

## Poultry and Pedagogy in Mississippi and Mexico: Bridging African American and Latin American History in the College Classroom

Matthew Casey and Rebecca Tuuri  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

IN SPRING 2014 at the University of Southern Mississippi, we combined our Latin American and modern African American history classes to explore the poultry industry in the southeastern United States in comparative and transnational terms.<sup>1</sup> In the decades immediately after the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans worked in the lowest-paid, dirtiest, and most difficult chicken processing jobs in the United States. In the past two decades, however, immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, many of them undocumented, have increasingly filled these positions. Our goals were to present this broad shift in terms of the interconnected political and economic transformations in Mexico and the United States without losing sight of the human side of the industry or failing to engage with the interests and perspectives of all parties involved.

Together, we presented two lectures: the first on the history and effects of neoliberal economic policies on the United States and rural Mexico, the second on workers' responses of migrating and organizing. These lectures prepared students to read Kathleen Schwartzman's *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants,*

*and Corporations across the Americas* (2013) as our respective classes resumed our separate meetings. Two weeks later, we reconvened for an in-class debate in which students advocated on behalf of African American poultry workers, Mexican immigrant workers, or chicken companies. During the debates, we, as instructors, acted as the voices of the governments of Mexico and the United States, weighing in on the feasibility and implications of students' policy recommendations. Through the commodity chain of poultry, we helped students understand how local experiences and their own lives intersect with transnational and global processes in a way that would have been more difficult in a traditional Latin American, African American, or U.S. history course. By exposing them to the multiple sides of debates about race, poverty, work, and immigration, we believe we helped them to become better "global citizens" at the same time that we made our class a reflection of ongoing historiographic trends. When we teach this unit in the future, we will also engage scholarship on animal studies, the potential of which we will reflect upon at the end of this article.

### Why Chicken?

Although geographically rooted in the Southern United States, the U.S. poultry industry is best understood in a transnational, or even global, perspective that can be difficult to address in regionally bounded courses. By happenstance, our Latin American and African American history courses were scheduled at the same time in the same building, erasing any logistical obstacles. More importantly, the History Department at the University of Southern Mississippi houses the Center for the Study of the Gulf South, which, among other goals, seeks to promote an understanding of the U.S. South and its relationship with territories in the Caribbean and Latin America. In other words, there were institutional mechanisms in place that encouraged conversations across geographic lines within the hemisphere.

In intellectual terms, the topic straddles a number of historiographic subfields that have steadily grown in recent decades. These include fields like labor and migration, race in the Americas, and animal studies, which have collectively highlighted histories of African Americans' and Latinos' interactions in the United States,

animal and human relationships, foodways, agribusiness, and global capitalism more broadly. The production, trade, and consumption of chicken address these themes in ways that are local, comparative, and transnational. It is no wonder that there have been a number of studies on various aspects of poultry production.<sup>2</sup>

Teaching about the poultry industry also pushes students to reflect on a number of complicated political issues in a way that transcends the terms of mainstream political debates, which are often narrow. The most obvious are Latin American immigration to the United States and the plight of organized labor, both of which have particular salience to African American communities in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, chicken offers students a unique perspective for considering the protracted debates about the proper role that government should play in the economy and society. In the future, we also hope to place a stronger emphasis on production processes and the role of food consumers. Although discrete issues, these are densely connected and overlapping, especially in the lives of immigrants, African American workers, people tied to the chicken industry, or residents of Mississippi—in short, our students.

In many ways, the large-scale production of chicken in the United States follows larger economic transformations. Chicken producers industrialized in the twentieth century and adopted the scientific management techniques associated with Taylorism. Now, chickens are raised on sub-contracted local farms before being brought to plants where they are killed, plucked, and chopped in a factory-style setting. Innovations in packaging, preservation, and marketing have allowed different parts of the chicken to be sold globally according to local variations in consumer taste.

