

## 2008 RESEARCH PROJECTS

Seniors majoring in International Economics and Cultural Affairs engage in a year-long independent research project. During the Fall semester they choose their topic and in the Spring their research culminates in a 30-40 page paper, under the supervision of 2 faculty readers in appropriate disciplines. This year, all papers fall under the general topic of Rights and Wrongs.



*The Adverse Treatment of Women Workers in Mexico's Maquiladoras and the Role of United States Companies*

Ali Ramsdel: With the institution of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), United States companies are finding it increasingly easier to relocate their factories (maquiladoras) just south of the United States-Mexican border, where they can pay employees nine times less than they are required to in the United States. The majority of the workforce employed by these maquiladoras is comprised of young women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five who are easier to exploit and cheaper to employ than their male counterparts. Inside these U.S.-owned maquiladoras, Mexican labor laws are disregarded, as women are required to undergo pregnancy testing, routinely produce urine samples, and provide information regarding sexual habits and contraceptive use. Worse yet are the hazardous conditions under which these women work and the constant threat of harassment, rape, and murder. My research will explain the way in which the development of maquiladoras along the U.S.-Mexico border has changed how employers and employees handle human rights violations. By looking at the ramifications of NAFTA and the extent to which its formation has led to an increase in incidences of abuse, rape, and murder, I will demonstrate the ways in which NAFTA is negatively affecting both the working conditions for Mexican women along the U.S. border and their legal, social, and organizational strategies for protecting their rights as women in the workforce.



*Violence Against Land Reform Activists in the Brazilian Amazon*

Anni Metz: Brazil is a nation deeply divided along lines of wealth and poverty. While it has a ratio of productive agricultural land to people that is comparable to that of the United States, just four percent of the population holds property rights to more than fifty percent of Brazil's land. With so few landowners having possession of such a significant portion of the nation's land, much of it remains unused. Throughout its history, Brazil has experienced considerable economic growth and technological progress, but is far from reaching its full potential agriculturally due to this inequality

in land distribution. The *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra* (“Movement of Rural Landless Workers,” or simply MST) is an organization comprised of thousands of landless people in Brazil, working to pressure their government to redistribute idle land to those people who would use it in a sustainable and profitable manner. Because of their peaceful protests, the MST has received much international support, which helps to rally for their cause and to achieve results. However, despite the nonviolence of the landless workers’ movement as a whole, members of the MST have often been victims of violence themselves, and they receive little to no government protection against these acts. As a result of this violence perpetrated against MST activists, the Brazilian government proposed and sought passage of supportive legislation. The link between the violence and this government action will be explored. As with the violence itself, international coverage and attention also pushed the government to act. This link will also be explored. Two specific acts of violence, both that took place in the northeast state of Pará, will be discussed: the very public massacre of dozens of landless activists in Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996 and the murder of an American nun, Sister Dorothy Stang, in 2005. As the latter murder took place so recently, and because Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil’s first “worker-president,” is currently in office, present efforts toward agrarian reform and ending the violence will be examined and compared to the actions of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso after the 1996 massacre.

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*“They Were Born, They Made Tortillas, and They Died” Change for the Indigenous Women of Chiapas*

Courtney Presson: Indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico are surrounded by a culture that discourages women’s independence through a variety of intimidating folkloric stories in which women are killed or punished for going out alone or questioning their husbands. Prior to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) Uprising of 1994, the EZLN came into the Chiapas region and began to work with the indigenous people. One of the more significant acts performed by the EZLN in contact with the indigenous people was the work they did specifically with the women of Chiapas. The main question this paper will answer is “How has the life of indigenous women in Chiapas changed since the Zapatista Uprising and to what extent did the Zapatistas contribute to the change?” I will attempt to discern if changes have occurred to better the life of indigenous women and what role the EZLN may have had in producing these changes.

