

Boxcar

(Vagón) By Silvia González - Directed by René Buch



STUDY GUIDE

Written and Compiled by Teresa Calves
Edited by Pablo Tufiño

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By Silvia González
Directed by René Buch

"Boxcar" and the Nuestras Voces
National Playwriting Competition are
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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Silvia González S. is a renowned playwright, a member of the Chicago Dramatists Workshop and was Chicago's Body Politic Theatre's first Latina playwright. She was born and raised in Pacoima, CA in the San Fernando Valley. Ritchie Valens [of "La Bamba" fame] also grew up there. In the San Fernando Valley. I know L.A. and the valley like the back of my hand." She has attended the Loyola Marymount University, studied in Italy at the Loyola Rome Center, and continued her education at the Loyola University in Chicago where she earned a BS in education. She now lives in Oregon with her husband, Tom Scherer and continues to write plays and promotes the arts among Latino students.

Silvia González S. is the recipient of the Hispanic Playwright Award (Boxcar) from Southwest Rep, in 1999, the METLIFE Nuestras Voces Winner 2004 and has published her plays *Waiting Women*, *Alice In Wonder Tierra (Or I Can't Eat Goat Head)*, *The Migrant Farmworker's Son* and *La Llorona Lloro*. When describing her writing style, González says, "I am somewhat Chicanacentric, or Latinacentric. I see through the eyes of a Latina. Whatever hits me, goes in my work. However, I strive to depict the Latino accurately, and I like to represent myself as a Latina who can write whatever.... I think I move through the world with an observing eye. Then I decide to write it down, and to my surprise it is interesting to people.



Now in my later years, I'm trying to observe people with compassion, even the ones who are blatant idiots. Playwrights are behavioral scientists and we document emotions."

The current political climate of the United States has made González's most produced play, *Boxcar*, more relevant than ever. This was the first play she ever wrote in 1987 inspired after learning about a tragedy in which 18 bodies and one survivor were found in a sealed boxcar in Texas attempting to cross the border. González felt it was important to honor those who have died in similar disasters, abandoned in boxcars and tractors trailers by the human smugglers called *coyotes*. "I knew this was going to happen again and again. I felt I had to do something. Somehow inspiration hit me to write some scenes for this play. The characters just spoke to me. It was the first play I had ever written focusing on immigration issues."

DIRECTORS' PROFILE

Born in Cuba, René Buch was founder and Director of Pro Arte de Oriente's Theatre Department, as well as founder of Havana's Acción Teatral de Autores. Through the ATA, he made possible the staging of plays by aspiring Cuban playwrights. He holds a degree in Law from Havana University. Mr. Buch came to the United States and enrolled at the Yale Drama School. While completing his MFA degree, he taught both Spanish and Spanish literature at Yale.

Mr. Buch directed *La Dama Duende* at the Greenwich Mews Theatre in 1968, produced by Las Artes – Frances Drucker and Gilberto Zaldivar. The success of the production gave birth to a new company – Repertorio Español. As Artistic Director of Repertorio Español, Mr. Buch has directed many plays from Spanish classics to contemporary Latin American plays and plays written by Hispanic American authors in the United States. His work with a specially chosen company of actors has developed an outstanding ensemble, which has won critical acclaim throughout the United States, and on its tours to Latin America and Spain. Under Mr. Buch's direction, Repertorio Español has presented Operas, Zarzuelas (Spanish operettas) and anthologies of classical and popular Hispanic music to enthusiastic audiences.



Photo by Michael Palma

In addition to his work at Repertorio Español, Mr. Buch has staged other operas and directed productions of Shakespeare, Pirandello, Cocteau, Ionesco, Beckett, Calderón and Lorca at regional theatres, including the Milwaukee Rep.; La Compañía de Albuquerque; Washington's Folger Theatre; The Old Globe in San Diego, California and Ashland Oregon Shakespeare Festival as well as theaters in New York such as Albany's Capital Rep.; Classic Stage Company; the Julliard Drama Center; New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Acting Program and the Pearl Theatre.

Mr. Buch has served as a panel member for the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, The Village Voice OBIE Awards Committee and the Independent Committee on Arts Policy, and as a board member of the Theatre Communications Group.

SYNOPSIS OF BOXCAR

WRITTEN BY SILVIA GONZÁLEZ - DIRECTED BY RENÉ BUCH

Photo by Michael Palma



Scene 1

The play begins with two Border Patrolmen Roberto and Bill out in the desert catching an immigrant named Manuel trying to cross into the United States...again. This is Manuel's ninth time and he and Roberto have become familiar with each other. Roberto asks Manuel "Don't you ever get tired of doing this?" Manuel responds by saying he doesn't get tired of eating and that a man must provide for his family. Roberto is Mexican-American and Manuel hints that someone in his family once was in his very position. Roberto takes Manuel to the van to bring him back to Mexico, but Manuel assures him that he will cross again.

Scene 2

Roberto and his partner Bill are in an interrogation room, questioning a young college student from El Salvador named Noel. Noel is visibly upset and the officers keep asking him what happened in the boxcar. Noel begins to tell his story.

Scene 3

Francisco is a man in his mid-forties who finds the boxcar and hides inside it. He waits inside quietly with his few belongings and his rosary and is soon joined by Noel who was just robbed by thugs outside the boxcar. They discuss the outrageous prices they had to pay the coyote that is getting them across. Another man called Huero enters the car loudly saying adios to Mexico and hello to California. Huero is obsessed with American music, clothes and lifestyle and is eager to get to a beach.

The men hear Pepe outside calling for help and they pull him inside the boxcar. He is covered in oil because earlier in his journey his coyote had sealed him inside a barrel. He says it was like being buried alive. The immigrants share stories on how they had previously tried to cross, hiding in cars and refrigerators and where they had gone for work (everywhere from California to Nebraska). Manuel who enters right as the train bells start to sound completes the group. Pepe and Manuel are old friends who knew each other years ago in Chicago. They are reminiscing when the sounds of the boxcar being latched is heard. They are unconcerned, figuring that the coyotes do that so Border Patrol won't check inside. They talk about they left behind and to whom they want to send money. Noel asks if anybody knows how to let more air into the boxcar.