Despite some exceptions, chicken companies received a boost from a convergence of factors in the late twentieth century. Neoliberal economic policies and deregulation of industries permitted faster line speeds and fewer workplace restrictions. The concomitant push for global free trade that followed the Cold War increased the already high volume of chicken that was being traded to places like Russia, especially the dark meat that is less popular in the United States, but standard fare elsewhere. Unlike other industries that have been outsourced in this economic climate, poultry production, like other agro-industries, has remained in the U.S., where it continues to receive federal subsidies.<sup>4</sup>

Although large-scale chicken production is as profitable as ever, new production processes have been hard on workers. In the late twentieth century, the largely African American workforce began to unionize. Amid a stalemate with their mobilized laborers, Schwartzman argues, companies began to hire, and even recruit, immigrants from Mexico. Many of them were undocumented, which diminished their ability to petition for protections. They were leaving the Mexican countryside, an area also transformed in the wake of neoliberal economic policies. Communal lands were privatized, and the Mexican government slowly removed agricultural subsidies and trade protections.

Large-scale chicken production is a thorny issue, and the terms of debate mirror larger arguments about neoliberalism and its effects on developing economies. There is ample evidence that companies are making specific attempts to hire undocumented workers and that the work conditions are uncomfortable and dangerous.<sup>5</sup> Workers face “hazardous conditions involving loud noise, sharp tools, and dangerous machinery. Many workers must stand for long periods of time wielding knives and hooks to slaughter or process meat on a production line that moves very quickly.”<sup>6</sup> They also work in extreme temperatures surrounded by “malodorous gas that rises from gashed stomachs.”<sup>7</sup> The plant must also be cleaned with harsh chemicals and hot, high-pressure water. On the job dangers include “cuts, strains, cumulative trauma, and injuries sustained from falls but also more serious injuries, such as fractures and amputations.”<sup>8</sup>

On the other side are arguments about providing cheap food for consumers in the United States and abroad, and the industry’s role in creating jobs in economically depressed areas like Mississippi. Large-scale poultry processing allows chicken to be packaged, shipped, and consumed in multiple forms in the United States and throughout the world. As consumers enjoy the reality of “a chicken in every pot,” producers point to the extensive international trade of chicken from the Deep South to Russia, Mexico, and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the bird care itself is sub-contracted to local farmers may provide a source of cash for Southern farmers—though factory farms can also destroy environments, cause an area’s land value to plummet, and lock farmers into debt.<sup>10</sup> It is not a coincidence that processing plants are being established in some of the poorest regions of the United States—places that are engaging in the same

types of efforts to court outside investment, such as developing nations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Is a terrible job better than no job at all? Must the question be addressed in such stark terms? The relevance of such queries is not limited to chicken, they are *the* questions of global capitalism in the twenty-first century, ones we wanted our students to confront.

### Combining the Classes

Our primary goal in the first two of the three combined class meetings was to create a common historical terrain for late twentieth-century United States and Mexico, especially as it pertained to African Americans, organized workers, and immigrants. We split our fifty-minute lectures in half to address our respective themes. Dr. Tuuri began with a discussion of the federal programs implemented during Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty in the 1960s, especially as they affected African Americans. The 1970s brought global economic crisis and early calls for economic deregulation in the United States. For Ronald Reagan, the solution was a rollback of the social safety net created in the previous decades and an attack on organized labor. Dr. Tuuri concluded with an account of the devastating effect that these economic transformations have had on African Americans.

Mexico experienced a similar political and economic fate, as Dr. Casey explained. In 1982, as a result of the same economic forces that brought recession to the United States, the Mexican government risked defaulting on a foreign loan to its northern neighbor. In response, the United States and international lending institutions pressured Mexico to adopt neoliberal reforms to avoid financial catastrophe. This included the privatization of industries and communal lands that had established a rural safety net for Mexicans since the early decades of the twentieth century. Government regulations, trade protections, and state services were eliminated as well. Students were encouraged to consider the deregulated economies and reductions in social programs in the United States and Mexico as processes with similar economic and ideological origins. These parallels culminated with the 1994 passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), promoting free trade between the countries and accelerating Mexico's economic deregulation. Dr. Casey then alluded to the next two lectures by

ending with brief reflections on rural Mexicans' responses, which included the emergence of the Zapatista Rebellion and lesser-known agricultural strikes like the so-called "War of the Eggs."<sup>11</sup>

