

San Jose State University

From the Selected Works of Gil J. Villagran

October, 2011

Introduction to Gil's Writings

Gil J. Villagran



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/gil_villagran/61/

The following editorials, essays and statements are a collection of my writings in the last ten years or so. Most of these editorials were published in *El Observador*, a San Jose based bilingual newsweekly, from 2006 to 2009 where I was graciously offered the unique opportunity to write a weekly column of my political thoughts, opinions, and musing of the week. That paper's editor, Rosario Vital, made this offer with support from the publisher, Hilbert Morales. This invitation come about after Ms. Vital asked me to write an article about President George W. Bush's address in San Jose at the Cisco Systems' hosted meeting of the American Competitive Council. I was planning to attend the demonstration against the president, several blocks away. However, with a newly printed and laminated Press Pass, I was able to enter the Cisco Auditorium where the Council met to hear the Bush address, along with the entire Washington DC press corps, invited guests (high tech CEOs, elected officials, GOP funders, and other VIPs). So that morning I sat among the captains of industry, Governor Schwarzenegger and about one thousand other local ruling elites. That evening I wrote my first editorial for *El Observador*, titled "Happy Talk from an Inane President."

Several editorials were also published by the San Jose Mercury News, some in the San Jose State University's Spartan Daily, where I have taught in the School of Social Work since 1996, and others in *La Oferta*, another San Jose based bilingual newsweekly. All of the editorials were written English; I translated some into Spanish for publication in the bilingual press and to share with primary Spanish speakers. The short memoir of "Beto—the writer of the letters of the Braceros" about my father's experiences as a Bracero contract laborer was written at the invitation of the Smithsonian Institution's Bracero Archive Project.

About 30 of the editorials are available on-line at the Bay Area Independent Media Center's website: www.Indybay.org search: Gil Villagran

I have been a lecturer in the School of Social Work at San Jose State University for 15 years and have been a practicing social worker for Santa Clara County for 33 years. I worked with immigrants since 1971 as a direct service social worker, manager, trainer, public information officer, grant writer, ombudsman, and community programs developer--providing public assistance, child welfare, parent education. I had the opportunity to initiate and managed the two replicated programs: the Family Resource Centers, and the Nuestra Casa Youth Gang Prevention Program while serving on the City of San Jose Mayor's Gang (San Jose BEST) Task Force.

In 1975, along with a handful of creative, dedicated and very committed individuals, we developed a specialized outreach and therapeutic program for political refugees from Chile--traumatized victims of torture, after release from concentration camp prisons. Our Chilean Refugee Support Committee was led by the very "leftist" Father Cuchulain Moriarty of Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

During the Immigration Amnesty program of the 1990s, I taught U.S. Citizenship and ESL classes for San Jose Metropolitan Adult Education at San Jose High School to immigrants from many countries and continents, but most from Mexico, attending night classes, often after working two shifts or two jobs during the day and another job after the 7-9 pm class (just as my papa had done thirty years earlier). Though tired from hard work as cooks, motel maids, gardeners, construction workers, or nursing home attendants, the students were eager to learn English, U.S. history and our Constitution in order to become proud U.S. citizens in the country where they were raising their children.

I was born in Mexico City, raised in Santa Clara, from the age of ten I worked summers picking crops in the fields of the Valley of Heart's Delight, later as a teen in the canneries, and as a night janitor at the Student Union while obtaining a BA in Philosophy/Sociology, and later a Masters in Social Work at San Jose State. As a child, I accompanied my father to ESL and Citizenship classes at San Jose High, Roosevelt Middle, and Horace Mann Elementary Schools.

I have been visiting and studying the effects of NAFTA on populations of corn farmers in Oaxaca, maquiladora workers in Tijuana, female domestic and factory

workers in San Jose, strawberry workers in Watsonville, gardeners, hotel maids, car washers and construction workers in San Jose. Many of these “NAFTA refugees” are unauthorized workers providing critical services to the nation, in more than a few cases working in homes and caring for the children of governors and senators and those seeking these offices.

I consider myself a perpetual non-violent, but often outraged, radical social worker—working for radical social change to *humanize* our families, our communities, our nation, the world and ourselves. He have been called a dangerous activist by several of my supervisors and managers who considered my public statements at City Council and County Board of Supervisor chambers on local, state, national or global issues to lack conformity to “official policy.” However, along with my radical views, I have also been praised by colleagues, local elected officials, and NGO community leaders for my dedication to human rights, peace and justice, and most important of all, people in need, or those who are called in my native Spanish, “los de abajo / those who are below” (due to poverty and other abuse by the ruling elites).

It is my hope and expectation that these editorials can provide a deeper understanding (for anyone that may be interested) of who I am or have been; of how I have been shaped by my experiences, travels, philosophical and historical studies and the events of our time.

--Gil Villagrán

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