

2013

# With Strong Arms and Callused Hands: a Study of Mexican Racial Identity in the Bracero Program From 1942-1964

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The College of Wooster

With Strong Arms and Callused Hands:

A Study of Mexican Racial Identity in the Bracero Program from 1942-1964

By

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by

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Spring 2013

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank Professor Roche for the invaluable guidance he provided in both my research and writing, in addition to calming me down and consistently encouraging me in our meetings. To the Copeland Fund, I am extremely grateful to have travelled to Stanford University for the primary sources that greatly enhanced this project. Mom and Dad, infinite thanks for your emotional and intellectual support. Without you, I could not have survived Independent Study. To my friends and to Ethan: your patience, humor, camaraderie, and love made this project not only bearable, but an integral and unforgettable part of my senior experience.

And finally, I dedicate this Independent Study to my grandpa—I hope I did you justice.

## INTRODUCTION

As a nation that values immigration, and depends on immigration, we should have immigration laws that work and make us proud...I propose a new temporary worker program that will match willing foreign workers with willing American employers, when no Americans can be found to fill these jobs.

- President George W. Bush

When President Bush first introduced a guest worker program to the American public in a White House press release in 2004, he never specifically mentioned Mexican migrants as the intended participants. But as he detailed his solution to America's 'immigration problem,' the implication that reform meant controlling illegal migration from Mexico became abundantly clear. President Bush began his speech by honoring the achievements of a Mexican sergeant in the Marine Corps, demonstrating the value of immigrants to the United States. He then prefaced his proposal by suggesting an expansion of funding and manpower for the Border Patrol, calling this a crucial first step to securing legal immigration. As for the guest worker program, President Bush outlined its purpose to legally make foreign nationals available to employers unable to find American laborers, noting that the contract workers could renew their terms of employment. The federal government would closely monitor employers to ensure their correct usage of the program, and work with foreign governments to provide monetary incentives for workers to repatriate.<sup>1</sup> While President Bush's guest worker program outraged Latino civil rights groups, the plan nevertheless gained traction after his

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush, "President Bush Proposes New Temporary Worker Program" (speech, Washington DC, January 7, 2004), The White House, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040107-3.html>.

speech.<sup>2</sup> The notion of a temporary worker program has resurfaced in Washington year after year as politicians struggle to balance immigration with the need for inexpensive labor from Mexico. As recently as February 2013, President Barack Obama met with business leaders and unions to determine their support for the program, making President Bush's plan a very real possibility for Mexican immigration reform.<sup>3</sup>

In the political discourse surrounding a potential guest worker program, both President Bush and President Obama have failed to acknowledge that this plan would replicate America's previous attempt at contracting Mexican labor—the bracero program of the 1940s and 1950s. Within months of America's entry into World War II, the United States and Mexican governments agreed to a temporary worker program intended to prevent agricultural and railroad labor shortages. Mexican men called *braceros* (Spanish for “strong arms”) went through a vetting process in Mexico, and travelled to the United States where employers awarded them labor contracts. These contracts provided federally guaranteed rights and wages, and allowed braceros to legally work in the United States for a fixed term until they repatriated to Mexico. The program sent Mexican nationals to twenty-six states, although the majority of braceros worked either in California, Texas, or other southwestern states. While the railroad program ended in 1945, the American and Mexican governments commissioned the agricultural program until 1964, discrediting the bracero program as solely providing emergency wartime labor. As a result of this extension, over twenty-two years two million braceros signed over 4.5 million contracts,

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<sup>2</sup> Michael A. Fletcher, Darryl Fears, “Bush Pushes Guest-Worker Program,” *Washington Post*, November 29, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/28/AR2005112800067.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Erica Werner, “Business, Unions Negotiating Guest Worker Program,” *Associated Press*, February 5, 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/business-unions-negotiating-guest-worker-program>.

making the bracero program the largest importation of migrant labor in American history.<sup>4</sup>

While the bracero program almost unanimously benefitted the agricultural and railroad industries, braceros consistently reported abuse, claiming that employers failed to fulfill their contractual obligations. Braceros described instances of unfair compensation, racial discrimination, inedible food, no medical care, overcrowded living, and little to no federal enforcement of the rights guaranteed in their contracts. Beyond braceros' claims, American workers denied the existence of a domestic labor shortage, and believed that of braceros displaced them from the workforce. Domestic laborers also felt that braceros depressed wages and working conditions, since agricultural and railroad employers exploited the Mexican workers. In addition, many Mexican American civil rights groups contended that the mistreatment and very presence of braceros encouraged negative stereotypes of Mexicans, and impeded progress for fair treatment in the United States.

Independent of the bracero program's internal failures, contract labor also negatively impacted existing patterns and structures. As the bracero program grew increasingly competitive in the 1950s, many migrants rejected by the program still travelled to the United States, increasing illegal immigration amongst federally unprotected workers. The availability of braceros along with this influx of undocumented workers increased dependence on inexpensive Mexican labor, and the assumption that it would remain readily accessible. When President Bush proposed reviving a guest worker program with Mexico, some historians looked to the bracero program as a predictor of its

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick Mullins, Director, *Bracero Stories*, 2008, 1:12.

successes and consequences, as demonstrated in the documentaries *Bracero Stories* and *Harvest of Loneliness*. The current debate surrounding temporary labor has not only brought new relevance to the bracero program, but has also caused issues of migration, labor, and racial conflict to resurface.

In this Independent Study, I explore the imposed and self-identified conceptions of braceros' racial identity, and how these conflicting identities specifically impacted the agricultural bracero program in California. The majority of this study will deconstruct the assumptions of braceros made by three outsider groups—the Mexican government, the agricultural employers of braceros, and organizations in the United States such as labor unions and Mexican American civil rights groups—and conclude with an analysis of braceros' self-perceptions. For these outsider groups, racial characterizations of Mexican labor often dictated their roles in the program, in addition to their expectations for contract labor. However, outsider conceptions of racial identity ultimately did not determine how braceros viewed themselves. Although no overarching identity exists for all braceros, through their oral testimonies, many former braceros recall specific experiences that undermined the stereotypes placed upon them by outsiders. Most former braceros also emphasize the upward mobility they achieved later in life, thereby defying definition by the bracero program at all. In this way, I argue that while the Mexican government, bracero employers, American unions, and civil rights groups shaped the bracero program with their perceptions of racial identity, braceros ultimately cultivated their own identities and exerted agency in a framework primarily dominated by outsiders.



The first chapter of this Independent Study centers on the Mexican government and their agenda for a guest worker program. After the devastating Mexican Revolution, the government believed the bracero program would transform racially inferior peasant workers into national modernizing agents. With newly acquired skills and wages from the United States, braceros would ideally return to Mexico to rebuild and develop the nation. In Chapter Two, I focus on large growers in California looking to solidify their agricultural empires. Because of the state's proximity to Mexico, growers falsely racialized Mexicans as superior to all other ethnic workers, and used their political influence to secure continued access to braceros. Chapter Three examines the racial images of braceros held by unions and civil rights organizations. Perceptions of braceros caused these groups to splinter; while some viewed braceros as threats to labor progress and assimilation, others embraced them as similarly oppressed and discriminated workers. These conceptions of braceros ultimately determined the methods used by unions and civil rights groups to challenge the bracero program. Finally, Chapter Four relies on written and oral bracero testimonies to examine their sense of agency against the stereotypes placed upon them. I also use these collective bracero memories to present a new, authentic characterization of braceros, constructed by the contract workers themselves.

In order to effectively discuss identity politics in the bracero program, I utilized specific terms to express concepts related to labor, identity, and race. For example, some scholars use 'bracero' to mean all Mexican migrants who worked in the United States during the bracero program, regardless of legal status. However, in this study I use

‘bracero’ to strictly refer to contracted laborers, emphasizing their distinctive experience in the bracero program. I call all other Mexican national workers in this study ‘undocumented.’ Although primary sources from the bracero program use ‘wetback’ to describe undocumented Mexicans, the term has since been labelled racially offensive. As such, I do not use it unless directly quoting another source. I also deliberately avoid the more contemporary terms of ‘illegal’ or ‘alien’ when referring to undocumented labor. To call the people who once occupied the land between Texas and California ‘alien’ becomes dehumanizing, while ‘illegal’ inaccurately portrays their status—although undocumented workers may have been hired illegally, their personhood does not rely on systems of law.

Conversely, I also have a specific definition in mind when I write about the agricultural employers of braceros and undocumented workers. According to activist and journalist Carey McWilliams, in the early twentieth century, most Americans pictured the traditional family farms that covered the Midwest when they thought of California’s agriculture. However, prior to the bracero program, large, organized, business-like ranches producing commercial crops emerged in California, replacing subsistence farming.<sup>5</sup> This distinction in terms greatly affected the bracero program. Because of this misconception that small farms employed braceros, many Americans underestimated the oppressive nature of growers and the conditions braceros faced during their employment. Therefore, when referring to growers and ‘agribarons,’ I specifically mean the owners and employers who profited from massively scaled agribusiness, not individual farmers.