Photo by Michael Palma

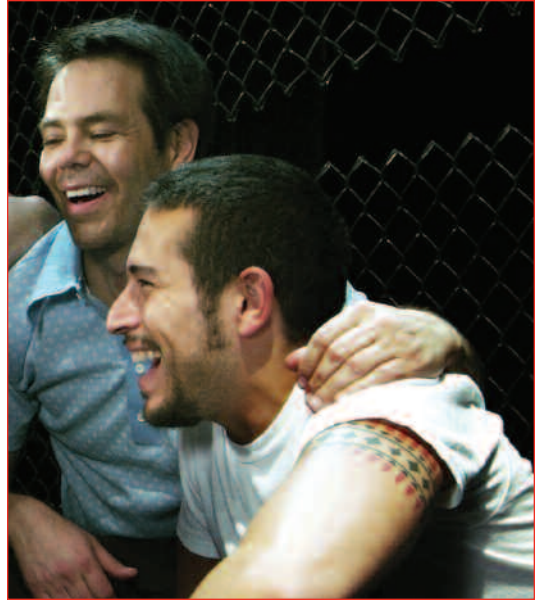


Scene 4

Back in the interrogation room, Roberto asks Noel, about his coyote. Noel tells him he doesn't know if everyone had used the same coyote. He has never used a real name and he called himself El Chapulín (The Grasshopper). Roberto sees how dehydrated and weak Noel is and feels sympathy for him. Roberto informs him that they reached his mother back in El Salvador and he will try to help him. His partner, Bill, does not approve of making promises to illegals and it becomes clear that Bill views the immigrants crossing as criminals and wants them out of his country. He feels little sympathy for those who die on the journey because they shouldn't have been doing something illegal. Roberto begins to argue with him that people should have rights and be treated like human beings, especially if all they want is to work. The scene ends with Bill asking Roberto what he wants to do about it. Roberto doesn't answer.

Scene 5

The men are singing in the boxcar and dreaming about beer to take their minds off the growing heat. Francisco tells them a story about a man he knew that climbed through a hole in a fence to cross into the US. The Border Patrol caught him and when they checked the computer, he was an American citizen. His mother had died and never told him. The men laugh and try to pass the time. Huero and Manuel's new hobby in the boxcar is to pick on Noel, the new kid, until Manuel discovers he is studying anthropology. Manuel has dreamed of becoming an anthropologist and is interested in people. He tells Noel that the one thing he has learned in all his travel is that deep down people are the same inside.



Scene 6

The men realize that the train is slowing down to a stop. They are already beginning to feel dehydrated. While everyone is calm at first, Noel begins to panic. The others dismiss his fears since this is his first time crossing and he is a rookie. Noel tells them why he left El Salvador. His father was a journalist who was assassinated for his politics and Noel's



mother feared for her son's life and sent him away. The group begins to scream and bang for help, hoping someone will hear them. They figure if they get caught they can always cross again later. Huero tries to use his knife to make a hole in the floor so they can breathe. Pepe is fading away and remembering back when he was stuck in the barrel; he thinks one of the other barrels fell off the back of the

moving truck. He thinks he heard a man screaming, sealed inside the can. Pepe asks Manuel what it is like to die in a barrel. Pepe is scaring him so Manuel tells him to think of his job that is waiting for him and how he will be able to send money to his sick daughter. Huero is crying and is unable to keep carving a hole into the floor. Francisco gently takes the knife from him and continues.

Photo by Michael Palma



Scene 7

Noel is in the interrogation room recounting this part of the story. Bill and Roberto step back from him for a moment and Bill remembers how easier it was before 9/11 and tells himself it is a job somebody has to do. Roberto remembers the origins of the United States and how immigrants who never got to share in the benefits of their hard work were the ones who built it. Bill repeats that someone has to uphold the law. Noel calms down and begins to finish his story.

Scene 8

The men are breathing heavily and remove some of their clothes. Manuel finally makes a breathing hole in the floor, but a fight quickly breaks out between Huero and Noel over who gets to breathe first. Francisco and Manuel break it up. Everyone notices that Pepe is not moving at all, but Manuel tells Huero to let him rest and get some air and everyone will take turns. Huero gets his air, but is still worried about Pepe. He tries to nudge him awake and sings Pepe's favorite song "Dos Arbolitos". Manuel and Francisco join in the singing, but Pepe does not wake up. Huero's singing grows fainter and he too dies. Now it is Francisco who realizes they are not going to survive this. He asks Manuel to confess his sins, but Manuel tells him "Don't knock on the door of death". Francisco is dying as he speaks about his dreams of getting a ranch for his son and daughter and remembers picking oranges in the sun. He lies on the floor and doesn't get back up. Manuel is weak, but he encourages Noel to breathe through the air hole. Manuel takes the knife and carves "Todos somos parientes" ("We are all related"). Manuel dies.

Scene 9

Roberto is upset after hearing Noel's story and is pacing, remembering when his father had become a citizen. He tells Bill how the United States tells immigrants "This is a great country, we want you to be like us, but don't come here. We want you to adopt our values, but don't come here. We will let you fight in our war and then we'll give citizenship sometimes after you get killed on the battleground." Bill tells "Robert" that he's only getting this upset because he knew one of the guys in that boxcar and they are so close to closing the case and going home.

Scene 10

Roberto tells Noel to come with him to the boxcar. Noel begs not to go back to that place, but Roberto wants to see it for himself. They find Manuel's carved message near the air hole. Roberto removes his gun, badge and handcuffs and places them on the floor. He has decided that he will no longer hunt immigrants. Roberto frees Noel while he repeats Manuel's words: Todos sono parientes.



Photo by Michael Palma

SUGGESTED READINGS

The following articles are about real life tragedies, including the 1987-boxcar deaths that the play is inspired on.