While the first combined lecture focused on macroeconomic transformations and high political shifts, the subsequent one illustrated African Americans' and Mexicans' responses to these changes and emphasized a larger history of efforts to organize jointly. We began the second class by playing two recorded versions of "We Shall Not Be Moved." As students settled in, they listened to a Mavis Staples rendition of the familiar gospel and blues standard that had served as sonic inspiration to participants in the Civil Rights Movement and a generation of organized workers before.<sup>12</sup> The repetitive nature of the chorus allowed us to lower the volume and speak over the song to refresh students' memories about its significance; we then switched to another version. This one, "*No Nos Moverán*" was a Spanish translation of the song recorded by Chicano activists at San Diego State University in the 1970s; the same group recorded the song with Joan Baez for a 1974 album, illustrating the numerous overlaps between the Chicano movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the labor movement, and the student counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The songs set the stage for our day's lecture.

Dr. Casey began by offering an overview of major shifts in U.S. migration policies since the race-based restrictions of 1924. In the 1940s, the Bracero Program brought thousands of rural Mexicans to the U.S. on seasonal contracts.<sup>14</sup> The 1965 reforms that eliminated race-based immigration quotas were considered by some to be the lesser-known sequel to contemporaneous civil rights legislation. Later, Reagan's 1986 migration reforms included amnesty for millions of undocumented immigrants as well as tightened restrictions on employers and stronger enforcement mechanisms. Dr. Casey ended by presenting data showing post-neoliberal migration spikes from Latin America to the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Tuuri followed with analyses of African American-Latino activism within civil rights, land rights, and labor rights activism in the 1960s and 1970s. She began by introducing *Hernández v. Texas*, the 1954 Supreme Court case that determined that Mexican Americans deserved equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, especially with regards to jury selection. Although less

well-known than *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was decided two weeks later, this civil rights ruling was equally important for Mexican Americans. In addition to fighting for legal change, Latino activists like César Chávez utilized the direct-action strategies of the African American civil rights struggle, including non-violent picketing, marching, and boycotting. Mirroring shifts within the black freedom struggle, the Latino rights movement became more radical in the mid-1960s, as more militant activists, such as Reies López Tijerina and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, adopted the title “Chicanos” and demanded economic justice. They even worked with Black Power activists like Maulana Karenga and Angela Davis. These types of collaborations peaked with the founding of the Rainbow Coalition in 1969, which brought together radical nationalist organizations, such as the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, and the American Indian Movement. These stories of collaboration challenge the common belief that African Americans and Latinos have been at odds historically. Unfortunately, as Dr. Tuuri’s final slide illuminated, Latinos and African Americans have also similarly suffered from increased racial profiling and incarceration during the War on Drugs in the late twentieth century.

Overall, we feel like the split lectures were a success, though a few students complained that they were too disjointed for such short class periods. While it is true that we could have each used a full lecture to tell our story, we hesitate to do that. In some ways, the disjuncture itself is part of the story. We felt that the integration of Mexican and U.S. history required the kind of thematic treatment we offered, as opposed to providing one story entirely followed by another. Regardless, we now felt that students were ready to engage with Schwartzman’s book at a high level.

### **Teaching *The Chicken Trail***

*The Chicken Trail* attempts to understand and explain the process of “ethnic succession” in the labor force of the poultry industry in all of its dimensions. How and why did the U.S. poultry industry shift from a factory workforce composed principally of African American women to one of Mexican immigrants? In answering this question, Schwartzman addresses a number of myths about Mexican immigration and Southern labor markets. She also details



the reorganizations in the poultry industry and African American mobilization in labor unions. Lastly, she explores the changing conditions in the Mexican countryside that provided a pool of willing workers. The result is a book that provides a thorough explanation of what she calls the “American Dilemma,” itself a local variant of the “Global Dilemma,” where a mismatch exists between the types of jobs available in a place and the workers who live there—creating suffering and poverty. According to Schwartzman, “economic transformations have left the United States with jobs that ‘nobody wants,’ jobs that are shipped overseas, and jobs for which American workers are unqualified.”<sup>16</sup> In this situation, “rural survival continues to be undermined by international trade, [and] people attempt to alleviate their poverty by abandoning first the countryside and then their country.”<sup>17</sup>