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<sup>5</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (University of California Press, 1939), 4.

Lastly, while I acknowledge that many individual cultural and racial identities exist, for the purposes of this study I limited my focus to specific categories of racial identity. In Mexico's rural villages, where most braceros came from, many Indians and Spanish-descended Mexicans interacted, producing mixed race *mestizos*. This racial ambiguity fueled the Mexican government's assumption of braceros as racially inferior, and in need of modernization through the bracero program. In the United States, rigid distinctions between whites and Mexicans existed, with many braceros experiencing the same segregation as African Americans. For these reasons, when referring to issues of identity I emphasize race rather than culture or ethnicity. Within this context of race, I specifically fix 'Mexican' to imply a non-American citizen and legal resident of Mexico. However, I use 'American' as an umbrella term; while 'American' encompasses whites, it could also refer to assimilated citizens of Mexican descent. I specify this because in my chapter on American unions, 'American' does not exclude union members of Mexican heritage. When analyzing the reconciliation of American and Mexican identities, I define that person or group as 'Mexican American' as opposed to 'Latino' or 'Hispanic' as a way to signal the conflict between these identities, particularly when discussing civil rights and interactions with braceros.

Turning to the materials that allowed me to build this Independent Study, I must begin with my most personally significant resource—my grandfather. While visiting his house in Texas in December 2011, I found some old documents of his, half in Spanish, half in English. My grandfather explained that I held his old bracero labor contracts in my hands, from his time as a railroad bracero during World War II. Born in the rural town of

Coxcatlán in the state of San Luis Potosí, my grandfather Fausto Sánchez Aguilar enlisted in the bracero program in 1943 as a teenager, despite not meeting the age requirement and lacking any experience with manual labor. As a bracero, he built and repaired railroad tracks in Ventura, Santa Susana, and Fillmore, California before working in Crestline, Ohio—about an hour away from The College of Wooster. During the course of my research, I recorded an oral testimony of my grandfather’s bracero experience as a personal contribution to this study. In this way, not only did my grandfather expose me to the bracero program and serve as a valuable resource, but his story also inspired this Independent Study.

To build an analysis based on racial perception and identity, including those reported by my grandfather and other former braceros, I relied heavily on the scholarship written on both the bracero program and Mexican American identity for historical context. Prior to the bracero program’s end in 1964, scholars primarily intended to expose the abuse of laborers obscured by agribusiness employers. Writing before the legalization of the bracero program, radical journalist Carey McWilliams used *Factories in the Field* to tell the “hidden history” of California, detailing the massive and fascist-like power of growers, and the ways in which they oppressed foreign and domestic labor. Following McWilliams’ example, scholar and labor activist Ernesto Galarza wrote the most definitive accounts of the bracero program; beginning with *Strangers In Our Fields* in 1957, at the height of the program’s use, he used interviews with braceros to systematically deconstruct their exploitation while working in the United States. Galarza succeeded this in 1964 with *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An*

*Account of Managed Migration of the Mexican Farm Worker in California 1942-1960*, widening his analysis of the program to examine the complex system as a whole, including the legislation that codified the program, and braceros' effect on union action. Lastly, while sociologist Henry Anderson began writing *The Bracero Program in California* in 1961 to assess braceros' medical care in a larger study on public health, Anderson ultimately revealed the mistreatment of braceros as reflected in their healthcare. While these works remain fundamental to scholarship on the bracero program, their authors often substitute analysis for exposition, due to the urgency of worker exploitation at the time. Therefore, although this writing provided a crucial foundation for my study, I primarily utilized them as resources, rather than modeling my analysis on their example.

Scholars' later writings on the bracero program more heavily emphasize analysis, with subjects ranging from the policy and politics that created the bracero program to surveys of the agricultural and railroad programs individually. Written in 1971, historians often label Richard Craig's *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* as the quintessential study of the bracero program. Craig constructs arguments for and against the bracero program from the perspective of political interest groups, emphasizing the disproportional amount of power held by growers over the political process. Kitty Calavita's *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S* borrows Craig's lens, also analyzing the bracero program from a structural standpoint. Calavita primarily focuses on the American government's role in the program, with particular emphasis on the Immigration and Naturalization Service. While she believes the goals of

the INS often overlapped with growers' aims, she argues that the INS solely acted to further their department, with growers benefitting accidentally. Deborah Cohen in *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* chose instead to focus her analysis on the agricultural bracero program individually. She stresses the program's transformative effects, arguing that both growers and the Mexican government used the program to mold braceros to their liking, with disastrous results for domestic workers. Complementing Cohen, Barbara Driscoll's *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North* remains one of the only monographs solely dedicated to the railroad bracero program. Driscoll argues that while the railroad program resulted from the strong relationship between the railroad industry and the federal government, unions also possessed enough power to contribute to the program's termination after World War II. While these analytically based works informed my research on the bracero program, Cohen's thesis supported an investigation on how conceptions of race contributed to different uses of the bracero program, and in this way, most heavily influenced this study.

In addition to scholarship specifically relating to the bracero program, I also relied on studies that analyzed identity politics for Mexican Americans during the bracero program. In George Sánchez's *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945*, he challenges the bi-polar model of racial identity that favors either assimilation or cultural continuity. He explores the history of Mexican immigration before the bracero program by focusing on Mexican and American assimilation programs, paying particular attention to those who did not conform to either

extreme. Providing an alternative perspective to the bi-polar model that Sánchez refutes, in *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930-1960*, Mario T. García examines the group he deems the ‘Mexican American Generation,’ or those who came of age between the 1930s and 1950s. García argues that this group struggled to either incorporate their Mexican roots or assimilate as Americans, inspiring them to create prominent activist groups and lead the first significant civil rights movement for Mexican Americans. With the analysis most relevant to the bracero program, David Gutiérrez’s *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* investigates Mexican Americans’ reaction to immigration—which ranged from seeing new arrivals as threats, or embracing common origins as a binding tie. He argues that Mexican Americans’ personal sense of ethnic and political identity dictated their stance on immigration, and applies his theory to those who reacted to the bracero program. Although Sánchez and García’s respective works do not directly address the bracero program, they provide a historical and analytical base to understand identity conflict. This allowed me to properly appreciate and build upon Gutiérrez’s argument, supplementing my own analysis of the identity politics that existed between Mexican American citizens and braceros.

Beyond secondary sources, I collected primary source documents that enabled me to authentically portray the racial perceptions that existed within the bracero program. Official union reports, strike bulletins, and personal correspondence between union leaders appear from two archives, the George I. Sánchez Papers at the University of Texas at Austin and the Ernesto Galarza Papers at Stanford University. With these

documents, I supplemented secondary accounts depicting the character of individual unions and the outcomes of particular protests involving braceros. When constructing braceros' collective memories and individual assertions of identity, beyond the oral history provided by my grandfather, I utilized sources from several mediums. While some secondary sources included bracero histories as evidence, such as Deborah Cohen's *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, I also used Jose-Rodolfo Jacobo's anthology of written bracero testimonies, *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers 1942-1964*. Two documentaries released after President Bush's guest worker program proposal likewise emphasize braceros' retelling of their experiences working in the United States. Similar to the primary sources relating to labor, these original bracero histories allowed me to recreate and analyze self-perceptions of the contract workers during the bracero program.<sup>6</sup>

When writing this Independent Study, I did not intend to neatly sort out the identity politics that drove the bracero program. Rather, I sought to accurately portray the program's complex nature, and the competing motivations for both its users and participants. In this way, an analysis of the racial assumptions in America's first guest worker program will hopefully provide an understanding of the identity conflicts that accompany immigration, migrant labor, and ultimately its reform.

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<sup>6</sup> George I. Sánchez, a labor activist and former president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, did not write *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945*, mentioned in the previous paragraph, but coincidentally shares the same name as its author.



CHAPTER ONE  
MEXICO'S FAILED REVOLUTION AND THE QUEST  
FOR MODERNIZATION

In a basic analysis of the bracero program, the American government had an obvious investment in temporary guest labor—agricultural and railroad employers needed extra workers to prevent labor shortages that would hinder America's success in World War II. But turning the focus across the border, the Mexican government's participation in the bracero program becomes harder to justify. The legacy left by the Mexican Revolution thirty years prior helps explain why the Mexican government might encourage its own citizens to leave their families and their homeland to pick American crops and benefit a foreign economy. Unresolved tensions between urban and rural Mexico, the federal government's self-conscious lack of power, and the intense desire to develop and modernize Mexico all combined to create the bracero program—the best solution for an unstable state.<sup>1</sup>

Originally, insurgent peasants fighting against an oppressive government sparked what would culminate into the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Poor, traditional, rural, and often uneducated, this class of people primarily worked the land. Under the reign of dictator Porfirio Díaz, these *campesinos* watched as the rich elite bought up their villages

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of my analysis, I define the Mexican Revolution as lasting from 1910 to 1920, or from the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz to the end of Venustiano Carranza's presidency, with infighting and tumultuous regime changes lasting for decades after. Although historians commonly use these years to constrain the Revolution, due to the nature of this chaotic period in Mexico's history, there have been a variety of reinterpretations as to when exactly the Revolution ended. For more, see William Beezley, "Reflections on the Historiography of Twentieth-Century Mexico," *History Compass*, 5, no. 3 (2007): 963-974.

and built privately owned haciendas. Instead of farming self-sufficiently, these peasants now literally served their *haciendado* employers under the passive approval of Díaz. Although a variety of factors contributed to the Mexican Revolution, peasant frustration served as its major driving force. Consequently, when the Revolution failed to deliver the demands of rural Mexicans, peasants instead left for the United States. The Mexican government's reaction to the migration of this class informed racially based assumptions of *campesinos* that ultimately carried into the bracero program.

