



Interview with ‘Farmingville’ filmmakers Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini

What drew you to the subject?

Carlos Sandoval: What really made me feel that something had to be done, that somehow this had to be documented, was when I saw a headline that said, “They Wanted to Get Some Mexicans.” That was like a stab directly into my heart, because I thought I would never hear language like that spoken in Long Island of all places. The reason that I was drawn to Farmingville, to the issue, was fear, and quite frankly, almost self-preservation. It was right around that time that the beatings took place, and I felt that something had to be done.

To what extent is *Farmingville* an illustration of what is happening in other communities in the U.S.?

Catherine Tambini: The United States is experiencing the largest growth of the Hispanic population in its history, and they’re coming to places that we don’t normally think of as immigrant gateways. They’re jumping over the urban areas and going straight for the smaller areas where they see growth, where they see that there is money, and where the types of services are needed that Americans today don’t really want to do.

Day laborers fill a void. We don’t want to break up a concrete driveway, we don’t want to mow our own lawn, we don’t want to wash cars. If we wanted to pay what it would cost to have Americans do those kinds of jobs, if you could find them to do it, prices would increase by probably 30%. People want cheap labor. People want cheap goods. So there’s a real need for the labor that these men come here to do.

What was your approach to representing both sides of the story?

Catherine: We wanted people to be able to experience what it is like to be a man who has left his family, crossed the desert, and is now standing on a corner trying to find work so he can send money home. But we also wanted people to be able to feel what it would be like if they had a group of thirty men move into a house right next door to them. How would I feel? You know, they’ve bought their home, this is their American dream. And then we wanted to allow the people who were trying to make decisions for the community to have a say. What is it like when you can’t do anything for your community because your hands are tied, because our immigration policy really needs to be changed?

Carlos: My goal in making this film was to make what I call an engaged, objective film. To give balance doesn’t necessarily mean dispassion. Balance doesn’t necessarily mean bland. Balance can mean that each person that speaks, speaks with their own impassioned, angered, frustrated, hopeful voice.

What's the situation now in Farmingville?

Carlos: On the surface, things are quieter. My fear though, is that there are certain levels at which it has penetrated more deeply. In some ways what was before at a surface level, may have seeped into the fabric in Farmingville and in other towns.

As Latinos emerge as the largest minority and spread out to many unexpected places across the country, there's going to be fear. The question then becomes, how do we respond to that? How do we see ourselves as a country in this latest stage of our formation? And my hope is that we will have a positive outcome, rather than the sort of easy, fearful response to change.