

## **ANNUAL REPORT: UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION PROJECT ETHNOGRAPHY 2015 FIELD SCHOOL**

Director: Jason De León (University of Michigan)

Co-Directors: María Inclán (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica); Haeden Stewart (University of Chicago); John Doering-White (University of Michigan)



*"Just like you, migrants have rights." Central American migrants listening to mass at a shelter in Chiapas, Mexico. Photo by J. De León*

Over the course of five weeks students with the Undocumented Migration Project conducted hundreds of structured and semi-structured interviews with Central American migrants attempting to cross Mexico to reach the United States. These interviews occurred in and around humanitarian shelters in Chiapas and Tabasco, Mexico. In addition, students recorded hundreds of hours of observational data on the experiences of migrants including their engagements with local and federal governmental agencies (e.g., immigration authorities, medical personnel, law enforcement). Students conducted all interviews in Spanish and data were recorded using a combination of written field notes, audio recordings, photographs, and videos. Thousands of photos were taken, as well as hundreds of hours of audio recording. In addition, archaeological data were collected on the various locales that migrants frequent while en route. These data provided crucial insight into the often traumatic experiences that Central American migrants have while traversing Mexico via walking and riding the tops of dangerous freight trains known as *la bestia* ("the beast"). Recent pressure from the United States on the Mexican government to slow the flow of undocumented Central Americans has led to increased border enforcement

raids and checkpoints, which has subsequently made the crossing process more violent and deadly. Students were given an up close view of these federal enforcement practices and their human costs. These data will be crucial for demonstrating both the intimate connection between US border enforcement and Mexican immigration controls and the importance of documenting the crossing process as it happens using a variety of anthropological approaches.

Field school students are currently in the midst of writing honors theses based on this field work and we anticipate an entire conference session dedicated to this field school in 2016 to be followed by an edited volume featuring student work.