For the Mexican government, the Mexican Revolution failed to resolve divisions between Mexico's political elite and racially othered poor. As a result, the post-revolutionary government never reconciled its agenda to advance urban Mexico with peasant demands for economic justice. From the Revolution to World War II, the Mexican government favored urban development, modernization, and national progress over fulfilling revolutionary promises such as redistributive land reform. Mexico's presidents believed the presence of rural *campesinos* impeded their goal of national transformation, and that peasants as a racial and economic class likewise needed to change. Instead of permanently losing this population through migration to the United States, the government instead sought to use peasants as agents of modernization. Through temporary guest labor, the Mexican government could legally obligate rural farmers to repatriate after working in the more modern United States. With hope that newly skilled workers would uplift Mexico, the government negotiated the bracero program primarily as a means for Mexican nationalism. Any collateral benefit for poor

Mexicans came second—leaving *campesinos* abandoned by their federal government during the Revolution, and subsequently during the bracero program as well.

For revolutionary leaders Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and their followers, peasant justice emphasized land redistribution and in particular, reversing damage done under Porfirio Díaz. Under his dictatorship from 1876 to 1910, Díaz attempted to make Mexico into a more modern nation—often at the expense of peasants.<sup>2</sup> Of his many reforms, restructuring land ownership had the most detrimental effect on agricultural communities. Díaz eradicated the *ejido* system, a structure which allowed rural farmers to cultivate communally owned land. In its place, he allowed for the construction of privately owned haciendas. To demonstrate the magnitude of this change, under Díaz, only eight men came to own fifty-five million acres of Mexican land along the United States border. Historian Frank R. Brandenburg describes this new state of agriculture as almost feudal, comparable to sixteenth-century Europe.<sup>3</sup> With Mexico's land in wealthier hands, Díaz pushed for the production of commercial crops which Mexico could export internationally. This dramatically shrank the cultivation of staple crops, rewarding the villages responsible for commercial farming with food shortages that sometimes fueled riots.<sup>4</sup> As a result, resentment and frustration fostered massive divisions between landlord and laborer. Michael J. Gonzalez, a historian on the Mexican Revolution, writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 24, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Brandenburg, "Causes of the Revolution," *Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940*, ed. James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1969), 18.

<sup>4</sup> William Beezley, and Colin MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 3-4, 6.

Landowners called agraristas [poor farmers] “heretics, blasphemers, atheists, thieves, and desecrators” and referred to themselves as “more intelligent, industrious, and cultured than their workers.” Agraristas characterized themselves as “virtuous and poor” and believed that “agrarianism had no quarrel with God and his priests.” They also rejected the insult that they were “dumb, lazy, or ignorant.” In fact, they believed that “educated people were inept when it came to raising crops and handling cattle.”<sup>5</sup>

In response to Díaz’s land reforms, agrarian revolts against the dictator and the Mexican elite erupted in Morelos and Chihuahua, the respective home states of Zapata and Villa.

In these areas, Zapata came to represent the soul of a land reform movement with Villa as its enforcer.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of two figures willing to demand land redistribution gave rural Mexican folk heroes to rally behind, and concrete methods to take back their land.<sup>7</sup>

Through a variety of roles, Pancho Villa’s fierce loyalty to the rural poor transformed him into a revolutionary icon who embodied *campesino* cries for land. As an adolescent sharecropper, Villa first encountered class conflict when defending his sister from an abusive *haciendado* employer. The resulting altercation forced Villa into hiding; his certain execution for challenging a member of the upper class, even in defense of his family, exemplified the blatant social injustices commonly found during the Porfiriato. As Villa sought refuge with local bandits, he found his calling as a criminal in the process. Villa’s tenure as a thief allowed him to witness vast class discrepancies beyond his own personal experience, intensifying his desire to avenge Mexico’s poor. Villa’s criminal

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<sup>5</sup> Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution*, 233.

<sup>6</sup> Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution*, 263.

<sup>7</sup> Porfirio Díaz, dictator from 1876 to 1910, found himself forcibly removed from office in 1911 after changing his mind about abstaining from one more term. For clarity’s sake, in this chapter, I also mention presidents Francisco Madero (1911-1913), Venustiano Carranza (1914-1920), Álvaro Obregón (1920-1924), Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), and Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946).

reputation quickly changed to that of a Robin Hood-figure—despised by his affluent victims and idolized by impoverished villagers.<sup>8</sup> This image followed Villa when revolutionary fighting broke out in 1910. As an army commander for Francisco Madero, Porfirio Díaz’s primary political challenger, Villa’s popularity exploded despite his lack of military experience. While his army travelled the country, Villa humiliated hacienda owners in front of their workers, and even executed them when he deemed it necessary.<sup>9</sup> As a result, rural villagers hailed Villa as the “people’s avenger”—bringing Mexico’s rich and powerful to justice.<sup>10</sup>

When his popularity as commander led to a brief term as governor of Chihuahua in 1913, Pancho Villa continued to abide by his allegiance to revolutionary principals. Villa confiscated land from those he deemed enemies of the Revolution, promoted education for the poor, and implemented moral codes such as prohibiting the army from drinking alcohol. Through these reforms, he intended to promote equality for Chihuahuans of different economic classes. While Villa’s plans to build a utopian and revolutionary Chihuahua exposed his naiveté, he managed to leave a distinct legacy in the state. After only two months in office, “Villismo” became synonymous with political, economic, and social change for at least three years after his term.<sup>11</sup> While primarily a militarist, throughout Villa’s varied career as a criminal, military commander, and

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<sup>8</sup> Alejandro Quintana, *Pancho Villa: A Biography*, (Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: Greenwood Biographies, 2012), 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Quintana, *Pancho Villa*, 28-29.

<sup>10</sup> Although many books have been written on the life and influence Pancho Villa, I relied on Quintana as a concise source. Other prominent works on Villa include: “The Life and Times of Pancho Villa” by Friedrich Katz, “Pancho Villa” by Paco Ignacio Taibo, and “Memoirs of Pancho Villa” by Martin Luíz Guzmán.

<sup>11</sup> Quintana, *Pancho Villa*, 69-75.

governor of Chihuahua, Villa consistently proved his commitment to Mexico's peasants. His attempts to carve a place for poor farmers in the Revolution made him one of rural Mexico's most prominent figures, and a significant threat to Mexico's elite.

Although as a bandit Pancho Villa lacked interest in national politics, he put his hopes in candidate Francisco Madero's plan for agrarian reform in 1910. Unfortunately, Madero used his relationship with Villa as a one-way exchange to force Porfirio Díaz out of power. When Madero invited Villa to join his revolutionary movement as an army commander, Villa accepted, despite his lack of political or military experience. Villa's persistence against the federal army, remarkable control of his men, and undeniable charisma as a leader made him a valuable asset, and eventually Madero relied on him as a personal confidante. However, after the fall of Díaz and Madero's election on October 1, 1911, the seams in the new president's relationship with Villa began to show. Despite the mounting evidence suggesting Madero's disregard for his revolutionary promises, Villa remained faithful to him.<sup>12</sup> But Villa's confidence had limits; after Madero's Minister of War chased Villa into exile because of a personal vendetta, Madero washed his hands clean of the situation. Madero knew defending Villa against a member of the federal army would anger wealthy Mexicans, and as Mexico's newest president in over forty years, Madero prioritized this base over rewarding Villa's loyalty and admiration. As Alejandro Quintana writes in his biography of Villa, Madero saw Villa as nothing more than a "useful bandit" who paved the way to the presidency.<sup>13</sup> Mexico's first post-Revolution president should have held promise for the rural poor. But Madero became the first in a

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<sup>12</sup> Quintana, *Pancho Villa*, 20-39.

<sup>13</sup> Quintana, *Pancho Villa*, 49-54.

long succession of presidents to champion peasant interests until they reached Mexico City—eventually deserting not only those like Villa, but all of rural Mexico.