THE BOXCAR THAT BECAME A COFFIN

Monday, Jul. 13, 1987 By ED MAGNUSON

The weak voice was just above a whisper. "We need help. Can you please help us?" Border Patrol Agent Stanley Saathoff turned a crank to unlock the door of a red Missouri Pacific boxcar sitting on a siding in the small town of Sierra Blanca, 90 miles southeast of El Paso. A naked young man threw himself into the startled agent's arms. "You've been sent from heaven," the man moaned. But when Saathoff looked inside the dark car, he found a scene straight out of hell. Sprawled across the floor in the 100 degrees heat lay the naked bodies of 18 other young men. In their efforts to escape from the locked boxcar, they left gashes on the wood lining of the heavy metal door and used railroad spikes in a vain attempt to gouge through the floor. They had removed their clothes to lessen the effect of the intense heat, also to no avail. Some had chewed their tongues during convulsions, spilling blood on their cast-off clothing.

Thus ended last week one of the worst tragedies in the long and tortured history of illegal crossings of the U.S.-Mexican border. The lone survivor, Miguel Tostado Rodriguez, 21, told how he promised to pay \$400 to a "coyote" (the term for smugglers who grow wealthy by sneaking Mexicans into the U.S.) for help in rafting the Rio Grande and hiding in a freight train headed for Fort Worth. All but two of his 18 companions had agreed to make similar payments. Those two were guides, working with the coyote.

After the 19 climbed into the boxcar in El Paso at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, the coyote threw a couple of railroad spikes in after them. He said the men could use them to punch through the car floor when they reached their destination. Then he slammed the door shut and locked it. But the smugglers apparently did not realize that this was an airtight steel car, lined with wood and insulating foam, designed to carry beer. The floor was nine inches thick.

It had been close to 100 degrees outside when the doomed passengers entered the car. After four hours, Tostado said, they began suffering from lack of air and water. Many ripped off their clothes. As the train rumbled along busy Interstate 10, the men screamed for help, but their delirious cries could not be heard. When their supply of water ran low, Tostado recalled, many "started fighting with each other because they were desperate to breathe and drink. They didn't know what they were doing."

"A naked young man threw himself into the startled agent's arms. 'You've been sent from heaven,' the man moaned."

Tostado found a crack in a corner of the floor, crouched and sucked in the life-saving air. He watched the smuggler's two aides dig at the floor with the spikes. "They ran out of strength, and they were the first to die." Others took up the task, but never completed it.

"People started dying, little by little," he said. Desperate for more air, Tostado hacked away with one of the spikes and finally punched through the wood. He dropped to the floor, gulping drafts of air. Tostado was now alive but alone, surrounded by bodies.

It was not until 7 a.m. on Thursday that Agent Saathoff heard the faint plea for help from Tostado. The coyote was believed to have fled back to Mexico. William Harrington, assistant chief of the El Paso Border Patrol, conceded that "we may never get our hands on him." The closest Harrington may come is the coyote's two confederates, whose sordid business led them to death in the boxcar that became a coffin.

18 ALIENS, TRAPPED IN A BOXCAR, DIE IN BUNGLED SMUGGLING ATTEMPT

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: July 3, 1987

LEAD: Eighteen illegal aliens trapped in a locked steel-walled boxcar were found dead today in stifling 120-degree temperatures in what the authorities called a bungled smuggling effort.

Eighteen illegal aliens trapped in a locked steel-walled boxcar were found dead today in stifling 120-degree temperatures in what the authorities called a bungled smuggling effort.

A 19th alien survived by using a spike to punch a hole through the wooden floor and breathe through the opening, said Mike Williams, the chief Border Patrol agent in El Paso. [Mr. Williams later said that two of the dead were smugglers.] "They appear to have gotten excessively hot," William Harrington, assistant chief patrol agent for the Border Patrol, said of the aliens. "Some appeared to have gone into convulsions, evidenced by nasal bleeding in their mouths and they were dehydrated." Train on Siding Overnight

The aliens had boarded an eastbound Missouri Pacific freight train late Wednesday afternoon at El Paso, about 90 miles northwest of Sierra Blanca on the Mexican border, Mr. Williams said. They were apparently headed for the Dallas-Fort Worth area, he said.

The freight train apparently stayed on a siding Wednesday night and was delayed for some mechanical problem, he said.

Mr. Williams said the temperatures in the boxcar probably exceeded 120 degrees. The bodies were found about 8 A.M. in a routine Border Patrol inspection of boxcars.

"It is definitely an organized smuggling effort," Mr. Williams said. "Possibly one of the smugglers was planning on riding the train on the outside, in a different

boxcar, with the idea of opening it up the first chance they stopped."

The dead were men believed to be in their 20's or 30's, said Harvey Bustamante, a dispatcher with the Hudspeth County Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Harrington said the bodies had probably been inside the boxcar 12 to 14 hours. He said Government agents might never positively identify the bodies. Clothing Scattered in Boxcar

Clothing was scattered around the boxcar, making the process of identification difficult, he said.

The 21-year-old survivor, Miguel Tostado Rodriguez, was examined by a doctor in the town of Van Horn and was helping the authorities piece together what happened.

"He had no injuries," said Dr. Bill Lipsey. "He had apparent dehydration and oxygen deprivation, but he appeared to be largely recovered. His only complaint was that he felt weak."

Mr. Tostado was expected to spend the night in a shelter for illegal aliens in El Paso, said James Selbe, associate chief of the El Paso Border Patrol. Survivor 'Very Worn Out'

"He's very worn out and as the day passes on, it will sink in what he's been through," Mr. Selbe said. Mr. Harrington said illegal aliens usually used El Paso freight yards to leave the border area.

"They stripped off all their clothes and tried to punch a hole in the door with a steel spike but it was a steel door, and they couldn't do it." Mr. Tostado survived by punching a hole in the floor of the car."

"Our agents do a routine check of all boxcars when the train officials sign for them," he said. "I am sure that once the survivor knew of anyone in the area, he would have started screaming and making noises."

"It is not uncommon to find aliens in a boxcar," he said. "But we just don't find them locked inside."

Mark Davis, a spokesman for Union Pacific, the parent company of the Missouri Pacific, said the railroad's agents did not open the car in El Paso because it was supposed to be empty. An aluminum identification tag missing from one side of the car prompted Border Patrol agents to check it, he said.

