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## SQUATTERS RIGHTS IN THE AGE OF FORECLOSURES

An interview with visiting speaker  
Max Rameau of Take Back the Land

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# The Raid

*Two years after a devastating raid at the Del Monte plant in Portland, the women who came together to survive the aftermath push for greater understanding of the immigrant experience*



BY ROBIN SCHAUFFLER  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Now, when they talk about it, Zaida Villatoro and the other women refer to it simply as "La Redada," The Raid: an event that stands between one life and another. A few of them have made it their business to talk about it, to share their stories with those willing to hear.

June 12, 2007 was another cold day in the plant — cold and damp. Villatoro was cutting fruit at the Del Monte Fresh Produce food processing center in North Portland. She'd been handling vegetables for several weeks, chopping them for salads to be sold in plastic boxes, but when fruit season came she was reassigned.

She heard a co-worker yell, "Run, run! La migra!" Agents of United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were raiding the premises.

Everyone fled, Villatoro says, and it was chaos. She saw people climbing on piles of crates, and others racing out the back door. About eight scrambled up and hid near the ceiling. She thinks

they stayed until dark and somehow snuck out. One woman climbed high and fell, and an ambulance took her away.

The workers were herded through a hallway and onto a platform where ICE agents took their names and searched them — their hair, clothes, everything.

"I wanted to run to the bathroom and vomit," Villatoro says, "I was so afraid."

She had been working at the plant for approximately three months. It was her first job in the United States.

A total of 168 people were detained that day, accused of working illegally in the United States. Most were swiftly deported to Mexico and Central America, although a federal grand jury indicted 13 for alleged document fraud, identity theft, and immigration offenses. Eight of them have since been convicted.

Women with young children in the United States were given permission to remain temporarily to care for them; some with serious health problems

also were allowed to stay and make a case for not being deported — the legal term is "protest of removal proceedings." After being processed at the ICE detention center in Tacoma, Wash., about 20 women were sent back to Portland, heavy electronic tracking bracelets clamped on their ankles.

Villatoro was one of those sent back to Portland, while her children are in Guatemala. She is applying for asylum, an option for those who cannot return home because of persecution or torture based on politics, religion, social group, nationality or race. She says that her husband, back in Guatemala, is an abuser, a drunk; that he kept a knife hidden under their mattress and often threatened to kill her.

The women, who spoke little or no English, got a quick education in American legal rights because as the raid was taking place, volunteer lawyers arrived on the scene. According to Siobhan Sheridan-Ayala, then with the immigration law

### MOTHER'S DAY VIGIL

On May 9, The Oregon New Sanctuary Movement will take a bus people to attend a Mother's Day Vigil outside the ICE Detention Center in Tacoma, Wash. The bus will leave at 9 a.m. and return by 5 p.m. to Portland. Contact Oregon New Sanctuary Movement 503-550-3510 or write portlandsanctuary@gmail.com

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## Immigrant workers face extremes of economic crisis

*Some of the lowest-wage workers face being blamed for the economic downturn as they struggle to survive it*

BY MARA GRUNBAUM  
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STAFF WRITER

Growing up in the riverfront manufacturing town of St. Helens, Yesenia Sanchez knew only a handful of other Latino families. Born in Oregon to Mexican immigrant parents, she was one of the only non-white students in her class. Still, she says, she was never aware of any significant racial tension.

That changed last year, when economic troubles stirred political unrest, which in turn brought animosity bubbling to the surface.

Columbia County, where St. Helens is located, has a small but fairly settled Latino community. Some, like Sanchez, are citizens, some are legal residents, and others are undocumented immigrants.

In November, Columbia County voters passed a ballot initiative to penalize businesses that

employed undocumented workers with a \$10,000 fine or revocation of their business license.

Another measure, which was voted down, would have required construction sites to display large signs declaring them for legal workers only. Latinos in the community, regardless of their immigration status, felt targeted.

"I'd never really experienced overt racism, or at least not that I can remember," says Sanchez, now a college student at the University of Oregon in Eugene. "I never thought that part of my community wanted to essentially kick me out — didn't want me there, my family there."

Columbia County isn't the only place Latinos are feeling the pressures of the recession in full force.

Oregon is home to almost 400,000 Latinos, most from Mexico. Their median income in 2007 was just over \$18,000 per person a year, according to the Pew Hispanic Center; the

average for Oregon is about \$25,000. Latinos were already more likely than other Oregonians to live in poverty and less likely to own their own homes.

Gloria Wiggins, who manages the Latino Services Division of Catholic Charities in the Portland Metro area, says her organization is now seeing twice as many people as usual seeking help.

"In the past, coming to the center, we had 30 to 50 (people) a day," Wiggins said. "Now we are seeing 80 to 100 on any given day, and getting about 200 calls a day from people looking for resources in rent assistance, food, health care, jobs."

With centers in Portland and Gresham, Catholic Charities' Latino program serves low-income people who work hard, but have limited skills and

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