Similar to Pancho Villa in the north, Emiliano Zapata in the south believed the Mexican Revolution could bring land and equality to his fellow *campesinos*—especially as urban interests threatened to make traditional agriculture obsolete. Although Zapata grew up only fifty miles from Mexico City in the state of Morelos, like most villagers, local and land-centered issues consumed him.<sup>14</sup> Zapata’s early life followed a trajectory similar to Villa’s; as a former adolescent criminal with a moral code concerning social justice, he earned a reputation for punishing hacienda employees and officials preying on agrarian villages.<sup>15</sup> As the chaos of the Revolution swept Mexico, Zapata recognized an outlet for his frustration concerning rural exploitation, and abandoned his career as a vigilante. However, Zapata soon realized that revolutionary politicians intended to reinvent Mexico by way of urbanization—continuing its abandonment of rural Mexico. Sensing a new enemy of the true Revolution, Zapata soldiered on for Mexico’s poor. In his 1911 Plan of Ayala, Zapata declared Francisco Madero a traitor to the the Revolution only three weeks into his presidency, and reaffirmed his allegiance to *ejido* agriculture.<sup>16</sup> Zapata’s Plan of Ayala demonstrated the first major break amongst ‘revolutionaries,’ revealing each faction’s true nature; while Madero defended the upper and middle

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Brunk, *¡Emiliano Zapata!: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 6-9.

<sup>15</sup> Brunk, *¡Emiliano Zapata!*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Emiliano Zapata, "Plan of Ayala," *Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940*, ed. James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1969), 45-46.

classes, Zapata and his Zapatistas represented the interests of rural Mexicans.<sup>17</sup> Like Villa, Zapata not only became a significant symbol of forgotten peasants, but he would expose himself to political exploitation as a result.

During the Revolution, Emiliano Zapata based his political alliances on who could best bring justice to rural Mexico. While this allowed him to most powerfully personify Mexico's push for land reform, presidents quickly identified and abused Zapata's pattern of endorsement. Through empty promises, Mexico's presidents turned Zapata from a revolutionary into a pawn, whose approval guaranteed the political support of rural Mexico. Empathizing with the anger in Morelos at Porfirio Díaz, Zapata first noticed candidate Francisco Madero for his Plan of San Luis Potosí. In addition to formally declaring Madero's revolt, the Plan of San Luis Potosí included an article concerning land redistribution. While not formally invited to join Madero's movement like Villa, an impressed Zapata assembled local rebels to back Madero's candidacy.<sup>18</sup> But once in office, Madero took his sweet time delivering land reform—causing an impatient Zapata to turn his forces against Madero.<sup>19</sup> Zapata continued using presidents' intentions for the poor as a litmus test for his allegiance; for example, he refused to support Venustiano Carranza in 1920 because Zapata believed he spoke for wealthy land owners.<sup>20</sup> After Carranza, subsequent candidates realized that fooling Zapata with their plans for rural equality would more importantly trick Zapata's followers into pledging

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Wasserman, *The Mexican Revolution: A Brief History with Documents*, (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012), 38-39.

<sup>18</sup> Brunk, *¡Emiliano Zapata!: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*, 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Wasserman, *The Mexican Revolution: A Brief History with Documents*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Brunk, *¡Emiliano Zapata!: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*, 113.



their support. With the state of Mexico still fragile from the war years of the Revolution, appeasing rebellious rural states became crucial to stabilizing new presidential administrations.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, while Zapata's dedication to his countrymen elevated him to idol status in rural villages, in politics, he joined Villa as a man whose passion for rural equality left him open to political manipulation, suspending any real progress for land reform.

Although Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata fought to improve conditions in rural Mexico, not one president after the Porfiriato fully delivered on their pledge to bring rural equality. From Francisco Madero in 1911 to Manuel Ávila Camacho in 1940, the lack of significant land reform revealed political inequalities that favored Mexico's urban elite; at best Mexico's presidents used land reform as a political tool, and at worst, an easily ignored cry from Mexico's lowest class. Many revolutionary presidents, such as Venustiano Carranza, approved elaborate reform policies they had no intention of enacting.<sup>22</sup> Others, such as post-revolutionary president Álvaro Obregón, entered office with the intention of ignoring revolutionary sentiments entirely.<sup>23</sup> Although historians generally view the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas as an exception to this pattern, due to severe urban problems, his policies intended for rural Mexico lacked the effectiveness called for in revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> Cárdenas' successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, returned to the tradition of favoring economic development over the concerns of

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<sup>21</sup> Brunk, *¡Emiliano Zapata!: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*, xii-iii.

<sup>22</sup> Wasserman, *The Mexican Revolution: A Brief History with Documents*, 109-111.

<sup>23</sup> Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940*, 190-191.

<sup>24</sup> Beezley, and MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, 118-120.

peasants, and relied on the bracero program to solve Mexico's rural problems.<sup>25</sup> Twenty years of Mexican presidents left rural farmers unfulfilled by a once promising Revolution, and only encouraged discrepancies in power between Mexico's poor and the ruling class. These economic and regional tensions went beyond just political conflict, but reflected deeper, unresolved issues of class and race in Mexico.

The Mexican Revolution built upon narratives of national identity that the Mexican government would struggle with for the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning with Porfirio Díaz, Mexican politicians consumed themselves with their country's international image. When Díaz prepared for Mexico's centennial celebration in 1910, the year before his downfall and Francisco Madero's election, he saw the milestone as a chance to showcase Mexico's modernity and progress to the world. He oversaw the construction of new buildings, planned parades, and gave speeches to commemorate Mexico's independence. Through the centennial, Díaz exhibited past Aztec glories, the colonial civilization of Mexico, and emphasized Mexico's current status as a cosmopolitan nation. But Díaz envisioned that Mexico's national identity would exclusively reflect urban Mexico—effectively ostracizing *campesinos* from the nation.<sup>26</sup> His mission to modernize Mexico brought class divisions to the forefront of Mexican consciousness, and pushed the rural poor to respond with their own visions for Mexico through the Revolution. Díaz's focus on cultivating urban Mexico had severe consequences; as presidents temporarily put aside national development to sort through

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<sup>25</sup> Beezley, and MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, 142.

<sup>26</sup> Beezley, and MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, 10-11.

the Revolution, modernization efforts—and identity issues—would emerge even stronger post-Revolution.

When the Revolution ended in 1920, a decade of war caused Mexico to lag in its national progress. To put the country back on a path toward modernization, the Mexican government emphasized urbanization to rebuild the country—drastically affecting peasant migration. As revolutionary battles devastated the countryside, Mexican cities swelled in population (Mexico City alone accounted for 60% of the nation's urban growth between 1910-1921).<sup>27</sup> Practically, cities offered protection for rural civilians migrating to escape the war. But socially, an urban life also represented an escape from the stagnant, primitive countryside. With more of its population concentrated in cities, the federal government heavily invested in expanding modern infrastructure such as railroads and roads. The government also introduced new technology such as telegraphs, telephones, and the radio to rural states that essentially still lived in the nineteenth century. Although this made Mexico smaller by making urban areas accessible across the nation, it did not necessarily improve Mexico's agrarian states. As policies shifted to cater to the needs of Mexico's urban population, particularly during the Cárdenas administration from 1937-1938, it appeared that the middle class had inherited a revolution intended for Mexico's poor.<sup>28</sup> Preoccupied with cultivating cities in the name of modernization, the Mexican government once again created conditions that intentionally excluded rural peasants from the nation. But in the process of urbanizing

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<sup>27</sup> George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>28</sup> Beezley, and MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, 75, 92-93, 157-158.

Mexico, the government also inadvertently intensified *campesino* migration to the United States—an outcome the Mexican government found itself less equipped to handle.<sup>29</sup>

Although the number of Mexico's peasants migrating northward escalated after 1920, these patterns did not appear spontaneously, but rather built upon precedents established during the revolutionary period. In the early twentieth century, before the Mexican Revolution, lax immigration policies in the United States and the availability of seasonal employment in agriculture and industry combined to encourage border hopping for rural Mexicans. With the transfer of people came a transfer of information about living and working in the United States, causing Mexicans to view migration as a casual, temporary, and acceptable endeavor. Migration eventually became so common that rural Mexicans viewed it as an extension of their work in Mexico, and never equated crossing the border with cutting ties to their home country.<sup>30</sup> As Mexicans grew comfortable with traveling to the United States, American employers likewise became accustomed to their presence in the labor force—so much so that President William Taft and Porfirio Díaz negotiated an agreement to contract unemployed Mexicans to ensure this flow of labor.<sup>31</sup> By the end of the Revolution, even Mexicans living in the interior of the country migrated to the United States, with most peasants bypassing work in Mexican

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<sup>29</sup> As a result of this population surge, federal priorities favored urban areas over decaying villages. Even Lázaro Cárdenas, Mexico's most liberal post-revolutionary president, had to abandon his plans to deliver on revolutionary promises, such as implementing a wealth redistribution program, to foster nationalism in cities. Urban conditions forced Cárdenas to act like his conservative predecessors, for example, strengthening the Nacional Financiera, a federally funded industrial development institution started by previous president Plutarco Calles. For more, see Beezley, and MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, 136-137.

<sup>30</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 48-49.

<sup>31</sup> Erasmo Gamboa, "On the Nation's Periphery: Mexican Braceros and the Pacific Northwest Railroad Industry 1943-1946," *Mexican Americans & World War II*, ed. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 270.

cities entirely.<sup>32</sup> This history of migration for the rural class, combined with pressure to urbanize, created the necessary push factors for Mexicans to enter the United States in unprecedented numbers, and to threaten the Mexican government's control over its own citizens.

