

FROM THE CASTLE

Our Plan

G. WAYNE CLOUGH

RESPONDING TO WORLD WAR II's labor shortages, the federal government initiated the Bracero Program, which brought more than two million Mexican farmworkers—*braceros*—to the United States. In September, at the opening of "Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," an exhibit at the National Museum of American History, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis commended the Institution for presenting the program's little-known story. It gave farmers much-needed workers, provided braceros with social and economic opportunities and increased the nation's ability to wage war. But it also brought suffering and exploitation. As Secretary Solis spoke, she looked up at Leonard Nadel's 1956 photographs documenting the workers' harsh living conditions. Her eyes welled with tears, and she said simply: "My father was a bracero." The exhibit will be on view through January 3, 2010, and then travel via the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (see americanhistory.si.edu/bracero or sites.si.edu).

"Bittersweet Harvest" fits neatly into the Smithsonian's new strategic plan: "Inspiring Generations Through Knowledge and Discovery, 2010-2015." The plan lays out four grand challenges into which we will focus resources and create new interdisciplinary centers. Two of these challenges, "Understanding the American Experience" and "Valuing World Cultures," are exemplified in "Bittersweet Harvest." Our collections of artifacts from around the country and the globe make the Smithsonian especially aware of the diversity that strengthens our own nation and of the differences between the world's many cultures. A third challenge, "Unlocking the Mysteries of the Universe," will continue our long-standing quest to understand the fundamental nature of the cosmos, using the latest technologies to explore our own solar system, meteors, the Earth's geology and the paleontological record. The fourth challenge, "Understanding and Sustaining a Biodiverse Planet," will advance our understanding of life on Earth and respond to the growing threat of environmental change.

This fourth challenge was addressed in part from September 29 to October 1 when Smithsonian specialists—including paleontologists, art historians and environmental educators—interacted with more than 3,700 participants in 50 states and 83 countries during the Smithsonian Education Online Conference on Climate Change (smithsonianconference.org/climate/program/). The Smithsonian's mission—"the increase and diffusion of knowledge"—remains; the new strategic plan focuses that mission for the next five years. As we collaborate across disciplines, undertake both formal and informal education initiatives, embrace technology and new media, and encourage entrepreneurship and partnerships, we aim to expand the Smithsonian's worldwide services. With any luck, exponentially.



"Bittersweet Harvest," a Smithsonian exhibit about *braceros* (California, 1956), fits neatly into the new strategy.

G. WAYNE CLOUGH is Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.



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