From the 1970s through the 1990s, African American women composed the bulk of the poultry processing labor force in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Since then, there has been a steady increase in immigrants from Mexico and other parts of the world; this is part of a larger spike in Latin American migration to non-traditional southeastern destinations. Schwartzman opposes the argument that immigrants were filling vacancies in poultry production or supplementing the existing labor force in a context of massive industry expansion. The claim that African Americans on the whole have been able to enter better jobs and leave poultry processing assumes a categorical upward economic mobility that does not exist. A proliferation of new alternative industrial jobs, which could have provided occupational mobility for African Americans, has been more lackluster than early optimists projected. Furthermore, the alternative jobs that did open were located too far from African American poultry workers and, thus, were largely unavailable to them. As Schwartzman explains, unemployment and incarceration rates for African Americans in Southern states continue to be higher than national averages, producing what may be called “a permanent recession for blacks.”<sup>19</sup> Through qualitative and quantitative research, Schwartzman illustrates that African Americans *have* sought to obtain these jobs since the 1980s, challenging the fallacy of job vacancies and labor shortages.<sup>20</sup>

For Schwartzman, the workforce shift is best explained as a conjuncture of short-term industry crises in the 1990s, increased



union organizing among African Americans in poultry work, and the gradual erosion of Mexico's rural economy—including its chicken production. Over the course of the twentieth century, large poultry companies emerged out of processes of expansion, vertical integration, and mergers, reflecting the post-New Deal trends toward agro-industry in the United States and the rise of factory farming. Changes in processing, packaging, and marketing technologies, when coupled with emerging global markets, allowed companies to dissect chickens and transport different frozen portions a great distance to new consumers. This created a situation that “brought profit to the owners and distress to the workers. Workers complained that work became increasingly difficult, dangerous, and underpaid.”<sup>21</sup>

Workers unionized in response, and when the chicken industry experienced brief moments of overproduction and losses in 1995 and 2000, companies sought to curb labor mobilization and recoup profits. Poultry workers engaged in union-building, strikes, walk-offs and attempts at collective bargaining, bucking national trends of union decline. Schwartzman argues that the recruitment of undocumented immigrants represented but one of the companies' strategies to increase profits and break their stalemate with organized labor. Other strategies included merging companies, lobbying the government for increased subsidies, union-busting, and scattered attempts to seek alternative sources of labor in the welfare and prison systems.<sup>22</sup>

If working-class African Americans were being displaced from their jobs in the poultry industry, the same was true for many of the rural-dwelling Mexicans who have left their homes in growing numbers since the 1980s. In the first years of that decade, the Mexican government began to dismantle their social safety net, privatize communal landholdings, and gradually eliminate import protections—including for poultry. All of this occurred under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as the Mexican government was about to default on a foreign loan to the United States. This initial push toward neoliberal economic policies was increased with the ratification of NAFTA, which allowed U.S. capital and goods to flow into Mexico with ease. Ironically, the chicken produced in the United States was now being imported into Mexico. Mexican chicken producers and other rural workers

sought their livelihoods elsewhere, including the United States. In other words, a larger pool of immigrant labor was available as a result of the same policies that deregulated the chicken industry and allowed producers to crack down on unions.

*The Chicken Trail* had a number of advantages for our purposes. First is the fact that it analyzed both Mexico and the U.S. South, including regions our students know well. Perhaps most important is that it presented highly contentious political issues in much broader terms than narrow debates normally do. The book prevents students from drawing any immediate or facile conclusions about its stance on immigration, which could have permitted intellectual laziness and given students a rationalization to stop reading. Indeed, Schwartzman begins the book by challenging the labels of “racist” or “bleeding-heart” that individuals on opposite sides of the immigration debate tend to throw at one another.<sup>23</sup> It is impossible to read this book and claim that immigrants are stealing jobs in the poultry industry or that African Americans are unwilling to fill them.

Educators considering the book for a similar unit should be aware of a number of its disadvantages within this pedagogical context as well. We knew that the book’s use of economic theory and overwhelmingly quantitative data would pose a challenge to some students. In order to help them navigate the text, a skill they need to learn in college, we pre-circulated questions for each chapter that encouraged them to focus on Schwartzman’s main arguments and highlight her principal claims (**Appendix A**).