When rural Mexicans left for the United States in mass droves during 1920s, the Mexican government realized its lack of power over a class it had systematically excluded from nation building for over a decade. Unable to prevent American industries from pulling peasant laborers to the United States, the Mexican government grew desperate to regulate the movement of its citizens, particularly after the Great Depression. With the American workforce devastated in 1929, unskilled Mexican farm workers found themselves at the front of unemployment lines in states like California, while laborers from Oklahoma and Arkansas took their place in the fields.<sup>33</sup> Concerned with the Depression's effect on American workers first, the United States government used repatriation programs to deliver over 415,000 Mexican nationals to the border. This sudden arrival of rural migrants overwhelmed the Mexican government, and left them with the challenge of reintegrating already undesirable peasants into an urbanizing society.

The massive repatriation of workers following the Great Depression caused Mexico's current president, Álvaro Obregón, to set a critical precedent regarding migrant labor. While he knew these rural men could potentially overwhelm the Mexican workforce, Obregón realized that peasant migrants could also help Mexico on its quest

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<sup>32</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Truman Moore, *The Slaves We Rent*, (New York: Random House, 1965), 82-83.

for modernization.<sup>34</sup> He believed that as rural farmers worked in the more developed United States, they learned more modern agricultural skills, thereby making migration a transformative process that turned peasant migrants into productive laborers. As a result of this revelation, after years of neglect from previous Mexican presidents, Obregón finally embraced *campesinos*—if only for their potential contributions to Mexico as a whole. In order to harness migration as a tool for national development, Obregón needed to ensure that Mexico did not permanently lose its citizens to the United States. The Mexican consulate began to implement programs that promoted national loyalty and identity to encourage return migration, particularly in areas with strong Mexican populations such as Los Angeles.<sup>35</sup> Despite these efforts to promote cyclical migration, the end of the Great Depression combined with Mexico's continued urbanization drove even more rural Mexicans across the border.<sup>36</sup> As migration again intensified in the early 1940s, so did the Mexican government's investment in modernizing its peasants and retaining its migrants—all motivations that ultimately culminated in the bracero program.

With increased emigration to the United States after the Great Depression, the Mexican government contemplated regulating migration through a temporary guest worker program. Newly elected president Manuel Ávila Camacho reflected the Mexican elite's continued conceptualization of *campesinos*, that their rural poverty impeded urban national progress. But with a codified labor exchange, the Mexican government could accomplish several objectives; guest labor would legally control the flow of workers to

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<sup>34</sup> Beezley, and MacLachlan, *Mexicans in Revolution 1910-1946: An Introduction*, 125.

<sup>35</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 113.

<sup>36</sup> Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940*, 232.

the United States, ensure the modernization of peasant workers, and require repatriation. With developed agricultural skills and American wages to contribute to the economy, former rural workers would now become productive Mexican citizens.<sup>37</sup>

But simultaneously, watching the lower class flock to the border embarrassed Mexican national leaders. Regulating migration meant encouraging American dependence, and could potentially represent Mexico backsliding in its development. Some even felt a labor exchange program meant admitting Mexico's Revolution had failed, particularly because it had overthrown a pro-American dictator.<sup>38</sup> Even amongst rural Mexicans it became clear that a labor exchange program showed Mexican weakness, a sentiment summed up in a joke that circulated around the state of Jalisco: "Santa Anna sold [Americans] the land, and Ávila Camacho rented the oxen."<sup>39</sup> Although codifying migration had benefits and disadvantages for Mexico, more significantly, it forced the Mexican government to finally reconcile its national ambition with its two national shames—its poorest citizens, and their migration northward.

While the notion of a temporary labor program created conflict in Mexico, Mexican officials ultimately justified it as a means to finally eradicate the cause of peasants' primitive status—their racial identity. Since Spanish colonization, race had always been a component to Mexican identity. When the 'white' Spanish encountered the 'dark' Indian, the product became racially mixed *mestizos*. After the Mexican Revolution,

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<sup>37</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>38</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, ed. Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80.

so many rural Mexicans identified as *mestizo* that Mexican society adjusted to incorporate this third racial category. While Mexicans had always characterized indigenous Indians as inferior to lighter-skinned Mexicans of Spanish descent, *mestizos* came to occupy a liminal space between the groups. As a result, rural *mestizo* peasants became the ideal group to modernize in the eyes of the federal government.<sup>40</sup> In the 1920s, anthropologist Manuel Gamio gave academic validity to the modernization of *mestizos* with his doctrine of *indigenismo*. *Indigenismo* celebrated indigenous culture as an artifact in the abstract, but practically sought to racially unite Mexico by eradicating all traces of Indian culture. Gamio modeled his theory off of the American racial ‘melting pot,’ and hoped that Mexico’s emulation of the United States would lead to a successful and legitimate post-revolutionary government. Although Gamio originally presented *indigenismo* as a scholarly theory for an integrated nation, it closely reflected the political agenda of the Mexican government for modernization. Before presidents Álvaro Obregón and Manuel Ávila Camacho saw migration as a means for national development, Gamio supported “backward semi-Indians” working in the United States because it exposed them to modern civilization. Gamio believed that once *mestizos* gained practical skills in agriculture and industry, they would join their Spanish-Mexican brothers in benefitting Mexico nationally. *Indigenismo* created an important precedent for the Mexican government to draw upon when contemplating its participation in a labor program.<sup>41</sup> When the bracero program entered negotiations twenty years later, the federal government could rely on this history of racially based rationale to condone sending its

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<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 44.

<sup>41</sup> Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 119-122.



citizens to the United States, believing it would achieve the greater goal of improving the Mexican state.

The divisions between the urban elite and rural peasants from Mexico's revolutionary past, the Mexican government's belief that regulated migration culminated in national development, and assumptions about rural peasant racial identities all combined in 1942—leading Mexico to the bracero program. American Ambassador George Messersmith officially approached Mexican Foreign Minister Ezequiel Padilla to propose a bracero program on June 15, 1942, just after Mexico formally entered World War II. Having long contemplated the implications of guest labor, the Mexican government realized it needed to handle bracero negotiations delicately to reach national progress. As a result, President Manuel Ávila Camacho took a month to consider the measure. While the president supported guest labor, other government officials raised legitimate objections; a codified labor exchange could encourage Mexican discrimination, or repeat the chaotic repatriation that occurred in the 1930s. As a compromise, the Mexican government consented to the bracero program but required legal guarantees for braceros. After negotiations, bracero contracts obligated that the United States, either federally or through private employers, provide transportation to and from Mexico, housing, wages comparable to domestic workers, and allow additional oversight by the Mexican government.<sup>42</sup> With both countries in agreement, on August 4,

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy*, (Austin, London: University of Texas Press, 1971), 40-45.

1942 in Mexico City, representatives from the United States and Mexico ratified the first international executive agreement for the bracero program.<sup>43</sup>

As peasants used the bracero program throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the program's image in Mexican popular culture did not reflect the government's depiction of it as a transformative and modernizing process. Rather, Mexican literature continued to represent braceros as unresolved national problems, reinforcing a stereotype of the lower class that had permeated Mexico's elite since the Revolution. Scholar María Herrera-Sobek defines Mexican literature written about braceros as 'elitlore,' or stories authored by members of the removed upper class. These writers relied on their imagination over authentic bracero experiences to inform their descriptions of the bracero program and braceros. Elitlore generally contradicted the political portrayals of braceros as modernizing agents, and instead emphasized their discrimination, poor wages, and overall misery in the United States. For example, in his 1958 novel *La Región Más Transparente*, Carlos Fuentes depicts braceros as representative of the Mexican lower class, who knew only poverty, illness, and death while in Mexico. In his book, the bracero program did not alleviate his protagonist of these experiences. Rather, through main character's continued exploitation in the United States, Fuentes implies that the very presence of *campesinos* in contract labor showed the lasting failures of the Mexican Revolution, and the government's inability to protect its citizens from economic injustice.<sup>44</sup> By connecting bracero mistreatment in the United States with their inferior

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<sup>43</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*, (Charlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1964), 47.

<sup>44</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience: Elitlore Versus Folklore*, (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979), ix-xi, 30.

status in Mexico, elite authors did not depict the bracero program as a means for national development. Instead, it presented rural peasants as a problem that continued to plague Mexico, despite their relocation to the United States.

While Mexican elite authors refuted the federal rhetoric of the bracero program as a modernizing process, through their writing, they also implicitly supported the government's agenda for bracero repatriation. María Herrera-Sobek argues that bracero fiction writers encouraged return migration by emphasizing prejudice against Mexican nationals from Mexican American characters. For instance, in Héctor Raúl Almanza's 1950 novel *Huelga Blanca*, two braceros encounter a Mexican American while lost in a citrus grove in Texas. The two protagonists assume that because of their common ethnic background, the Mexican American will help them find their way. Instead, the stranger verbally abuses them, and threatens to shoot the braceros if they do not immediately leave the citrus grove. According to Herrera-Sobek, the common occurrence of Mexican American mistreatment in elite fiction created expectations for bracero repatriation in Mexican society, and established a traitorous image of braceros who stayed in the United States.<sup>45</sup> In this way, while Mexican fiction writers did not entirely reinforce the government's political agenda, they used their novels to represent bracero workers as both continuously ostracized by Mexican society, but also forbidden from abandoning it.