"On this particular train, the Border Patrol took 52 illegal aliens from the train prior to departure from El Paso," Mr. Davis said. In April 1984, five Salvadorans were killed and six other aliens seriously injured when a train drove through the group as they were being led by smugglers on a forced march on a narrow railroad trestle near Kingsville, Tex.

On the Fourth of July weekend seven years ago, a report of a man lying by the side of a remote Arizona highway led to the rescue of 12 Salvadorans and two Mexican smugglers. Thirteen other people died in the attempt to cross the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, where sand temperatures reached up to 150 degrees. 7 From Same Town

Mr. Williams of the Border Patrol said Mr. Tostado, the survivor, told the authorities that at least six of the victims were from his hometown of Pabellon de Arteaga in the state of Aguascalientes, in central Mexico. "The scene is grim," Mr. Williams said, shortly after returning to El Paso from Sierra Blanca. "They stripped off all their clothes and tried to punch a hole in the door with a steel spike but it was a steel door, and they couldn't do it." Mr. Tostado survived by punching a hole in the floor of the car.

Mr. Williams said two of the dead were smugglers. He said it was normal practice for smugglers to accompany their clients in a locked boxcar. He said there was usually someone at the other end to let the aliens out.

Mr. Williams said the three smugglers apparently led the men to the freight yard in El Paso, which he described as "a real popular spot" for illegal aliens to begin their trip to the interior of the United States. The freight yard is about a half-mile from the Mexico border, across from Juarez, a city of more than a million people.

Mr. Williams said two of the smugglers climbed into an empty boxcar around 5 P.M. Wednesday along with their clients. He said the third smuggler, who remained outside, slammed the door shut after locking the door.

He said investigators were trying to learn the identity of the third smuggler.



DECOMPOSING BODIES FOUND IN A RAILROAD CAR

DENISON, Iowa (AP) — Workers at a grain elevator were cracking open rail cars left in storage when they came across a grisly discovery: Eleven decomposing bodies.

All the victims had apparently boarded the rail car in Mexico four months ago and were possibly smuggled into the country, said Jerry Heinauer, district director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service for Nebraska and Iowa.

After Monday's discovery, the rail car was sealed and shipped to Des Moines for examination by criminal investigators and the state medical examiner. The tests were to be conducted Tuesday.

Heinauer said authorities do not yet know whether the occupants of the rail car were being smuggled, but he said it fits the pattern of some smuggling operations. Their nationality was unconfirmed.

"Unfortunately it does happen occasionally that smugglers lead migrants into the United States and then they lock them in cars so that authorities wouldn't check the cars," Heinauer said. "And, sometimes what happens, closer on the U.S. side, the migrants will make some sort of commotion. They're literally trapped inside and sometimes authorities will be able to save them. In this case it seems they were not and that their deaths were horrific."

Heinauer said he was told by the Mexican consul that the rail car left Matamoros, Mexico, in June. It had been parked in Oklahoma since then, before heading to Denison, about 60 miles northeast of Omaha, Neb.

Matamoros, near McAllen, Texas, was once one of the major centers for illegal immigrants seeking to enter the United States. The increased border enforcement in the 1990s shifted many immigrants away from Matamoros and farther west.

The bodies were found Monday afternoon by workers flipping open the lids of rail cars so they could be cleaned before loading at a grain elevator west of town, Crawford County Sheriff Tom Hogan said.

Authorities said they didn't know if the victims were men, women or children. Jose Luis Cuevas, Mexican Consul for the Dakotas, Iowa and Nebraska, said officials with Union Pacific Railroad, which brought the cars to Denison, had given him the impression that the bodies had been in the car at least four months.

"I presume as soon as they have some type of a way to match the ID or to try to determine possible ID, then we'll follow up with Mexico to see if we can put a name to the person," Cuevas said. "The loss of life is a real tragedy," Cuevas said.

In 1987, Border Patrol agents found 18 Mexican immigrants dead and one barely alive in a boxcar left on a rail siding in Sierra Blanca, Texas. The survivor told authorities the man who smuggled them across the border had put them aboard a boxcar in El Paso and locked the door. Temperatures in the boxcar reached 130 degrees and 18 men suffocated. The man who survived had punched a breathing hole in the floor with a railway spike.

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Photo by Michael Palma

The Immigration Debate: Both Sides of the Argument, Lou Dobbs and Janet Murguía

DOBBS: BIG MEDIA HIDE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION

POSTED: 1:39 p.m. EDT, April 25, 2007

By Lou Dobbs
CNN

Editor's note: Lou Dobbs' commentary appears weekly on CNN.com.

NEW YORK (CNN) -- The Bush administration and the leadership of the Democratic Party are preparing to take another legislative leap at imposing a massive illegal alien amnesty on American citizens.

And the mainstream media are complicit in advancing this thinly veiled blanket amnesty. Instead of asking and answering important questions about why our immigration laws aren't being enforced and why we're permitting pervasive document fraud, the national media seem hell-bent on trying to obfuscate the issue, shamelessly playing with language, equating legal immigration with illegal immigration while obviously trying to preserve the illusion of objectivity.

Too often, the language of the national media describes illegal immigration as "migration" and illegal aliens as "undocumented immigrants," even though many of them have lots of documents, most of which are fraudulent or stolen. Some media outlets have taken to calling illegal aliens "entrants." Whether such language is meant to engender sympathy or to intentionally blur the distinction between legal and illegal, the mainstream media are taking sides in this debate.

The Arizona Republic, for example, used

"undocumented immigrant" more than 80 times in 36 separate stories in the past month alone; the term appeared as many as 12 times in one article on "migration," according to our Lexis-Nexis search. At the same time, "illegal alien" appeared a total of only nine times during that span, with seven of the references coming from readers' opinions, one from a quotation and one from an editorial.

The mainstream media report as if America would no longer be a welcoming nation if we stopped illegal immigration. Nothing could be further from the truth. Why do the national media conveniently and routinely neglect to report that the United States brings in more lawful immigrants than the countries of the rest of the world combined? Each year, we accept 2 million immigrants legally. We give a million legal immigrants permanent residency every year. We bestow citizenship on 700,000 people a year and provide almost half a million work-related visas a year.

