



## Spanish for Activist Camp 2008 a success!

The Spanish for Activists Camp is an annual collaboration between the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and CUSLAR. This year the camp was held at Nature's Song Retreat Center in Wilseyville, NY on August 1-3<sup>rd</sup>.

The activist camp seeks to teach Spanish language skills through the lens and context of Latin American solidarity. This year, we had three skilled teachers hold a series of language classes in conjunction with workshops on Latin American politics and issues. Some workshops held were on Latin American farmworkers in New York, understanding Afro-Dominican identity in the

Dominican Republic, globalization and the economy of the Caribbean, U.S.-Mexico border politics, indigenous identity in Guatemala, and economic changes in Ecuador. The weekend included delicious vegetarian meals, an evening of salsa-dancing, a performance by a Spanish-language theatre troop, and camping. The camp serves as a space for activists of all ages to gather, share energies, and experiences.

If you are interested in participating, teaching, or leading a workshop in the summer of 2009, let us know!



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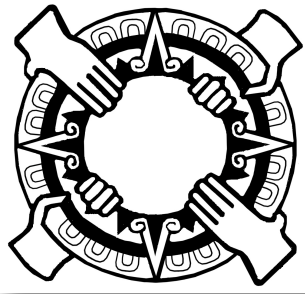


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## MESSAGE FROM COORDINATOR

**CUSLAR****Mission Statement**

The Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a project of the C R E S P Center for Transformative Action (CTA) a non-profit umbrella organization. Founded in 1965, CUSLAR is one of the oldest Latin American solidarity organizations in North America.

CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and human rights in Latin America through local and international education, solidarity, alternative media, and activism. Our members are a diverse group of students, faculty, and local residents united in our concern about the connections between the United States and Latin America. And as a primarily volunteer organization, CUSLAR's programming varies depending upon the interest and experience of its active members.

**Dear CUSLAR supporter**

I want to take this opportunity to reintroduce myself, since you might not have received our summer newsletter. My name is Daniel Carrión, the new CUSLAR Coordinator. I was hired in April by the CUSLAR Advisory Board and the Center for Transformative Action. Upon beginning the position, I really had to hit the ground running. CUSLAR has been in a process of reinvigorating energies. Our two summer interns, Meredith Santana and Jessica Rodríguez, and I planned our annual Spanish for Activists Camp in August this year, which was an exciting success. Continuing with this energy, Meredith is one of our school-year interns, while Ricardo Villarreal has joined the staff.

As you can tell, CUSLAR has an eager and energetic staff to do the Latin American solidarity work that is all too important – and not a moment too soon! In this time in history, it is evident that this work is increasing in necessity. Political relations within Bolivia are at a point of contention; Haiti and Cuba were struck with a series of devastating hurricanes that have crippled the countries, and the international relief efforts are inadequate – coupled with

the potential for increased hurricane frequency due to climate change; Venezuela continues to create a government that many nations are resistant to accept; border issues with Mexico are of continuing concern; the United States financial crisis has potential ramifications for Americans and people around the world; and trade liberalization is an issue of continuing concern for Americans who are losing jobs and Latin Americans who are subjected to the forces of western neoliberal economics.

I am asking you to take a concerted interest in these issues. Latin American solidarity is not simply an issue to take interest in order to 'help people'. Instead, we need to take action to figure out how all of these policies, situations, and disasters prevent everyone from creating the society we want. Please join CUSLAR as we reinvigorate these energies by working to envision new U.S. and Latin American Relations, and fight for justice throughout the Americas.

Venceremos,

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Meredith Santana - Intern  
Ricardo Villareal - Intern



# BUILDING COLLECTIVES

By Jennifer Chicon  
and Jill Petty

The traditional model for a study abroad program, usually limited by logistics and institutional requirements, provides a narrow opportunity for students to engage in experiential learning that is "relevant" to their lives. The Culture and Society: An International Field Experience course, sponsored by the Department of Sociology at Ithaca College, emphasizes the interconnectedness that exists between the people of the Dominican Republic and the United States. The program also strives to highlight the leadership potential that participating students have in community organizing. This insight into the purpose of the program motivated us to get involved. We knew the potential that this type of study program would have in shaping our ideas about the roles students can take in working towards social change. This was definitely apparent in the formation of the group which included both Ithaca College and Cornell students with various understandings of U.S. and Latin American relations.

