

Witness to Courageous Indignation: A Story of Farmworkers in Mecca, CA

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Over 8,577 farmworkers live in the community of Mecca, California. They include men who work from sunrise to sunset under scorching sun to satisfy America's hunger for fresh fruits and vegetables; women work alongside the men in the fields while caring for their family's every need at all times; children who go to school, laugh and play with contagious energy like all children do. What's different about this farmworker community; however, is that every breath of fresh air they inhale, every drop of fresh clean water that quenches their thirst, every bite they take into a crunchy juicy apple, and every step they take as they walk along ancient dirt roads lined with palms is only a mirage.

The community faces serious socio-economic and environmental issues including air pollution, arsenic in local water, unemployment, low educational attainment, few afterschool programs and activities for youth, limited access to professional development and training opportunities for adults, limited access to technology, and limited access to healthy food.

Unity has real meaning here because people know each other. Their lives are familiar and intertwined. Good news travel quickly and bad news even faster. The majority of adults traveled from distant and faraway lands in search of work and a better future at some point in the last century. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the population migrated from Latin America, Mexico specifically. Over time, they planted themselves in this land where the success of agriculture in the desert became an admirable scientific miracle for the crops that abound as well as for the strength and resilience of the people who work the land and are now deeply rooted in this community. Today, ninety-two percent (92%) of the population speaks Spanish. Over seventy percent (70%) of the population has less than a high school education and forty-nine (49%) of the population lives below the poverty level with a median household income of \$26,592.

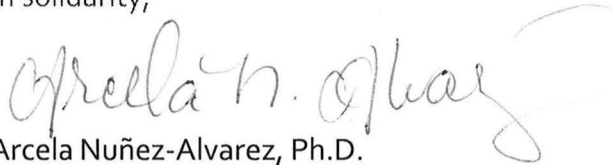
Nonetheless, they wake up every morning with the vision of a life, like the rest of us, in which sacrifice gives way to fulfilled dreams and plentiful opportunities. They eat, love, play, pray and die like the rest of America. They believe in democracy and understand it through their children's pledge of allegiance. They are faithful believers of the American Dream. "Our children are citizens," a community member pointed out, "and they deserve to be treated like Americans."

They go to local and state representatives seeking support to help them improve access to basic infrastructure and services such as electricity, safe drinking water, drainage and pavement. However, their pleas for help go unheard time and time again. Everyone around them seems to be deaf and blind to what is happening to them and their children. Some of the community leaders are facing eviction and other forms of intimidation yet they remain strong and unafraid. When they should be bitter and outraged, they speak passionately and poetically about human rights and the wrongs perpetrated against the community. When they should be

aggressive and skeptical, they talk about respect and dignity. When they should be greedy and protective of what they have, they willingly share their bottled water and food with others. When they should be exhausted from working so hard, they volunteer more. Action by action, they demonstrate what it means to be a caring person and collectively embody courageous indignation.

Thank you for your example.

In solidarity,



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