Illegal immigration, in fact, has the potential to change the course of American history: Demographers at the Brookings Institution and the Population Reference Bureau paint a troubling picture of the future of our democracy. As more illegal aliens cross our borders and settle in large states like California, Texas and Florida, congressional seats will be redistributed to these bigger states following each decennial Census. States with low levels of immigration will ultimately lose seats as a result. Unfortunately for American citizens, this seismic shift in political representation will be decided by noncitizens that cannot vote.

Congress will soon take up so-called comprehensive immigration reform, and a bipartisan House bill would probably admit 400,000 guest workers a year. And since any plan calling for eventual legalization would

"Too often, the language of the national media describes illegal immigration as 'migration' and illegal aliens as 'undocumented immigrants.'"

include family members who live outside the United States, the legislation would open our borders to tens of millions of people. The Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector estimated that the 2006 version of the McCain-Kennedy bill would have added an additional 66 million immigrants over the next 20 years. The bill may change, but that estimate has yet to be refuted.

There's no question this type of mass immigration would have a calamitous effect on working citizens and their families. Professor Carol Swain, professor of law and political science at Vanderbilt University and author of "Debating Immigration," would like to see more people speak up for the sectors of society most affected by illegal immigration.

"How many African-American leaders have you seen come out and address the impact that high levels of illegal immigration [are] having in the communities when it comes to jobs, when it comes to education, when it comes to health care?" she asked. "And often, these low-skilled, low-wage workers compete in the same sectors for jobs."

Let's have a vigorous open debate on illegal immigration in this country, and let's begin with the facts. Estimates of illegal aliens in this country range from 12 million to 20 million people. Why doesn't our government know how many there are?

Shouldn't this Congress and this president at least recognize that the industries in which illegal aliens are employed in the greatest percentages also are suffering the largest wage declines? And shouldn't there be an economic impact statement researched and delivered to this Congress, this president and the rest of us before any legislation granting amnesty is even considered?

Shouldn't we first bring the facts of illegal immigration out of the shadows?

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the writer



Photo by Michael Palma

LOU DOBBS TONIGHT (TRANSCRIPT)

Aired March 27, 2006 - 18:00 ET

This is a rush transcript. This copy may not be its final form and may be updated.



JANET MURGUIA



LOU DOBBS

ANNOUNCER: This is LOU DOBBS TONIGHT, news, debate and opinion for Monday, March 27, 2006 Live in New York, Lou Dobbs.

Still ahead here, I'll be talking with one woman who disagrees with almost everything I have to say about the issue of illegal immigration but she does so with intelligence and class and some great style. La Raza president and CEO, Janet Murguia will be my guest. We'll argue about what is going on in this country and what should happen. Stay with us.

DOBBS: Demonstrations that we've been reporting on here on CNN throughout the day, including to this very hour, the latest on what has become a drumbeat of protests against the Sensenbrenner bill that would crack down on illegal immigration, establish border security, and by the way, even, even punish employers who illegally hire illegal aliens. The National Council of La Raza is the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in this country, has been outspoken in opposition to this legislation. Joining me now is the head person, Janet Murguia. She's the president and CEO of the National Council of

La Raza. Good to have you here.

JANET MURGUIA, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA:

Thanks, Lou, nice to be here.

DOBBS: The Sensenbrenner legislation is sort of off focused right now, except in these demonstrations. We're watching a guest worker program move through. It looks like everybody's going to get what they want as far as the Judiciary Committee on agriculture workers and the hell with border security and controlling immigration. What do you think?

MURGUIA: That's not true. There's got to be...

DOBBS: ... Which part isn't true?

M: Well enforcement and security have to be part of a comprehensive solution to this crisis that we're seeing happening right now in immigration. And the McCain-Kennedy bill, which is the focus of the Senate Judiciary Committee meeting today, really has security and enforcement measures in it. They do.

D: You and I both know ...

M: ... They do, and we know it has to be part of it.

D: There is no way you could even talk about border security in that legislation. Secondly, it is nothing more than a pay for citizenship. I mean it is a disastrous attempt in immigration reform.

M: That's your opinion, but the fact is...

D: It is and that's who I'm speaking for.

M: ... we've got a broad coalition that was a bipartisan vote that came out and conservatives like Sam Brownback and Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, those aren't exactly your liberals, they support.

D: I don't care what they are.

M: Well but they support the McCain-Kennedy solution on this...

D: Well, good for them.

M: ... in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

D: I think they're wrong-headed as they can possible be.

M: Well the fact of the matter is, is we want to find solutions. We can all have opinions about what we think of the issue and we know it's broken, but let's focus on solutions. This is a comprehensive solution that offers security. It offers a guest worker program and it offers a way to deal with the 11-to-12 million undocumented folks who are here.

D: It gives them a chance to buy citizenship, the McCain -- and that's simply what it is. It is a guest worker program. This president talking about a guest worker program. There is no security for the borders. And just help me out with this, Janet. Explain to me something just as simple as I can, because what you're talking about are conservatives and liberals at the far end of this debate, both as

"MURGUIA: 'we're a nation of laws and we're a nation of immigrants. We can be a welcoming society and we can be a society that's a lawful society.'"

liberals and conservatives, and frankly I think there is wrong-head at both ends because they merge on this. They're both owned by the corporate interests and the special

interests in this country. The Democrats looking for votes. The Republicans looking to exploit cheap labor. There's no significant fine against illegal employers and you and I both know it. There's not another element of border security.

M: There's a broad coalition that includes business industry, labor, the Catholic Church.

D: Here, let me give you a broad...

M: ... No, but just a second. Give me a chance here. What we've seen is a lot of people come together and say, "We have to have -- we're a nation of laws and we're a nation of immigrants. We can be a welcoming society and we can be a society that's a lawful society." This McCain-Kennedy bill offers the right balance that says we can have enforcement of security, but it also recognizes that we need to deal with the future flow of immigrants and this guest worker provision is not amnesty. It basically says people have to go to the end the line, pay fines and learn English and then they can qualify. And then it says we have to deal practically with the 12 million who are here. The Sensenbrenner bill doesn't do that.

D: Why are all those demonstrators out there carrying Mexican flags?