In collaboration with Justicia Global, a Dominican based grassroots organization, and *Oné Respé* - Center for Solidarity and Reflection, a non-governmental organization focused on education and solidarity, our group was able to interact with the communities these organizations work with. In San Cristobal, we observed an inspirational example of solidarity that gave our group a perspective on the dynamics of power that exist cross-culturally. We spent a day with

members of the Association of *Convite* Campesinos of El Ramon, an organization of rural farmers who maintain the ideals of unity and respect even in a changing economic environment. While observing the farmers as they worked in rhythm with each other through song, our group was able to see the effects of a collective community in action. From this experience, we reflected on the role each member plays in the *Convite* and implemented this dynamic to the work we did within our group. The members



**Members of the *Convite* weed the field  
and prepare for coffee plants**

of the *Convite* entrust each other in making decisions and value the relationships within the organization while noting the significance of working towards a common goal.

Through that experience we were all able to treat our daily lives as a testament to organizing not necessarily in a formal manner working within a social movement, but in a way that makes our peers, family, friends and loved ones aware of the implications that our actions have globally. For a part of the group, the trip was a first experience with grassroots movements

and organizing work. For others, it was something they had been involved in before and wanted to experience on an international level. However, regardless of what each individual brought into the group, we realized the necessity of forming a collective. In the process of forming this collective we were able to deepen our relationships with one another moving forward with a sense of unity.

We were aware that returning to the United States would challenge our collective state. We all enrolled in the course for different reasons, have varying influences in how we lead our lives, but wanted to come back sharing and reflecting upon this ideal. Although the idea of organizing may be different to all of us, in each other we have found a new and unconditional support. Many members of the trip have become organizers on our campuses and in the Ithaca community. There are six members from the program involved with an Ithaca College organization, Students for Economic Equality (S.E.E.). We have been able to integrate the lessons from organizing work in

the Dominican Republic to the leadership roles and group dynamics of S.E.E. Many of the discussions we had in the Dominican Republic focused on the way power dynamics divert attention from the task at hand. This has been applied to S.E.E. by conducting the group in a manner that incorporates all member input equally, without an executive board. The experience, here and abroad, has instilled in us a purpose to join with people across the world in creating a just global community. The Culture and Society course is held every



Spring semester followed by a three week program in the Dominican Republic. If you interested in learning more about the workshops held at Justicia Global and Oné Respé, our visits to schools, the impact of the Zona Franca - Free Trade Zone, and the importance of historical elements in our understanding of solidarity please visit our collective blog at: <http://soci312.blogspot.com/>

For more information contact Professor Alicia Swords from the Department of Sociology, Ithaca College at [aswords@ithaca.edu](mailto:aswords@ithaca.edu).

*Jill Petty, '10, and Jennifer Chicon, '09, are sociology students at Ithaca College. They are also members of Students for Economic Equality and collaborate with the Tompkins County Worker's Center.*



Students from IC and Cornell reflect at Parque Mirador del Sur in Santo Domingo on the last days of the trip.

If you would like to be a member of CUSLAR, contact us by email: [cuslar@cornell.edu](mailto:cuslar@cornell.edu)

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## CIUDAD JUAREZ: GROUND ZERO OF NAFTA

**By Daniel Carrión,  
Coordinator**

"I think what you can do here depends on everyone's abilities. With creativity, anything is better than nothing." Verónica Leyva of the Mexico Solidarity Network left us with these words on October 27th in a presentation hosted by CUSLAR. She was invited to present at Cornell University to share her experiences as a community organizer in Ciudad Juarez.

Verónica was a provocative speaker, touching upon issues pertaining to women, economic and labor conditions, and violence. She provided a framework through which we can begin to understand the thousands of maquilas (free trade factories) that exist throughout Mexico. For instance, she pointed to the fact that 80% of all maquilas in Juarez are owned by United States companies; a fact that cannot be easily ignored. As a result, most of the wealth produced from that maquila does not stay within the community, but is transferred to American bank accounts.

Perhaps, what is most alarming about the conditions in Ciudad Juarez is the level of violence in the city.

