

Conversations: Scholars and Farm Workers

Conversations with farm workers, migrants and other subjects of academic publications.

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Theme: [History](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

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The basic question, never asked by established and up and coming academics is: What do the subjects who answer my questions get out of it? The academic will write an article in a professional journal or a book for a scholarly press. Publication leads to an appointment, a promotion, and life time employment, a substantial salary with health insurance, a pension, travel funds and time paid to conduct studies.

A Mexican farm worker who was asked for an interview, walked away. The scholar followed him explaining the importance of the study and its relevance “to improving the life of the community through greater understanding”.

The worker stopped and looked his pursuer in the eyes “How much will you pay me for my time?”

The scholar was taken aback hesitated and asked; “Why do you expect to be paid?”

And the peasant answered; “Why not? You are paid to write books . . . my interview will help you write your books. You pay me for my time and answers.”

The scholar argued in vain: “My publications take the side of the farm workers, peasants, the immigrants, my writing exposes the exploitation by landlords and supports peasant resistance.”

The peasant answered; “But those exploiters, at least pay me. I am resisting your attempt to secure my labor without remuneration”.

The scholar moved on to interview another peasant and explained that “the study would improve the life of the community by making the world aware of the plight of the immigrant Indians”.

The Indian asked “What ‘world’ reads about Indians in the fields. Only others like you. They read your writings in order to interview other Indians in order to publish books. And, all of you live in a different world. Will your books or articles raise my wages, secure me credit, build a road to market”?

Some demanded equality of wages: one hour interviews at the pay rates of the scholars.

Others, the wisest, demanded pre-payment of village improvements. Because they quickly learned that the wily, scholars did not fulfill their promises; the interviews were

completed, with handshakes and promises. But the streets were never paved.

According to peasants, it turned out that the worst exploiters were not the landowners who paid a miserable wage, but the scholars who insisted on work without pay. And worst, deprived the peasants of family time, of free time among friends and companions.

The peasants have yet to write their book about scholars who profit from unpaid labor and academics who refuse to answer the peasants' basic question "What do we get out of it?"

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