M: Well there's a sense of pride with anybody. We just had St. Patrick's Day. Are you saying that Irish, because they're holding up their Irish flags, that all of a sudden they're not loyal or they're un-American? It's a double standard to say that people from one country can wave their flag, but people who want to be Americans can wave another flag, but they're not being loyal. That's a double standard. Irish Americans...

D: ... Are you accusing me of a double standard?

M: Well, I'm just saying.

D: Because I want you to look me in the eye and I want you to hear me loud and clear.

M: Yes, I'm right here.

D: OK, are you ready to listen to me loud and clear?

M: I'm here.

D: I don't think that we should have any flag flying in this country except the flag of the United States. And let me tell you something else, since we're talking about double standards and I think you're right about people who would believe that. But let's be clear. I don't think there should be a St. Patrick's Day. I don't care who you are. I think we ought to be celebrating what is common about this country, what we

enjoy as similarities as people. And as Peter Viles was reporting, talking about the culture and the heritage of their people and that's why they want to hold up the Mexican flag or Ecuadorian flag.

M: No, this is about the American dream, this is about the aspirations of being Americans.

D: No, let me finish. No, the American dream is being ripped out of the hands of millions of U.S. citizens today. Their jobs are being outsourced. Their schools are falling apart. Half of the Hispanics in this country are dropping out of high school, half of them, and you know that. Half of our -- young blacks are dropping out of high school.

M: But look at the contributions. Look at the contributions that immigrants are making. They're paying federal taxes.

D: Not immigrants, not immigrants, no they're not.

M: But Hispanics immigrants, they are paying federal taxes.

D: No.

M: Hispanics and immigrants contribute \$519 billion into the Social Security trust fund, a trust fund that's going to pay your Social Security benefits.

D: Let me given you a real piece of bad news for you. Over half of those people coming to this country illegally don't have a

"MURGUIA: ...this is about the American dream, this is about the aspirations of being americans.'"

"DOBBS: Let me given you a real piece of bad news for you. Over half of those people coming to this country illegally don't have a high school education."

high school education. They're going to be a net drag on the social services of this country. We're going to be supporting them, our social safety net.

M: They're going to provide the work force that's up to 25 percent of that work force that is contributing and sustaining the Social Security trust fund that you and many others are going to be able to benefit, \$519 billion.

D: \$519 billion? Janet, can I tell you right now, and I want to say this in front of God and everybody, whoever told you that illegal immigrants are going to contribute \$519 billion...

M: ... Immigrants and Hispanics.

D: Hispanics now? Now you're saying...

M: ... I'm saying that -- you can look it...

D: ... Excuse me. Do you think that most Hispanics in this country buy this nonsense, that illegal immigration is great? You don't think that there's a division in what Hispanics and Latinos in this country think about illegal immigration?

M: No, I think that there are a lot of people who bring different points of view. But I think they

all recognize that there's a common objective.

D: But why would you incorporate what Hispanics do?

M: There's a common agenda here in the sense that we want to provide an opportunity to fix the broken system. It needs a comprehensive solution...

D: OK, here's a solution.

M: ... that includes enforcement and it includes a guest worker program in dealing with those 12 million undocumented.

D: Here's a solution. You tell me what's wrong it. First we secure our borders. Then we create a rational and humane immigration policy. We take control of the immigration and our borders in that order.

M: We can do enforcement and we can make sure we're supporting some opportunities. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. We really can, we're in the 21st century, we can figure this out. We're a nation of laws and a nation with immigrations.

D: Janet, I would love to say you're right, but you're watching people go on the set and say they're not talking about amnesty when they're talking about guest workers program. You're watching people sit there and say to you that they're -- please; they're equating Hispanics and illegal aliens.

M: We've poured millions and billions of dollars into enforcement-only approaches.

D: Are you not doing that?
Equating Hispanics and illegal
aliens?

M: No.

D: You said Hispanics and
immigrants?

M: No, I'm not doing
that. I think other
people are doing that.

D: Where did you get
the \$519 billion?

M: We have a documented report
that shows in the Social Security
suspension files when they look at
who isn't -- they can't identify
names, they look at who is
contributing. Those are often
immigrants without documents who
are paying into the Social
Security system.

D: Seven billion dollars a year,
do you know what they're costing
in terms of social service and
suppressed wages a year.

M: I'm just saying, they're going
to see a lot of...

D: It's a quarter of a billion
dollars.

M: ... the economic vitality that
we see in this country is due in
large part to the immigrant work
force.

D: Why do you say immigrant? We're
talking about illegal immigration.

M: Well there are immigrants here
who are contributing to that.

D: I would hope so, they have for
200 years.

M: Yes, right.

D: But what about the illegals?

M: Let's fix the system, Lou.
Let's get a solution that works...

D: ... That's right, secure the

**"MURGUIA: ...the economic
vitality that we see in this
country is due in large part to
the immigrant work force."**

border and then we can worry about
the rest.

M: But we can secure the border
and find opportunities to deal
with this. If we just do
enforcement only, that's what we
did in 1996.

D: It's four and a half years
after September 11th...

M: And it hasn't worked.

D: ... we've got a Homeland
Security Department that still
can't secure a port or a border.
We have got a big problem. We
can't walk and chew gum, not with
this government and not with this
administration.

M: And American people...

D: Janet Murguia of La Raza...

M: (INAUDIBLE) aspire to that, I
think, and we can figure this out.

D: Janet Murguia, the head of La
Raza. Good to have you with us.

M: Nice to see you here.

A RESPONSE TO LOU DOBBS

NCLR SUPPORTS ST. PATRICK'S DAY!

"Along with a strong belief in family, country, and the democratic ideal, part of being an American is a deep sense of pride in where one's ancestors came from."

This week, Janet Murguía, President and CEO of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), appeared on Tonight with Lou Dobbs, the news anchor who has become the darling of the anti-immigrant movement. As Murguía explained to Dobbs that the Mexican flags which have been appearing sporadically in the student protests this week were more a symbol of cultural pride than a political statement, akin to the outpouring of Irish flags on St. Patrick's Day, Dobbs made the stunning announcement that he in fact opposed St. Patrick's Day and Columbus Day or any other "day."