"Violence in Ciudad Juarez has been given a female face..." Since 1993, *feminicidio* has been a growing concern in the city. Verónica pointed out that many of these femicides are against mostly young, long-haired, and dark-skinned females. But while femicide is a serious concern, violence continues to escalate for both genders. So far 1200 individuals have been murdered in 2008, but the only federal response has been increased militarization of the city. Leyva exclaims "Militarization of the city is not an appropriate response!" What struck me most while listening to her

presentation was that there is no direct translation for *feminicidio* in English – the word 'femicide' does not popularly exist. It makes one wonder: does that mean that we do not recognize the systematic gender-based violence that exists in the United States?

To further complicate matters, the economy of Ciudad Juarez is of growing concern. The global economic recession, Veronica notes, has vastly impacted a part of the economy that was questionable in the first place: *maquilas*. While the *maquila* sector certainly offers

what can be done and what is being done about these issues. Although her years of experience in this city may lead one to think that her ideas are focused specifically in that community, she tells us "I think this means that this can't only be happening in my city, it must be happening in other parts of the world too. For that reason, we must not continue to support neoliberal models that have no benefit for the majority."

So what do we do? According to Verónica and the Mexico Solidarity Network, we must create our own models of economy, based on intimate social networks. "What we need to counteract global neoliberalism is to build a global solidarity network... that is why I am here to talk to you."

For more information on the Mexico Solidarity Network, visit [www.mexicosolidarity.org](http://www.mexicosolidarity.org).

**"With creativity,  
anything is better  
than nothing."**

**Veronica Leyva Rosario  
Mexico Solidarity Network**

*Thanks to the Feminist, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program, Student Assembly Finance Commission, and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlan of Cornell University for their support of this program.*

the majority of employment overall, it also supplies the majority of 'precarious' employment. Precariousness in this sense means dangerous employment in terms of treatment and risk-exposure in the workplace. Evidently some of this precariousness is based on the reliability of that job market as well. Just in the period between December 2000 and March 2003, 100,000 jobs were lost – primarily in the *maquila* sector. When asked by an audience member if she thinks there have been any improvements or benefits from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Verónica stood and pondered: "Not that I know of, but if I ever find one I will call to let you know."

Immediately following the presentation, audience members asked

# BOLIVIA ON THE BRINK?

**By Emma Banks**

In recent months, many stories of a “Bolivia on the brink” of civil war and collapse have appeared. While the current political situation is tense, this friction is nothing new in Bolivia.

Adding to the image of Bolivia most Americans receive, in September, President Evo Morales and his Movement toward Socialism (MAS) party declared the US ambassador to Bolivia, Philip Goldberg, a “persona non-grata”. The media called this “anti-Americanism” and “socialist radicalism.”

In truth, both the current political situation and the expelling of the ambassador reflect a changing political landscape in Bolivia that clashes with both national history and US foreign policy norms.

## **Internal tensions: conflict between the opposition and MAS**

Many people accuse President Morales of inciting radicalism in Bolivia. However, Morales has, for the most part, simply drawn out old tensions that have been present in Bolivia for centuries. The tensions between the elite class (many of whom consider themselves of European descent) and the indigenous majority 60-70 % of Bolivia’s population) are still affected by the remainders of a colonial mentality, clashing over control of natural resources and land, repressing language and religious rights, and exploitation of labor in agricultural mining industries. With a socialist-leaning,

indigenous leader as president, it is hardly surprising there has been a backlash from the conservative elite.

Tensions increased between MAS and the lowland elite when Morales nationalized hydrocarbons in May 2006. The draft of Morales’ new constitution contains provisions for indigenous autonomy and land redistribution – a blow to elites who want less central government control. The lowland departments (akin to states) in the eastern part of Bolivia held autonomy referendums in May 2008, expressing their concerns. In response, Morales held a recall referendum in August where voters cast either “Yes” or “No” votes for the president and vice presidents, as well as at their departmental prefect. Morales won with a majority, but this victory was not enough to satisfy the opposition.

This September, violence erupted in the lowland provinces, especially isolated Pando on the Brazilian border. Opposition members clashed with indigenous supporters over the terms of the new referendum draft, set for a vote on December 7th. While this violence is certainly a dark turn for Bolivia, many Bolivians believe that it is unlikely to escalate into a civil war. Bolivia has a history of tensions and protests, but has historically resolved its problems.