More significantly, some students enrolled in the African American course criticized what they considered Schwartzman’s one-dimensional depiction of black workers. We believe that there are a number of reasons for this. First, the book is mostly about the African American working class in one industry. This may not have meshed well in a course that had spent the previous months arguing against a monolithic African American experience. Second, this group of workers tends to drop out of the narrative after the initial chapters on the industry’s history and the process of ethnic succession, devoting more ink to immigrants and even more to economic forces and political shifts. Although people are clearly her concern, Schwartzman’s use of qualitative data was fairly limited and intended to punctuate larger quantitative discussions. Students probably could have made the same criticism of immigrants, though

none did, thus suggesting our students' bias in consideration of American-born workers. In many ways, our students' observations illustrate their close readings of the book and embody the goals of critical reflection and thinking. Additionally, despite Schwartzman's breadth of topics, she spends far too little time discussing the impacts on the contract chicken farmers and chickens themselves. These criticisms will not preclude us from assigning the book in the future, but we encourage instructors replicating our model to supplement the book with additional articles and book selections.<sup>24</sup>

### The Final Debate

After the first two joint lectures in which we primed students for reading the book, we sent them away with our worksheet of reading questions that asked them to define the book's goals, research questions, main points of each chapter, main phrases and terms, and ultimate conclusions (**Appendix A**). We hoped that having students stop to write down answers to these questions while reading a scholarly work would help them make better sense of the author's argument and use of evidence. We believe that these mandatory questions improved their comprehension of a book that operated at a high level and ultimately led to a better discussion when both classes reconvened for a debate (**Appendix B**).

Upon entering the classroom on that final day, each student (from both classes) grabbed a sheet of paper from a shuffled stack. Each page contained a number of questions and one of the following roles: African American factory worker, Mexican immigrant, or chicken industry representative. While by no means a comprehensive list of the groups represented by Schwartzman, these three identities helped integrate our two classes and forced students to consider a wide range of concerns. By randomizing roles, this exercise broke any cliques or biases that students may have developed over the course of the semester. Students were also handed a list of discussion questions about their group's overall goals, what they felt needed to be changed, what needed to remain the same, what they expected from both the Mexican and United States governments, and what each group needed from the others (**Appendix B**). Drs. Casey and Tuuri also took on the roles of the Mexican and United States government, respectively.

Students were required to arrive prepared to discuss the book, and groups only needed a few minutes at the beginning of class to establish their arguments. We gave each of the three constituent groups an opportunity to make opening remarks, beginning with the chicken industry representatives. After that, students engaged in a three-way debate that was moderated by us, but did not otherwise have a rigid structure.

This final class discussion helped highlight the major points of Schwartzman's book while also treating the main groups involved in the debate in a fair manner. First, this discussion humanized the workers. African American and Mexican immigrant workers both pointed to their need for a reasonable workplace environment, drawing upon Schwartzman's description of the horrific conditions found on the assembly lines. Both spoke to the importance of a livable wage in order to support themselves and their families, again citing the drastically lower salaries of poultry workers from other manufacturing jobs.<sup>25</sup> Both groups first suggested unionizing as separate groups and then came to propose unionization as a joint organization. Students came to better understand the reasons why unions have historically been formed and helped lift some students' distrust and suspicion of organized labor.

This exercise also helped students take the company position seriously. They came to understand how contemporary commodity chains function and how companies face real challenges in a globalized economy. In a situation where profit comes only through high volume, unionized, American-born workers who demand better conditions and pay from companies increase the costs associated with running poultry companies. The group representing the company rightly broached the subject of cost for global chicken consumers. Students also began to see the specific ways in which company personnel, not just "market forces," recruited undocumented immigrants to replace more demanding, sometimes unionized, African Americans.<sup>26</sup>

This discussion also opened up conversations about national and international policy solutions. All three groups called upon the Mexican or United States government to implement new protective tariffs that would promote the well-being of workers in the United States poultry industry and Mexican farmers. Some called for healthcare for workers as well. Acting as the voices of the respective

governments, we intervened in the debates to question such policy proposals. We invoked NAFTA and the policies of the last thirty-five years—not to declare the future impossibility of students’ proposals, but to encourage them to consider the staunch opposition that such proposals would face. Hence, while students sought new solutions, they also experienced firsthand how complicated a policy resolution to this problem would be. However, students began making the connection between the immigration debate and the effects of globalization on the labor market, something that Schwartzman has encouraged readers to consider.<sup>27</sup> They also made connections between chicken consumption and the local effects of national and global political economy, thus creating tools for a critical and open-ended appraisal of the local—a necessity in a global economy.