While we certainly admire the fact that Dobbs spurned hypocrisy in his crusade against "multiculturalism," taking it to new if increasingly absurd heights, we could not disagree with him more that cultural pride is inconsistent with being an American. On the contrary, we believe that, along with a strong belief in family, country, and the democratic ideal, part of being an American is a deep sense of pride in where one's ancestors came from. To question someone's loyalty as an American because they are proud of their roots would be as silly as questioning it because they were family-oriented or a person of faith. What sets this country apart from any other is that there is no one way to look, sound, or be "American," and the true

mark of being an American is cherishing, and adhering to, the values that make this country great.

Drinking a green beer, eating a kielbasa, playing the glockenspiel in a parade, or wearing kente cloth has not prevented any American from stepping up when this country has needed them or hindered anyone from banding together as a nation in a moment of crisis – and that goes for the Latino community as well. Many of the young people holding those Mexican and American flags have fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, cousins, and other family members serving in Iraq. Many of them will likely be serving there themselves in the coming months and years.

Those who have focused on the flags are missing the point of these rallies – it is about helping a group of people who long desperately for a chance at the American Dream, just like millions of immigrants before them whose descendants now march proudly in parades all over this great nation.

Photographer Recounts Crossing U.S. Border With Mexican Illegal Immigrants

National Geographic Adventure magazine January 23, 2003

The busiest gateway for illegal immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border for the past five years—a 261-mile-long (420 kilometer) stretch of Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona—is now considered the deadliest point of entry as well. According to the Border Patrol, this remote corridor—which also contains Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, considered the country's most dangerous national park—claimed at least 134 illegal immigrants' lives last year, more than any other region along the border.

To shed light on the life-and-death struggle of migrants entering the U.S., photojournalist and author John Annerino began documenting their story twelve years ago. He shares his experiences in his book *Dead in Their Tracks: Crossing America's Desert Borderlands.*, in the February 2003 issue of National Geographic Adventure magazine (read an excerpt from "National Park War Zone"), and in this online-exclusive interview.

In 1987, you crossed the U.S.-Mexico border with four other migrants. What was that journey like?

We started out about four or five [o'clock] in the afternoon—migrants usually leave for the border around then. Three of the men had walked the route before, which had been handed down from one generation to the next. So they weren't following a trail per se. They were keying off geographical landmarks like mountain ranges.

During the summer, the Barry M. Goldwater

Range is very grim country. We walked until midnight without taking a rest. One [migrant] had a flashlight. There was enough ambient light so your eyes grew accustomed to the dark. But still you'd bump into a prickly pear or cholla cactus and have to stop and pull the thorns out of person's leg or shoe.

Then we rested—as much as you can [when you're] tossing and turning on the hot sand in your t-shirt. We were up by 4:30 a.m. ready to roll, and walked until 8 p.m. If you're trained and acclimated to the heat, you really don't notice it until you become dehydrated. Your muscles become cramped from lactic acid

“What did you learn from the trip? The extraordinary lengths that human beings will go to make a better life for themselves. If we had another five miles [8 kilometers] to go, we might not have all made it. And they were doing this to feed their families.”

and from the number of hours you're standing upright. You get dizzy, feel nauseous. You can't hold down water. Mine lasted for about 40 miles [65 kilometers] and then I was out. We just made it because it was starting to cool, and the goal was in sight—in this case Interstate 8. We could actually hear it miles off. So that spurred us on, as did the camaraderie of the group.

What did you learn from the trip?

The extraordinary lengths that human beings will go to make a better life for themselves. If we had another five miles [8 kilometers] to go, we might not have all made it. And they were doing this to feed their families.

How easy is it to cross the border without being apprehended?

Very easy, if you know what you're doing. There are those who believe that if they walk



these extraordinarily long distances across the desert, they'll evade the Border Patrol. And again, we're talking 30 to 120 miles [50 to 190 kilometers]. You can make it if you can handle the heat and distance—and if you don't get caught.

But there are other groups of people who are more knowledgeable. Some cross through a hole in the fence [along the border], from Nogales, Sonora [Mexico], to Nogales, Arizona, hire a taxi, and a mile [1.6 kilometers] south of a Border Patrol checkpoint, the riders will get out of the car, walk into the desert maybe a mile [1.6 kilometers], then north for another two miles [3.2 kilometers], and the taxi driver, having gone through the checkpoint, will be waiting alongside the highway or access road off Interstate 19 to pick up the group and take them to Phoenix. They don't run the risk of dying in the desert.

How did you become involved in documenting the lives of illegal immigrants crossing the U.S. border?

I ran away from home at the age of 16 to Hawaii to become a big wave surfer, and stopped en route in Blythe, California, to pick cantaloupes. I worked side by side with both legal and illegal migrants from Mexico, 12 hours a day, seven days a week. They took me under their wing and fed me, and I made a mental promise that if I had the opportunity in

my lifetime I would show the dangers and difficulties they had in getting to the U.S. to do stoop labor.

Fast forward, I was living in Prescott, Arizona, and had just made the switch from working as an outdoor education instructor to becoming a photojournalist. I read a news account of Border Patrol agents who spearheaded the rescue of 23 migrants in the Arizona desert.

I was dumbfounded—I didn't know this type of situation was taking place in Arizona. I went to Tacna and spent two weeks with two Border Patrol trackers. I said to one of them, "I want to show both sides of this story. Is there any way I can show how difficult and dangerous it is to cross the border other than going with a group of migrants?" And he said no—but if you do, I'll catch you. I did it soon after, in the summer of 1987. I didn't get caught, probably because he wasn't working that day.

You are very sympathetic toward those who lose their lives while trying to cross the border. Is there a way to prevent migrants from dying?

I think there are two solutions. One, I think we should have a guest worker program for migrants who want to work in U.S. They could work for a period of X number of months, return to Mexico, and apply to come back the following year. I think the general perception is that migrants who come to the U.S. want to stay and live here permanently—but oftentimes that's not the case.

It's a difficult thing to leave your family 2,000 miles [3,200 kilometers] behind and live in a foreign country where you are unwelcome in many places—except to do indentured-type work.

I think part of this solution rests squarely with the Mexican government as well.