This month, MAS and the opposition reached a tentative agreement to hold elections in December 2009 if the constitution passes. Additionally, Morales has agreed to not run again in 2014 if he wins in 2009. While there are still obstacles to overcome in resolving the conflict, MAS has made clear concessions to the opposition,

helping to quell, at least for this moment, the tension.

## **External tensions: conflict between MAS and the US**

The headlines not focused on civil war are focused on the declaration of Ambassador Goldberg as a “persona non-grata,” citing this as proof of anti-Americanism and radicalism in the Morales administration. In reality, the US has a long history of interfering in Bolivia – conditioned foreign aid, neoliberal trade policy, and human rights abuses associated with the War on Drugs (Bolivia produces coca from which cocaine is derived).

The last few months have seen a decline in US-Bolivian relations. In June, thousands of protesters surrounded the US embassy in La Paz, demanding the extradition of ex-President Sánchez de Lozada and ex-Minister of Defense Sánchez Berzaín. The two men, currently being harbored in the US, are wanted for trial in Bolivia after ordering the military to fire on civilian protesters in 2003’s Gas War, which provoked more than 70 deaths. A month later, coca growers in the Chapare region of Bolivia organized to cancel all USAID alternative development funding after two decades of ineffective development coupled with undermining of community organizations.

Considering the already existing distrust of American policy in Bolivia, Goldberg made many diplomatic errors. He consistently met with opposition members before consulting with the central



government. His support for the opposition was ill timed, especially as violence erupted after his visit to Santa Cruz. In the wake of so much uncertainty, the Morales administration could not risk allowing a foreign ambassador to end the already tense situation and contribute to undermining the government.

A testimony from American journalist Jeremy Bigwood suggests that the US government's attempted to undermine the Morales administration by supporting the opposition though USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and other organizations. While the US might have been able to manipulate Latin American politics during the Cold War, Bolivia is proving this strategy is no longer viable.

The tensions between the US and Bolivia continue as last month with the withdrawal of all Peace Corps volunteers in Bolivia and Bush's threat to cancel the Andean Trade Preference Act. In response, Morales plans to cancel Drug Enforcement Agency and CIA activities in Bolivia. However, it should be understood that many Americans are still living and working in Bolivia without fear. Additionally, aid is still flowing into Bolivia from the US, and Morales will soon be traveling to the US to meet with world leaders at the UN. With the election of Barack Obama, Morales has expressed hope for repairing this rocky relationship. The Obama administration will have to work hard to distinguish its foreign

policy from both the Clinton and Bush administrations.

#### What next?

As always, the political situation in Bolivia is uncertain. The election of Evo Morales has drastically altered the political path, and eruptions are bound to occur. Morales has no intention to step down before 2014, and is in fact likely to win in 2009 considering he has almost 70 % of the popular vote from the recall referendum and won in 2005 with over 50% of the vote – an unheard of majority in recent history. MAS must continue to be receptive to the opposition who, in turn, must respect the majority's support for Morales.

The US should learn from mistakes from the Cold War: interfering in Latin American democracy building leads to violence and mistrust. While the Bush Administration may not agree with Morales political ideology, it should

accept that the majority of Bolivians do. Bolivia is still a new democracy, going through many changes, and support of peaceful resolution with the opposition, would help the US foster a stable Bolivian democracy and patch fragile relations. Bolivia is not on the brink, but the US should not push it any closer to the edge.

*Emma Banks is a junior in the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell, studying US-Latin American relations in the College Scholar program. She is a member of both CUSLAR and Cornell Organization for Labor Action (COLA). She also works as the program assistant to the Immigrant Services Program at Catholic Charities. She spent the summer in Cochabamba, Bolivia working for the Andean Information Network, a small non-profit think tank You can read her blog at [www.banxeinbolivia.blogspot.com](http://www.banxeinbolivia.blogspot.com).*

cuslarlanguages@gmail.com'. In the bottom right corner, there is a handwritten note in a different script: '¡aprenda español!'."/>

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## US FOREIGN POLICY COMES HOME TO ROOST

**By Miranda Cady Hallett**

Last summer I sat in the living room of Carlos and Tania's home, surrounded by family photos, children's books, plastic flowers, a buzzing television and all the trappings of middle class life. While my daughter played with their two kids in the other room, they told me their story of flight from El Salvador, struggle to find work, and frustrations with the process of seeking asylum.