Students also wrote short essays on the book. Dr. Casey’s Latin American history survey students turned in their papers before the class discussion, while Dr. Tuuri’s African American history survey students turned in their response papers two days after the discussion. Both classes were asked to describe the conditions for poultry industry owners and workers since the 1980s, describe areas of conflict and cooperation, and evaluate solutions for the “American Dilemma.” Both groups of students exhibited a firm grasp of the main concepts of what, for many, was a challenging book. We believe this was due not only to the reading response questions, but also from the class discussion. The essay assignment helped students solidify the knowledge that they had already acquired from lecture, reading, and discussion and to process their experience (**Appendix C**).

Perhaps our biggest regrets in this teaching unit were our failure to consider animals’ experiences and our singular focus on policy-level solutions at the expense of individual consumption habits. During the in-class debate, Dr. Tuuri encouraged students to consider their roles as consumers, but this produced little subsequent discussion. In future iterations of this exercise, we will look to the wide-ranging scholarship on animal studies and meat-eating to analyze additional dimensions of poultry production and to introduce individual alternatives alongside policy solutions.

The breadth of this scholarship allows further opportunities for debate and discussion. Scholars have challenged the philosophical underpinnings of a rigid human-animal divide and emphasized the

significant biological overlap among the species—all to destabilize the assumptions used to rationalize eating animals and ignore animals as historical subjects.<sup>28</sup> At the very least, bringing chickens' experiences into this unit would force students to recognize that animal welfare is directly linked to larger issues like public health, environmental destruction, and humans' work conditions.<sup>29</sup>

Placing our discussion of political economy and labor into a broader analytical arena will promote solutions that transcend the strictures of policy and disallow students from lapsing into zero-sum game analyses of native and immigrant workers. Wendell Berry's suggestion that acts of consumption represent a form of "farming by proxy" will encourage students to recognize their own participation in the factory farming system as members of the eating public.<sup>30</sup> Sections of Jonathan Safran Foer's highly accessible *Eating Animals* would provide additional discussion fodder about individual policy solutions; these range from animal welfare advocates who desire more humane farming conditions and less cruel methods of slaughter to animal rights activists who promote vegetarianism and veganism as the most viable solution to the problems of the factory farming system.<sup>31</sup> In sum, bringing in animals would introduce additional dimensions of the problem and provide new solutions.

## Conclusion

The combination of increased integration of global markets and new scholarly emphases on transnational, comparative, and global history has created demands for classroom content that stretches the parameters of traditional, geographically bounded survey courses. A number of issues that straddle regions can be dealt with in slivers, but we wanted to address the issue of poultry in its full geographic scope. Combined courses and the scholarship on the chicken industry in Mexico and the United States allowed us to address a bundle of social, political, and economic issues of particular importance to the residents of Mississippi. We believe that we increased students' consciousness of these issues without downplaying the concerns of any of the actors involved. In our minds, this speaks to educators' mandate to create global citizens—a process that ultimately begins with a close reflection on the local and its connections to other places.



## Notes

1. We would like to thank Jane Dabel, editor of *The History Teacher*, and our anonymous reviewers who pointed us towards key texts in critical animal studies and provided other helpful suggestions for enriching this teaching unit.

2. Kathleen C. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations across the Americas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Steve Striffler, *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); William Boyd and Michael Watts, "Agro Industrial Just-in-Time: The Chicken Industry and Postwar American Capitalism," in *Globalising Food: Agrarian Questions and Global Restructuring*, ed. David Goodman and Michael Watts (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1997); David Griffith, "Hay Trabajo: Poultry Processing, Rural Industrialization, and the Latinization of Low-Wage Labor," in *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small-Town America*, ed. Donald D. Stull, Michael J. Broadway, and David Griffith (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995); LaGuana Gray, *We Just Keep Running the Line: Black Southern Women and the Poultry Processing Industry* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2014); Angela Stuesse, *Scratching out a Living: Latinos, Race, and Work in the Deep South* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016); Annie Potts, *Chicken* (London, United Kingdom: Reaktion Books, 2012); and Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

3. For classic studies that examine African Americans' relationship with organized labor, see Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 786-811; Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996); and Roger Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!" *A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997). For more on the tension between African Americans and Latinos, see Nicolas C. Vaca, *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict between Latinos and Black and What it Means for America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004); and Kenneth J. Meier, Paula D. McClain, J. L. Polinard, and Robert D. Wrinkle, "Divided or Together? Conflict and Cooperation between African Americans and Latinos," *Political Research Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2004): 399-409.

4. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, 28-29, 58, 88, 91.

5. See, for instance, "Chopping Chicken in Missouri: Immigrants—Not Locals—Still Fill the Processing Lines," *PRI's The World*, 14 May 2013, <<https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-05-14/chopping-chicken-missouri-immigrants-not-locals-still-fill-processing-lines>>.

6. "Workplace Safety and Health: Safety in the Meat and Poultry Industry, While Improving, Could Be Further Strengthened," GAO-05-96,



U.S. Government Accountability Office, January 2005, <<https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-96>>.

7. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, 33.

8. Ibid.

9. Quote is from Herbert Hoover's 1928 campaign promise, as cited in Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, 53-54.

10. Christopher Leonard has likened the labor arrangement between chicken farmers and agro-industrial giant Tyson to sharecropping. See *The Meat Racket: The Secret Takeover of America's Food Business* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 3.

11. This is detailed in Paul Eiss, *In the Name of the Pueblo: Place, Community, and the Politics of History in Yucatán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Chapter 7.

12. Mavis Staples, "We Shall Not Be Moved," *We'll Never Turn Back*, Anti-/Epitaph, 2007, CD.

13. The Spanish-language recording was from *Rolas de Aztlán: Songs of the Chicano Movement*, Smithsonian Folkways SF40516, 2005, CD.

14. Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

15. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute* 17 March 2016, <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states>>.

16. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, x.

17. Ibid. Although Schwartzman does not emphasize it, chickens also suffer as they are hatched, raised, and killed in a manner more concerned with increasing profits than with their well-being. See Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 48-49, 65-67, 129-137; Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Chapter 10; and Potts, *Chicken*.

18. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, 2, 17, 27-29; and Gray, *We Just Keep Running the Line*, 4. Angela Stuesse points out how black men and women had fought during the Civil Rights Movement for the right to join the chicken processing plant workforce in the 1960s. See Stuesse, *Scratching Out a Living*, Chapter 3.

19. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, 3.

20. Ibid., quote on page 3, analysis on 42-48, 20-27, 31-42, 37, 50.

21. Ibid., 53-56, 61.

22. Ibid., 37.

23. Ibid., xi-xii.

24. Suggested supplemental materials on African American poultry workers are Gray, *We Just Keep Running the Line*; Stuesse, *Scratching Out a Living*; Karen Anderson Tucker, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (June 1982): 82-97; and Charlie LeDuff, "In a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die; Who Kills, Who Cuts, Who Bosses Can Depend on Race," *The New York Times*, 16 June

2000. On contract farmers, see Leonard, *The Meat Racket*; on chickens, see Potts, *Chicken*; Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Chapter 10; and Foer, *Eating Animals*, 48-49, 65-68, 129-137. On migration more generally, see David Bacon, "How US Policies Fueled Mexico's Great Migration," *The Nation*, 4 January 2012.

25. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail*, 32-35.

26. Ibid., Chapter 4.

27. Ibid., 164.

28. Dawne McCance, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013); Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici, "Introduction: Writing Animal Histories," in *Centering Animals in Latin American History*, ed. Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 3-6; and Dorothee Brantz, "Introduction," in *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*, ed. Dorothee Brantz (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

29. Foer, *Eating Animals*, 48-49, 65-68, 129-137.

30. Wendell Berry, as quoted in Foer, *Eating Animals*, 237.

31. Foer interviews people who advocate a diverse range of alternative consumption habits. See Foer, *Eating Animals*, 203-244.

## Appendix A

### Reading Questions for *The Chicken Trail*

Kathleen C. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations across the Americas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

Use these to help you find the main points and big ideas within each chapter. We will not collect them, but they will help you write your paper and focus on the important parts of each chapter.

#### **Preface**

What are the goals of the book?