They should set up checkpoints at various access highways to the U.S. and stop migrants from crossing the desert during the summertime. But there's no economic incentive for the Mexican government to stop sending its people to slaughter in the U.S.

because of the millions of dollars they send back home.

Aside from the death toll, do you think there are any other negative consequences of migrants crossing the border illegally?

Environmentalists often raise the concern that illegal immigrants are causing natural resource damage—and they do. But look, for instance, at Mount Everest, and the tons of trash that are removed from the most popular 8,000-meter [26,000-plus-foot] peak in world—trash left behind by people who are experienced in outdoor travel and sensitive to the mountain ethics of "climbing clean." Then you look at Organ Pipe National Monument and the trash left there—whether it's tin cans, clothes, or gallon jugs. The parallel is that these people are on a life and death journey as well. The migrants may not be climbing Mount Everest, but many are knocking on death's door as

they try to trek across the desert in the summertime. And the human inclination is, "Can I leave this behind and make it easier to survive?" When you see someone leaving a toothbrush behind, they're admitting, "I don't think I'm going to make it."

Around 15 years ago, when I was still teaching outdoor education, I climbed Baboquivari Peak, on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation. I had no thought about immigration—I was just climbing this beautiful peak, and enjoying the beautiful desert landscape. Several years later I started seeing trash and the trails [left by migrants] and I began wondering who was doing this and why—and that changed my perspective. So of course it bothers me to see a park like Organ Pipe get trashed, but on the other hand, you see the human side—our neighbors suffering and dying on American soil—and that's very painful for me.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you think that the United States should limit the number of immigrants allowed to enter the country? Do you think that the government should restrict the number of refugees who can set up residence in America?
2. Do you think that illegal immigration is hurting the U.S. economy? Do you think that the average American consumer benefits from having a source of cheap labor? Do you think that illegal immigrants have a right to education and medical services?
3. Do you think that highly skilled legal immigrants are beneficial to the U.S. economy? Or do you think that legal immigrants harm the economy by taking jobs away from American citizens?
4. How does Roberto's stance on illegal immigrants change throughout the play? How does he go through this transformation?
5. The playwright has the character of Bill voice the opinions of people who are strongly against illegal immigrants entering the United States. Discuss how Bill's own prejudices against immigrants (and Mexicans in general) affect his partnership with Roberto and how he performs his job.
6. Why do you think Manuel is so fascinated by anthropology and finding out from whom people are descended? Why does he keep repeating the phrase "We are all related"?
7. Unlike the others, Noel is a young college student from El Salvador and is escaping political danger. What does this say about the United States immigration policy if people who need protection cannot enter the country through Mexico?
8. Discuss some of the dangers workers face when dealing with coyotes. Would coyotes be able to do what they do to immigrants trying to cross (e.g., locking people in car trunks, barrels, refrigerators and boxcars) if the policies were different?
9. Noel's life and the lives of the four other men have been very different. Explain the differences. What are some of the reasons for Huero and Manuel picking on Noel?

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Fact sheet posted by National Council of La Raza, 2006. www.nclr.org

Myth: Undocumented immigrants do not want to be legal residents.

Fact: Immigrants come to the U.S. for a variety of reasons – to reunite with family or to find better employment opportunities – and would prefer to do so through legal channels. However, the U.S. immigration system is extremely limited, and undocumented immigrants in the U.S. cannot simply apply for a visa and obtain legal status.

Myth: Undocumented immigrants are lazy.

Fact: Ninety-six percent of undocumented men living in the U.S. are employed, which exceeds the labor force participating rate of legal immigrants and U.S. citizens by 15 percentage points.¹ Many work two or more jobs. It is clear that employment is a major driving force behind undocumented migration; many industries, such as restaurants, hotels, and agriculture, report that they rely on these hardworking migrants.

Myth: Undocumented immigrants take jobs from Americans.

Fact: Immigrant labor is needed to fill jobs in the U.S. that an older, more educated American workforce is not willing to fill, especially at the low wages and poor working conditions many unscrupulous employers offer.² Currently, there are approximately nine million undocumented workers in the U.S. filling important gaps in the labor market. There is substantial evidence that their presence in the labor force creates jobs and strengthens local economies.

Myth: Undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes.

Fact: Undocumented immigrants pay taxes in a number of ways, including income and sales tax. The majority of undocumented immigrants pay income taxes using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (iTINs) or false Social Security numbers. All immigrants, regardless of status, will pay on average \$80,000 per capita more in taxes than they use in government services over their

lifetime.³ The Social Security Administration reports that it holds approximately \$420 billion from earnings of immigrants who are not in a position to claim benefits.⁴

Myth: Undocumented immigrants drain the welfare system.

Fact: Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the vast majority of state and federal benefits and are only eligible for those that are considered important to public health and safety. In fact, many legal immigrants are also ineligible for most federal benefits. As a result, health care spending for immigrants is approximately half that of citizens.⁵

Myth: The best way to stop undocumented migration is by increasing enforcement.

Fact: Between 1986 and 2002 the number of border enforcement agents has tripled, the number of hours they spent patrolling the border grew by a factor of approximately eight, and the Border Patrol's budget has increased tenfold. At the same time, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has continued to increase.⁶ Support is growing for a more comprehensive approach to immigration control, which combines smart enforcement with measures to create a legal path for those who come to the U.S. to work, and those who are already in the workforce.

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2 Parol, Rob, "Essential Workers: Immigrants are a Needed Supplement to the Native-Born Labor Force". Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, March 2005.

3 Smith, J.P. and B. Edmonston, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997.

4 Testimony on the "ITN" and Social Security Number Misuse presented by Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr., Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, to the House Committee on the Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Oversight, Subcommittee on Social Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC, March 24, 2004, www.ssa.gov/oig/communications/testimony_speeches/03102004testimony.htm.

5 Mohanty, Sarita A., Steffie Woolhandler, David U. Himmelstein, Susmita Pati, Olveen Carrasquillo, and David H. Bor. "Health Care Expenditures of Immigrants in the United States: A Nationally Representative Analysis." *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 95, No. 8, August 2005.

6 Massey, Douglas, "Beyond the Border Buildup: Towards a New Approach to Mexico-U.S. Migration." Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, September 2005.