On the wall, next to families pictures, were seven framed diplomas from the School of the Americas, and a large photograph of Carlos in uniform. Carlos worked for the Salvadoran military during the war in the intelligence division. He trained at the United States military's School of the Americas in techniques to "break" informants in the so-called war against communism. US support for the Salvadoran military during the civil war of the 1980s, amounting to a million

dollars a day at its height, helped train and fund people like Carlos to bomb, kill, and torture their fellow citizens.

It was his participation in that repressive violence that led Carlos to migrate to the United States. After he received a number of death threats, his wife insisted that they leave the country because she was afraid. They filed for asylum in the United States. Asylum applications are notoriously slow, so it was not until recently that he was informed that his application was denied. On what basis? "They tell me I am a torturer, that I have violated human rights," Carlos raged. "How can they be telling me this, when all I did was what the *gringos* taught us to do?" He described to me how US military officers trained him and his fellow soldiers, and asked them to keep their presence a secret. Over 20 years later, Carlos kept this secret even when appearing before an immigration court judge who told him his past actions

make him unfit to be a resident of the United States of America.

In our imperial adventures, the United States creates horrific practices and situations that we later deny and cover up. In this particular case, the confluence of clandestine US militarism and immigration policy ironically created a contradictory, and fundamentally unjust situation for Carlos and his family. The same actions that the US government taught him as his patriotic duty are the same actions that makes him a violator of human rights. As deeply disturbing as it was for me to sit with this man and hear his seething hatred for the people he tortured and killed, and perhaps more disturbing to hear his eagerness to become American so that he can use his skills "to help stop the terrorists," his presence in this country is nothing more than US foreign policy come home to roost.

For the many Salvadorans still waiting for asylum in the US who were innocent victims of the war, and even for those like Carlos whose actions could not be called innocent, a path to citizenship is a moral right, not a privilege. It is outrageous that US policy so consistently sows the seeds of conflict and destruction abroad and then deny asylum to those who have been displaced and whose lives have been twisted and damaged by these same conflicts.

*Miranda Cady Hallett is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Cornell. She conducted her dissertation research on immigration policies and programs and the struggles of Salvadoran immigrants in rural areas of Arkansas. The names in this article have been changed to protect the anonymity of the research participants.*

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NEW WEBSITE IN 2009

*Our website is still under construction. Be sure to visit the new website to learn more about the organization, sponsored events, language classes, and more!*

## HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST SPEAKS

**By Janice Gallagher**

Colombia has never been on the radar of most Americans. Barack Obama changed that during the final debate with his opposition to the proposed Colombian Free Trade Agreement, due to concerns about labor-union killings and human rights. President Bush is said to push through the Colombian FTA during his final lame duck period, and to be bargaining with Obama for support.

*Why is it important that Obama not cave to pressure to support the FTA? And what is really at stake for Colombians?*

Freddy Caicedo, a human rights activist who works closely with Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in Colombia, recently came to Ithaca, NY to discuss the proposed FTA. He highlighted that the debate over the FTA occurs in the context of Colombia's over-forty-year civil war. The government regularly collaborates with paramilitary forces – right-wing death squads that have committed the majority of human rights abuses in Colombia. Caicedo pointed out that “multinational and national associations have financed and promoted the paramilitary strategy,” including Chiquita, Coca-Cola, and Drummond Coal, all of whom have been accused of and/or sued for hiring paramilitaries who threaten, kidnap, torture, and kill Colombian union members.

Within this context, Caicedo

highlighted three illustrations of why the FTA would be disastrous for Colombian communities:

**1) Increased paramilitary violence and internal displacement**

Passage of the FTA would create an economic boom for the south-western port of Buenaventura, where Caicedo works. Paramilitaries have worked with local state authorities to clear land needed to expand the highway to the port. Paramilitaries have gone house-to-house, rounding up leaders, threatening families, and killing community leaders in order to frighten the rest of the residents out their homes. The FTA would exacerbate this type of violence, which has displaced ten percent of Colombians.