What is the global dilemma?

To what does “the chicken trail” refer?

What is the problem with migration debates in the U.S.?

What do sociologists debate about migration and jobs?

#### **Chapter 1 – Why Follow Chickens?**

What can chickens tell us about the U.S. and Mexico?

What is ethnic succession?

What was happening in the poultry industry in the U.S. South in the 1990s?

What was happening in rural Mexico in the 1990s?

#### **Chapter 2 – Ethnic Succession in the South**

What did ethnic succession look like in the U.S. South?

How exactly did the composition of the workforce change?

What are some of the different theories for how it happened?

What does Schwartzman claim?

#### **Chapter 3 – Where Have All the Workers Gone?**

What are some of the theories for African Americans’ exit from the Southern poultry industry?

According to Schwartzman, what are the problems with these theories?

What does Schwartzman claim is the real reason?

#### **Chapter 4 – Taylorism Invades the Hen House**

How and when did small chicken farms transform into large industries?

What is Taylorism?

How did Taylorism change working conditions in the poultry industry?

How did workers respond to these changes?

#### **Chapter 5 – Solving Industry Crises: *Pollos Y Polleros***

What were the two crises that the poultry industry faced in the 1990s?

How did hiring immigrants solve both problems?

What other methods did chicken companies use to solve their problems?

### **Chapter 6 – Squeezing out Mexican Chicken**

What were the major changes in the Mexican economy in the 1980s and 1990s?  
How did these changes influence the production of chicken in Mexico?  
According to Schwartzman, should we blame any and all trade for problems in Mexico?

### **Chapter 7 – Voice: Squawking at Globalization**

How did Mexican poultry producers respond to neoliberal policies and NAFTA?  
What were their main complaints?  
In what ways were they successful?  
In what ways were they unsuccessful?

### **Chapter 8 – Exit Mexico: “Si Muero Lejos De Ti”**

How did Mexican farmers experience changes in the poultry industry?  
How did they respond to these changes?  
What happened to Mexican migration in the 1990s?

### **Chapter 9 – The Global Dilemma: Summary and Reflections**

What are Schwartzman’s recommendations for policy changes?  
Do you agree with her public policy goals?  
What else could be done?  
Do her observations refer to all immigration or just undocumented immigrants?

## Appendix B

### Debate Questions for Poultry Industry Representatives

Upon entering the debate, students received one of the following group assignments, along with questions important to the various poultry industry representatives.

**You are advocating on behalf of African American poultry workers:**

- What are your overall goals and what do you need to achieve them?
- What do you want to change about the poultry industry?
- What aspects of the industry do you want to remain the same?
- What (if anything) must the Mexican government do to help you?
- What (if anything) must the U.S. government do to help you?
- What can the other two groups in the room do to help you?

**You are advocating on behalf of Mexican immigrant poultry workers:**

- What are your overall goals and what do you need to achieve them?
- What do you want to change about the poultry industry?
- What aspects of the industry do you want to remain the same?
- What (if anything) must the Mexican government do to help you?
- What (if anything) must the U.S. government do to help you?
- What can the other two groups in the room do to help you?

**You are advocating on behalf of the U.S. poultry industry:**

- What are your overall goals and what do you need to achieve them?
- What do you want to change about the poultry industry?
- What aspects of the industry do you want to remain the same?
- What (if anything) must the Mexican government do to help you?
- What (if anything) must the U.S. government do to help you?
- What can the other two groups in the room do to help you?

## Appendix C

### Essay Questions

#### **HIS 310: Latin American History HIS 374: African-American History Essay 3**

The goal of this assignment is for you to reflect upon the contemporary political issues of migration, poverty, and economic growth in a way that takes the perspectives of business owners, immigrants, and African American workers seriously.

Answer the following questions in a four-page essay using lecture notes and Kathleen Schwartzman's *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations across the Americas*.

Be sure to answer each of these questions fully, with specific examples and evidence from Schwartzman's book.

1. According to Schwartzman, what have been the experiences and primary goals of business owners, African American workers, and Mexican immigrants in the poultry industry since the 1980s?
2. What have been the biggest areas of conflict and cooperation among the groups?
3. What do you think is the best solution to what Schwartzman calls the "American Dilemma"?



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