Despite characterizations of the bracero program in Mexican consciousness fostered by elite fiction, the federal government continued to use the bracero program

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<sup>45</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 21-22, 36.

as structural tool for peasant modernization. A significant but often overlooked provision in bracero contracts guaranteed the financial security of braceros once they repatriated through a bracero savings plan. But in practice, this savings plan became a means of exploitation, showing that the government's dedication to modernity continued to take precedence over the welfare of its own citizens. In order to participate in the bracero program, the Mexican government required that braceros pledge ten percent of their earned wages to the government, and receive federal reimbursement upon their return home. Although the American government fought the inclusion of this clause in preliminary negotiations, Mexican delegates refused to back down from their savings plan. In addition to guaranteeing repatriation, the Mexican government hoped the plan would create and spur markets for consumer goods. Specifically, the government wanted braceros to purchase American agricultural equipment and tools with their awarded wages. On an international level, Mexico would not just export raw goods and materials to the United States, but it would also become a market for American machines.<sup>46</sup> But nationally, a ten percent savings plan allowed the Mexican government to protect peasant braceros from their own 'backwardness'; with an 'allowance' of wages paid upon repatriation, braceros would learn the importance of savings, and responsibly spend the money on agricultural tools to put their new skills to work in Mexico.<sup>47</sup> Theoretically, all parties benefitted from a bracero savings plan—Mexico would begin modernization with

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<sup>46</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Pitti, "Bracero Justice: The Legacies of Mexican Contract Labor," (paper presented at the Seventh Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference, Yale University, October 27-29, 2005), 5.

its economy, braceros would improve their national standing, and the United States and its manufacturers could once again capitalize from Mexican labor.

But only about two percent of braceros ever saw their held wages again, meaning an estimated ten million to one hundred million dollars went unaccounted for. Many illiterate braceros did not even realize a savings clause existed when signing their labor contracts. When braceros did inquire about collecting wages, Mexican officials often told them they needed to travel to Mexico City to receive the money, taking advantage of the fact that many braceros could not afford the trip. Although archival research indicates that many Mexicans submitted complaints to the government about lost wages, scholars still remain unclear about where or how exactly the money disappeared.<sup>48</sup> The Mexican government acknowledged no wrongdoing and paid no reparations until a movement in 2008 to reclaim lost wages threatened to reveal “authentic proof” that the money “disappeared on instructions” of a former president.<sup>49</sup> The ten percent savings plan could have immediately improved the livelihood of braceros, had it functioned properly. But with the federal government’s longstanding desire for modernization, it becomes clear that even thirty years after the start of the Mexican Revolution, national benefit still triumphed above all other interests.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Pitti, “Bracero Justice,” 6.

<sup>49</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Although the movement to regain wages gained significant momentum, a variety of issues made it difficult to make the Mexican government reimburse former braceros. Legal issues surrounding jurisdiction in the United States, loopholes employed by the Mexican government, time limits to submit claims, and providing adequate proof of lost wages impeded the success of this movement. For more, see Pitti, “Bracero Justice.”

On the surface, it made no sense for the Mexican government to enact the bracero program; condoning thousands of Mexicans to perform backbreaking, menial labor in a foreign country only impeded Mexican independence, and hardly commanded respect for its national image. But when viewed in the context of the failed Mexican Revolution, the bracero program held potential to resolve the unintended consequences that stemmed from national upheaval. By sending poor, backward, racially inferior Mexicans to the United States, the Mexican government could simultaneously achieve a variety of goals—such as controlling migration after the Revolution, transforming state embarrassments into productive citizens, and achieve the everlasting goal of national modernization. Therefore, in Mexico, the bracero program did not function as an exchange with the laborer in mind, nor did its creators intend it to. With no land reform or significant change in rural Mexico since the Revolution, the bracero program would only solve national issues by way of rural labors, but continue to leave the rural laborers themselves behind.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “AGRIBUSINESSLAND”:

#### THE RISE OF CALIFORNIA FINANCE FARMING

“Agriculture is a quiet word,” wrote journalist Carey McWilliams in 1939, “but, in California, it has taken on new meaning and novel implication.”<sup>1</sup> While Mexico grappled with the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath, across the border in California, a new form of agriculture thrived. Beginning in the nineteenth century, wealthy Americans hoped that with California’s mild climate and extremely fertile soil, they could turn farming into an enterprise reminiscent of the lucrative plantations in the antebellum South. Growers originally settled in California because they could buy plots of workable land that stretched for hundreds of acres. Combined with the artificial manipulation of water, massive capital investment, and the development of railroads to carry products nationwide, large-scale growers effectively industrialized traditional farming—creating agribusiness.

In order to sustain this new agricultural industry in California, agribarons needed to secure a labor source to pick their commercial crops. Growers quickly identified two critical elements in a desirable laborer: perceived skill at manual labor, and submissiveness in the fields. Using ‘scientific’ theories on race and class, growers found it easy to ascribe their preferred characteristics to Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and poor American workers—racializing agricultural labor in California. When federal

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<sup>1</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (University of California Press, 1939), 4.

immigration laws and economic trends made some sources of labor unavailable, agribusinesses increased their reliance on Mexican migrant workers, and settled on their ideal stoop laborer. While American workers sought to settle and build lives for themselves in California, and Asian migrants could not easily return to their homelands, California's proximity to the Mexican border allowed Mexican migrants to repatriate and later return to California for the next labor season. Because of the rotating nature of Mexican labor, growers not only developed a significant dependence on Mexican workers, but fought to make them an integral part of California stoop labor.

When the United States entered World War II, California agribusinesses capitalized on the wartime environment to secure consistent, codified access to Mexican labor. Growers claimed that without workers imported from Mexico, labor shortages would cause crops to rot in the fields, and create food shortages for both fighting soldiers and the American public. As a result of this pressure, the United States government negotiated with Mexican officials to create a temporary exchange of foreign labor, or the bracero program. Once the bracero program went into effect and steady streams of Mexican workers travelled to California, growers refined their ideas of racialized labor. Agribusinesses established criteria for the ideal bracero, which braceros performed in exchange for employment—creating a self-fulfilling Mexican stereotype. Growers also chose what provisions of the bracero program to uphold. Without a history of labor regulation in agribusiness, growers selected, paid, and housed braceros according to their own standards. By doing this, agribusinesses manipulated braceros into their desired labor force while simultaneously exploiting their contribution to agribusiness. Therefore, despite the



bracero program's original intentions, it ultimately served the purposes of agribarons above all else.

When American farmers came to California in the nineteenth century, three primary factors allowed them to create agribusiness—land ownership, water control, and capital investment. Land ownership began with the Spanish; after settling in California, colonizers carved the land into massive ranches and distributed the land grants to wealthy individuals and families. For example, as a reward for his victories in the Spanish military, one sergeant received a ranch whose boundaries encompassed present day Berkeley, Oakland, and Alameda. When Mexico inherited California in 1821, the government left land rights intact. By the time the United States won California as a spoil of the Mexican-American War, discrepancies in land ownership had only grown—for instance, roughly eight hundred individuals owned over eight million acres of California land in 1848.<sup>2</sup> Two years before California's induction as a state in 1850, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo stated that the United States government would honor these private Mexican land holdings in California, even after it became American soil.<sup>3</sup> Sensing a profitable opportunity, Mexican capitalists flooded their country's courts with applications to purchase large plots of California's unsettled land, hoping to sell it to wealthy Americans before United States government sold land publicly.<sup>4</sup> Many of the Americans who bought these extensive land grants became California's first agribarons,

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<sup>2</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*, (Charlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1964), 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Walker, *The Conquest of Bread: 150 Years of Agribusiness in California*, (New York, London: The New Press, 2004), 60.

<sup>4</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 12-15.

and perpetuated the pattern of large, individual land ownership in California. Because California entered private hands before American statehood, acclaimed journalist Carey McWilliams wrote about the state as a “colonial empire.” He likewise characterized California’s agriculture as “topheavy,” “unbalanced,” and “socially irresponsible” due to land monopolization.<sup>5</sup> With massive plots of rich California land secured, growers continued their mission for industrialized agriculture.<sup>6</sup>

In order to effectively cultivate agribusiness in California, growers invested their private capital and political influence in the manipulation of water—the life force of farming. Historian Donald Worster depicts the entire West as a “hydraulic society,” meaning it depended on water for survival. Consequently, who ever controlled water also controlled power. Worster theorizes that in a modern capitalist state, two equivalent center of power created access to water—a private sector of agriculturalists and a public sector of representatives. California had both.<sup>7</sup> Agribarons’ first attempt at water manipulation came from a privately funded project that diverted the Colorado River to Southern California in 1896, creating the fertile Imperial Valley.<sup>8</sup> But as growers realized

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<sup>5</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 21-22.