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*Seeking a Passing Grade: The Success and Failures of the State’s Religious Education Programs in Modern Spain*

Susan Van Dyke: Today, the government of Spain struggles to find the balance between the religious freedom guaranteed in its constitution and acknowledged universally as a basic human right, with a sense of socio-cultural stability and national security. In my paper, I would like to study how effectively the democratic principles of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 were implemented into society especially within the state education system. Furthermore, I would like to investigate the current trends in the Spanish education system, especially with regard to the Islamic population, and where the conflict is heading. Are Islamic communities within Spain receiving equal funding and representation within the education sector or will the conflict with the Roman Catholic tradition and fear of terrorism override this goal? This is the question I seek to answer in my IECA Senior Thesis.

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*Mexican Border Towns: A Haven for Police Corruption and Human Rights Violations*

Patrick Sullivan: The Mexican border has been a notorious location for illegal activities ranging from kidnappings and drug trafficking to rapes and murders. In most of these human rights violations, the Mexican police have been seen to take an active role in them. With the help of a non-governmental organization, the Washington Office on Latin America, and the change in presidential control from the PRI to the PAN since 2000, the Mexican government has decided to take a stand against police corruption. There are active changes along the border and within the police force itself to eliminate any corrupt officers, but have the changes been significant enough, and will the police force ever quite wipe off the smear on their reputation as being corrupt?

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*Remaining Uneducated: The Inequality of Roma education in the Czech Republic*

Jen Clessas: I am writing about human rights in the Czech Republic focusing specifically on the mistreatment of the Roma (commonly referred to as Gypsies) in Czech public schools. The Roma are not treated equally and the vast majority of Romani children are forced into remedial schools, the same schools mentally handicapped Czech children attend. This discrimination of Romani children is hurting the Czech economy. If the Roma were allowed to participate in an equal education, the country would benefit from a more efficient workforce, lower unemployment, less social spending, healthier citizens and a more culturally accepting society.

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*Shedding a Light on Japan's  
Shadow: Hikikomori and Their  
Affect on Japanese Society and the  
Economy*

Blain Keller: *Hikikomori*, which means “withdrawal” in English, are Japanese (mostly males in their teens or twenties) who choose to withdraw from Japanese society by staying in their rooms for six months or longer. *Hikikomori* choose to stay in their rooms in order to escape prejudice, pressure, and rejection from society. Within the last twenty to thirty years, *hikikomori* have become a growing problem for Japanese society. Currently, experts claim that there are one million Japanese who are *hikikomori*, which is approximately one percent of the population. This percentage of the population, however, is expected to rise rapidly due to Japan’s increasing elderly population and low birth rate. This paper will focus on answering two main questions: what kinds of human rights violations do *hikikomori* experience and what economic and social consequences will Japan face in the near future if the *hikikomori* problem is not solved?

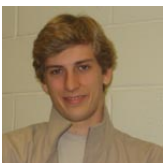
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*The Vieques Struggle*

Jenni Gulley: The Vieques struggle is a story of a long economically, racially, and environmentally oppressed people who have decided to stand up for their rights and their community despite the power and the size of their oppressor, the United States Government. The struggle stems from the acquisition of over 26,000 acres of the 33,000 acre island by the United States military in the early 1900s. This land was used as a testing site and storage facility for newly developed bombs and weaponry until 2003 when the US pulled out of Vieques, an island of Puerto Rico. Although this was a much celebrated occasion, it does not mark the end of the struggle. The Vieques people now struggle to receive reparations for the human rights violations committed by the United States before 2003 and to make sure that the United States is held accountable for the damage it caused to the once nutrient rich soil, the demolition of local flora and fauna, and for the clean-up of the thousands of tons of shrapnel and toxins that remain on the island as a result of the numerous tests carried out by the hands of the US military.

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*The Unemployment Problem in  
France*

Tony LeClerc: France’s well intentioned welfare state has instead turned its society into one of privileged and excluded individuals as restrictions

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currently encourage a status quo. French policy makers have failed to address the problem until now and have instead put the blame on globalization. It is suggested that if certain protections included in French job contracts were to be relaxed, redistribution would occur through market forces, thus leading to higher employment, improved job creation and a better match between employer and employee. If France is to successfully integrate its immigrant population, it must find a way to loosen job contracts and progressively diminish some of the social security that is currently offered in order to create incentives for the excluded parts of the population to get involved.

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