**2) Disastrous for farmers and food security**

With the influx of cheap, US-subsidized food imports, many farmers would be faced with losing their farms or turning to illicit crop cultivation, which funds both the paramilitaries and the FARC guerrillas.

**3) Further union suppression.**

Obama got it right – Colombia continues to be the most dangerous country in the world to be a union leader. Forty-four union leaders have been killed this year – up from 39 last year. Caicedo spoke of the striking sugar cane workers, who work in “slavery” conditions: 12-15 hour days, seven days a week, with no job security or health care. In recent weeks, strike organizers



**Freddie Caicedo**

have been targets of assassination attempts and intimidation. In a country with low wages, poor labor standards and non-existent organizing rights, the FTA would weaken, not strengthen, of these standards.

The USA could use the trade agreement as leverage to strengthen human rights, environmental and labor standards. Instead, the proposed FTA would be disastrous for Colombians who are struggling to survive in dignity and construct a more peaceful and equitable society.

*Janice Gallagher is a PhD candidate in the Department of Government at Cornell University. She studies Latin American politics. She worked as a human rights accompanier with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Bogota, Colombia last year.*



# WHEN MONEY FAILS

By Wren Albertson-Rogers

*Today I experienced the most extreme levels of poverty that I have ever been exposed to.*

*I felt a pit sinking deeper and deeper in my stomach as we drove into the La Solidaridad housing project, just outside of Granada. The "streets," littered with mounds of rubble, dirt, and burning garbage, were almost all flooded, mosquitoes breeding in the small lakes where half-naked children played. Occasional ghastly, lone horses occupied some corners, trying to find what grass was left to fill their skin-and-bones figure. Men and boys worked without pause, hauling large concrete blocks to new houses in construction where others stirred cement mixture in the street, most covered head to toe in dirt and bits of dried concrete. In between houses in the midst of construction stood, and leaned, small one-room homes made of uneven wood and scraps of metal and plastic...*

*However, almost without exception, save for a few of the unfinished homes, a television glowed its sickeningly-blue glare through the window of every house. They even shone through the cracks between the wood and metal of a number of the casitas. Some presented the evening news, some presented happy, well-clad white people, grinning ear-to-ear, eager to win Gameshow X. others played movies from the shiny, sleek DVD player that rested beneath the devilish-looking, square black box.*

This is an excerpt from the travel journal I kept this summer when I worked for one short, hot month as an intern for Viva Nicaragua! This organization promotes cross-cultural solutions to global and regional issues by encouraging communal, group-led, sustainable development efforts in and around Granada, Nicaragua. In a country torn apart by dictatorship and revolutionary struggle and stifled and deprecated by careless international aid efforts, this proved to be anything but easy.

Carrie McCracken, the industries director, assigned Allie, a fellow Viva! volunteer, and I the lead roles of a development initiative with three communities outside Granada – El Fortín, Paz y Vida, and La Solidaridad. We held workshops and met with community members on crucial topics like health and hygiene, community leadership and partnership, and gender stereotypes and inequality in order to help the struggling communities fulfill international grant requirements.

The two largest challenges to the success of our project were the relaxed

views on time and punctuality promoted by Nicaraguan culture, coupled with the negative effect of years of blind international aid. After setting a workshop or meeting time over a week in advance and having to wait three, four hours for the Nicaragua parties to arrive was disheartening, but only part of the problem. Having been left decimated by the revolutionary upheaval of the dictatorship, the country has been receiving aid, almost constantly, from foreign donors for the last fifteen odd years. As a result the mentality of many Nicaraguans has changed from proactive to passive: people sit with an outreached hand and await relief.

Although I learned countless lessons about inequality, poverty, and the constant struggles faced by communities in Nicaragua, what I learned about foreign aid was even more crucial. While it is essential for the improvement of global issues forced upon the developing world by the selfish, capitalistic state of industrial nations, it is the responsibility of the developed world to empower, not enforce, positive change through

sustainable, egalitarian, and plausible solutions, for only then will we truly be able to promote social justice and equality.

*Wren Albertson-Rogers is a College Scholar student in the College of Arts & Sciences at Cornell University. His travel journal can be found at [www.guajirasincera.blogspot.com](http://www.guajirasincera.blogspot.com).*

WINTER 2008-2009

# SPANISH FOR ACTIVIST CAMP PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRISTIAN VILLAGRA



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