<sup>6</sup> Carey McWilliams became a critical figure in California agriculture in the 1930s and 1940s as a social critic and an activist. Through his highly influential writing, he sought to bring about social justice by revealing the abuse of minority laborers in agriculture, and the exploitative nature of agribusiness itself. McWilliams also wrote as a radical regionalist, choosing to expose myths about California and agriculture and present the reality of injustice in its place. California politicians considered McWilliams as such an expert in his field that he served as the chief of the state’s Division of Immigration and Housing. His writing significantly impacts this chapter, both as a primary and a secondary source. For more information on the importance of McWilliams in California agriculture, see Michael Steiner, “The Politics of Place: Carey McWilliams and Radical Regionalism,” *The Political Culture of the New West*, ed. Jeff Roche (University Press of Kansas, 2008), 135-165.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, (Oxford University Press, 1992), 7, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception*, (New York: A.A. Wynn, 1949), 301-302.

they could not financially sustain such massive irrigation projects, these private interests relied on public officials to deliver access to water. In 1902, Congressman Frances Newlands from Nevada introduced the National Reclamation Act, which Worster calls the most important legislation in the history of the American West. Through the Reclamation Act, the sales of public land went into a revolving fund that financed projects to irrigate states like California. This federal legislation reflected Western interest in water, largely fueled by growers, and had a well-oiled Western lobby that ensured the Reclamation Act's passage.<sup>9</sup> After growers knew they could rely on public funding to guarantee water access when private capital failed, agribarons could finally create large-scale financial farming in California.

Now that growers controlled a vast acreage and had access to limitless water, farming in California became a highly specialized and mass-producing industry. With water manipulated from the Colorado River, California agriculture exploded—by 1927, Imperial Valley contained almost 5,000 ranches within 400,000 acres of land, with some individual farms sitting on 3,000 acres.<sup>10</sup> The emergence of such massive farms allowed agribarons to focus on harvesting only one crop, and prompted growers to no longer see themselves as farmers in the traditional sense, but as avocado growers, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Because agribarons had the potential to profit from specialized farming, financial investors began incentivizing the cultivation of specific crops. Bank of America for instance, the largest bank in the world, lent millions of dollars in loans and brought down

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<sup>9</sup> Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 130-131, 160-161, 165, 199-212.

<sup>10</sup> Worster, *Rivers of Empire*, 200-201.

<sup>11</sup> McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception*, 108, 112.

mortgage rates to national lows for growers willing to specialize.<sup>12</sup> Enabled by capital, crop specialization became extremely lucrative, making vegetables that once sold for three million dollars in 1900 bring in sixty million dollars in 1930.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, the development of railroad lines contributed to the growth of agribusiness by providing a nationwide market for California produce. Although historian Richard Walker insists that California agribarons still competed with farmers in other regional markets, expanded railroad networks and refrigerated cars made California crops available across the country.<sup>14</sup> As a result of these innovations, California farming had changed to such an extent that Carey McWilliams described it as “...no longer ‘agriculture’ in the formerly understood sense of the term, but a mechanized industry, owned and operated by corporations and by farmers...”<sup>15</sup> As large-scale, specialized crop production revolutionized the nature of American farming, agribusiness steadily began to take over California outside the fields as well.

While agribusiness gained strength as a profitable industry, the creation of grower associations allowed agribarons to both defend their interests as businessmen and develop their power over labor as capitalists. In 1934, growers formed the Associated Farmers of California, perhaps the state’s most powerful agribusiness collective and, according to Richard Walker, a “California vigilante movement.”<sup>16</sup> While this network of growers

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Jelinek, *Harvest Empire: A History of California Agriculture*, (Heinle & Heinle Publishing, 1982), 61-65.

<sup>13</sup> McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception*, 152-153.

<sup>14</sup> Walker, *The Conquest of Bread*, 207-208.

<sup>15</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> Walker, *The Conquest of Bread*, 286.

formed under the guise of providing assistance in emergency situations, such as earthquakes, the Associated Farmers quickly revealed its true purpose—to prevent and break labor strikes that hindered their production. With a membership of forty thousand in 1939, the Associated Farmers became a dangerously powerful force. To exemplify their ability to crush opposition from stoop laborers, Carey McWilliams reported that in 1935, on the eve of an apricot harvest, three fiery crosses blazed on a hill overlooking a farm labor camp in San Jose. While agribarons in the Associated Farmers never explicitly admitted responsibility for the act, in a local radio broadcast four days later, a representative of the association told its members “to go ahead and [not] worry about agitators this season.” For this, and other instances like it, McWilliams likened the presence of the Associated Farmers to “farm fascism” in California.<sup>17</sup> With power in numbers, growers began to exert their dominance over not just agriculture, but the very laborers they employed.

Growers attempted to control stoop laborers by carefully selecting them according to their race, a practice justified by ‘scientific’ evidence. Although historian Neil Foley analyzes the racial assumptions made of farm laborers in early twentieth century Texas, he believes the systems of race that appeared in Texas applied to California agriculture as well. Many growers in Texas and California subscribed to the theory of eugenics, which falsely attributed traits such as the ability to perform manual labor, intelligence, and personal temperament to the biological construction of race. Theories such as eugenics explained why growers believed race empirically determined the value of different

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<sup>17</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 231, 235-238.

laborers in the fields, and consequently used race to inform their hiring choices.<sup>18</sup>

Deborah Cohen, a scholar on the bracero program, also builds upon the theory that growers intertwined race and labor. She argues that growers labelled manual labor as unfit for whites—meaning that while agribarons believed stoop labor suited Mexicans or Asians, white workers in farm labor must have had inherent genetic flaws that caused them to fail as farmers.<sup>19</sup> With these theories of race in mind, growers made very specific choices about what racial groups they let work their ranches, and solidified their preference for foreign labor.

In addition to using other racial groups for stoop labor, agribarons in California particularly favored using Mexicans because they defined the ‘Mexican race’ as having an innate ability to pick crops, and desirable personal characteristics that prevented them from striking. Charles Collins Teague, a grower and president of Sunkist Cooperative, encompassed the beliefs of California growers in his memoir, *Fifty Years a Rancher*. Like his contemporaries, he propagated the idea that Mexicans excelled at manual labor because of their race, writing:

Mexicans have always been one of the chief sources of California’s labor supply. They are naturally adapted to agricultural work, particularly in the handling of fruits and vegetables, for the Mexican climate in many respects is similar to that of California. Many of them have a natural skill in the handling of tools and are resourceful in matters requiring manual ability.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, (University of California Press: Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1997), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 48, 58.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Teague, *Fifty Years a Rancher: The Recollections of Half a Century Devoted to the Citrus and Walnut Industries of California and to Furthering the Cooperative Movement in Agriculture*, (Charles Collins Teague, 1944), 141.

In addition to depicting Mexicans as biologically predestined for manual labor, agribarons also assigned passive qualities to their race. In his manual for success in large-scale farming, grower R.L. Adams advised his readers, “Foreign nationalities have their own particular racial traits...the common Mexican peon or laborer is usually a peaceful, somewhat childish, rather lazy, unambitious, fairly faithful person.”<sup>21</sup> Other stereotypes of Mexicans as docile and migratory also emerged across the state, contributing to the assumption that they would most likely not strike. Because of perceived skill in stoop labor and inability to create trouble, for their race alone, growers held Mexican workers in high regard.<sup>22</sup>

Whiteness in agricultural labor also held an inherent meaning to agribarons. But unlike Mexicans and other ethnic laborers, an American in the fields carried negative connotations of an unfit worker and an inadequate citizen. In Charles Collins Teague’s experience as a grower, Americans did not work as well as Mexicans. He writes, “When you’re out in the fields, they’re usually irrigated, and very humid. The combination of the heat and the humidity is just about more than a human being can take...I’m not going to ask an American...to do it. I don’t know of anybody except the [Mexicans] who can take it.”<sup>23</sup> Agribarons believed so strongly in the inferiority of white labor that the Farm Placement Service discouraged domestic laborers from agriculture entirely.

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<sup>21</sup> R.L. Adams, *Farm Management: A Text-Book for Student, Investigator, and Investor*, (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1921), 542, 522.

<sup>22</sup> Although growers perceived Mexicans as docile by nature, their assumptions did not always prove correct. For example, in 1928 Mexican workers struck cantaloupe growers in Imperial Valley. While the strike failed, it proved popular Mexican stereotypes wrong and predicted future labor militancy. For more, see Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 124.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 56.

Paradoxically, this only reinforced widespread stereotypes of white workers as unreliable.<sup>24</sup> In addition to their assumed inability to perform stoop labor, historian Neil Foley argues that the very presence of whites in farm labor negated their racial status in the eyes of growers. According to Foley, growers attributed the existence of white farm workers to racial mixing, thereby excluding white stoop laborers from claiming ‘authentic’ whiteness.<sup>25</sup> Grower R.L. Adams likewise reflects these negative images of white farm workers, characterizing them as “hobo or tramp laborers” who “descended to their homeless condition by reason of bad habits, improper living, or misfortune.” He labels them “unemployable—mentally defective or physically weak,” further illustrating their place in agricultural labor.<sup>26</sup> For agribarons, these racial perceptions ultimately determined their choice in in stoop laborers, and would only grow in significance in times of limited labor.

