so-called “ Aliens”. It is at least bizarre at the thought that the United States are born as a landed migration.

In fact, the ancestors of these Republicans, persecuted for religious reasons, departed from Plymouth in England, crossed the ocean and landed in what would become the “ land of freedom” in the bay of Cape Cod. From the history of immigration, we can get many things. The first is that the United States owes a substantial portion of their initial development in the labor

force paid by immigrants who have collaborated in the construction of roads, power sources and the creation of income, the key of the development of a civilized nation.

The Latinos, conversely, driven by the need, over the centuries have left their country to go to work for the Americans, while their country, with enormous opportunities for growth and a wealth of natural resources, relies under the hands of corrupt politicians and drug traffickers. The U. S. share of around two thousand miles of permeable border with Mexico; the geographical contiguity allows families of migrants to remain in harmony with their cities and environments of origin.

In the nineties, supported by anti-immigrant sentiment that was brewing in California, the U. S. Administration has stepped up controls, densely patrolling the border, erecting walls and fences and increasing the use of military technology, such as aircraft, infrared light and motion sensors. The aim was to prevent illegal immigration, but the result was to push it on areas most difficult to control, areas where temperatures reach fifty degrees in the shade, where you have to travel more than eighty kilometers in extreme conditions. Emigrants are pushed by the economic poverty, drawn by the hope of a better life in the United States and blocked by an iron wall on the border.

It is strange to think that most Americans have enthusiastically greeted the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, weeping about 250 people who died trying to pass him over twenty-eight years, while many others remained indifferent to the construction of a wall between Mexico and the United States, in spite of

more than 3, 000 migrants died during the last ten years while trying to enter U. S. Latinos bring with them some of the worst stereotypes of modern society and are often seen as people who do not pay taxes, draining the funds of local communities, while selling drugs, committing crimes and stealing jobs for Americans.

Some immigrants even bring the same level as terrorists, not realizing that the 11 terrorists entered legally and not from the southern border. Yet, most of the immigrants take away jobs from Americans, as they carry out tasks that they reject. Immigrants, moreover, not only does not harm the economy, but will supply direct and indirect taxes: as a whole, they pay more than ninety billion dollars in taxes, but many of them as illegal immigrants are even afraid to use social services. What if one day all the Mexicans disappear like magic from the state of California?

This is the question that attempts to answer an unusual film by Arau, A Day without a Mexican, which happened me to watch some months ago. The Mexicans, and under this broad title are enclosed all the Latinos, are the backbone on which the economy of California relies. Generally speaking, the weaker and poorer ethnic groups are those on which the rich and powerful ones build their power and their wealth. Parking attendants, shop assistants, waiters, cleaners, gardeners, fruit pickers, factory workers, babysitters, all menial jobs done by the humble and necessary and essential by the Mexican, Chinese, North Africans, Albanians of this world.