As the federal government increased immigration restrictions on migrants from Asia, California agribarons likewise increased their dependence on Mexican workers. Before Mexicans gained a significant presence in stoop labor, growers primarily relied on Chinese and Japanese workers to pick crops. But after Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and negotiated a Gentleman’s Agreement that curbed Japanese immigration in 1908, growers needed an alternative source of racialized labor.<sup>27</sup> With Japanese and Chinese labor severely limited, growers hired private contractors to lure

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<sup>24</sup> Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 206-207.

<sup>25</sup> Foley, *The White Scourge*, 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Adams, *Farm Management*, 520.

<sup>27</sup> Erasmo Gamboa, "On the Nation's Periphery: Mexican Braceros and the Pacific Northwest Railroad Industry 1943-1946," 270.



Mexicans to California with semi-legal labor contracts. With this *enganche* system (from *el enganche*, “the hook,” implying that recruiters hooked Mexican workers on empty promises), by 1915, Mexicans had replaced Asian workers as growers’ primary source of stoop labor.<sup>28</sup> Congress further restrained Asian labor with the Immigration Act of 1917. While the law restricted migration from India and the Philippines, members of Congress more importantly passed the law with significant loopholes for Mexican immigration; it allowed Mexicans to continue working in agribusiness in a publicly sanctioned provisional program, referred to as the ‘first bracero program.’<sup>29</sup> With constraints on traditional sources of racialized labor, growers not only hired more Mexican workers as a result, but also began to distinguish them as an ideal source of foreign labor.

Agribarons coveted Mexican labor above all other workers primarily because of California’s proximity to the Mexican border, making Mexicans a rotating source of labor. Growers first valued Mexico’s accessibility because migrants had the opportunity to leave California after a harvest, and return to their families across the border. In the eyes of agribarons, this easy repatriation made Mexican workers into “homing pigeons,” who posed no social threat to contaminating white society in California.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, Mexico’s proximity posed a serious threat to farm laborers who decided to strike. With a country as close as Mexico, growers could utilize readily available migrant Mexicans to replace insubordinate workers—ensuring that laborers made no progress in demanding

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<sup>28</sup> Jelinek, *Harvest Empire*, 69-70.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," *Journal of the West*, 47, no. 3 (2008): 66.

<sup>30</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 148.

better wages, shorter hours, or improved working and living conditions.<sup>31</sup> Although Mexican workers shared many desirable qualities with other racial labor forces, such as the inability to speak English, the willingness to work under harsh conditions for low wages, and a lack of power to defend themselves, growers ultimately preferred them as disposable labor. By constantly drawing from an abundant labor pool, employers not only ensured dominance over their workers, but sustained the power of agribusiness as an industry.<sup>32</sup>

When the United States entered World War II at the end of 1941, agribarons took advantage of an opportune time to combine racialized labor, federally codified access, and rotating migrants from an adjacent nation. As growers in California prepared to ramp up production due to the new war, they initially opened their doors to once shunned white laborers from Arkansas and Oklahoma. Ironically, these former Dust Bowl migrants now bypassed farm labor for higher-paying jobs in the expanded defense industry. In an attempt to prevent labor shortages in the fields, in September 1941 anxious growers petitioned the International Nationalization Service for thirty thousand Mexican laborers. The INS denied their claim, insisting growers use their resources to find available American workers instead. But two months later, the attack on Pearl Harbor changed everything. By early 1942, half of the agencies who insisted domestic workers could fill labor shortages began investigating the Mexican government's response to importing

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<sup>31</sup> McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> McWilliams argues that in reality, Mexican migrants in California frequently never returned to Mexico, but rather 'hibernated' in enclaves of urban communities deemed "Little Mexicos." He insists that state records also support the existence of pattern, and refute growers' theory of Mexican 'homing pigeons.' For more, see McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 148-150.

labor.<sup>33</sup> As a result, negotiations for the bracero program began, and with it, growers came that much closer to the codified stream of Mexican labor they so badly desired.

Although the United States government officially negotiated and approved the bracero program, growers demanding Mexican labor served as the driving force behind the legislation. The image of unpicked crops rotting in the fields and potential damage the war effort sufficed for the federal government to bend to the will of California agribusiness, and use a variety of techniques to ensure the bilateral approval of the bracero program. While Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho approved the program, his other officials voiced concerns.<sup>34</sup> To win the confidence of the Mexican government, American negotiators guaranteed terms that would protect the bracero worker. On the other side of the border, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made the bracero program appear essential to victory in World War II, assuring Americans that it would fight the “war of [food] production, upon which the inevitable success of [the American] military program depends.”<sup>35</sup> When threatened by domestic politics, national agencies propped up the program to ensure it did not die. The War Manpower Commission, the Immigration Service, and the Departments of State, Labor and Agriculture all clandestinely formed a Special Committee on the Importation of Mexican Labor to iron out the program’s specifics. Only several months after the design and ratification of the bracero program did Congress even formally submit its approval. When

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy*, (Austin, London: University of Texas Press, 1971), 22-23.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon*, (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 15.

Congress passed Public Law 45 on April 29, 1943, the bracero program officially came into existence.<sup>36</sup> Although the federal government fashioned the bracero program to benefit both the United States and Mexico, at its heart, it benefitted California agribusiness the most. The bracero program showed the extent of growers' accumulated power from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. Now, when they flexed their power from California, even the federal government responded.

Despite safeguards built into the bracero program to protect against discrimination and abuse, agribarons used degrading rituals in bracero recruitment to screen workers according to their racial standards for a good laborer. Beginning in migratory stations in Mexico, historian Deborah Cohen argues that recruitment officials sent braceros implicit messages to work obediently, show docility, refrain from labor strikes, and embody the ideal laborer for growers so that they may return to the United States. Braceros took this sentiment with them north, as they “performed backwardness,” or played into racial stereotypes in order to impress agribusiness representatives.<sup>37</sup> Braceros correctly assumed that growers would hold them to racialized standards when choosing laborers. Once at American recruitment centers, inspectors ordered braceros to strip naked while they doused the workers with pesticides, killing the lice that inspectors assumed braceros brought with them from Mexico. Braceros also had their clothes thoroughly scrubbed, in an attempt to wash away their ‘filth’ as peasant laborers. After physical purification, agribusiness representatives examined braceros for marks of a good laborer; physically,

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<sup>36</sup> Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1992), 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 92-93, 101.

this included calluses or old scars, in addition to desirable personal traits. Sociologist Henry Anderson observed growers' logic when picking braceros firsthand, and in an interview, described the process:

The fellow representing some growers association up in Northern California was happy enough to have me stand by his side while he demonstrated the way he did his so called selecting. Well, there were these hundreds of men lined up outside, and they would shuffle past this guy who commented on why he was selecting one guy and rejecting another guy, and it all had to do with whether they measured up to his criteria for what he considered to be a good bracero. These had to be men who were apparently timid, docile, unlearned, impoverished, anybody who was well dressed or well spoken would be rejected.<sup>38</sup>

Only after representatives could identify the qualities growers valued in a bracero, would the worker then get offered a contract.<sup>39</sup> By the time the Mexican and American governments enacted the bracero program, racial standards in farm labor had become so widespread that both the employer and the worker knew what ensured a bracero's employment in California. Therefore, even in recruitment, the bracero program reinforced racialized standards that growers had cultivated for decades.

For twenty-two years of bracero labor, growers only refined their image of the ideal Mexican worker. Not only could they pinpoint what qualities made a good bracero, but agribarons often praised the mold they had set for contract labor. Throughout the program, growers screened braceros for youth, servility, humility and docility, while refusing to tolerate displays of wit, arrogance, or sociability.<sup>40</sup> In addition to defining the

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<sup>38</sup> Gilbert Gonzales, Vivian Price, and Adrian Salinas, Directors, *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*, 2010, 19:04-20:07.

<sup>39</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 98-99.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 99-100, 107.

temperament of the model bracero, growers continued to assert that braceros possessed more physical stamina for stoop labor than any other type of worker, especially Americans. Agribarons came to celebrate the racial stereotypes they created, embracing the fact that they could call their ‘chosen braceros’ dependable, hard working, clean, and of “admirable character.”<sup>41</sup> In his 1957 article, Thomas Gorman wrote: “In addition to an innate love of natural things, the braceros have great patience and endurance, and are quiet and courteous.” In the article’s accompanying photo essay, several braceros grin with sombreros adorned on their heads, while in another photo two braceros grin as they pick strawberries and string beans, and a third bracero laughs with a bushel of celery in his arms. The caption reads, “His warm friendliness marks this man as one who could get along anywhere.”<sup>42</sup> This article exemplifies the approval given to braceros who fit growers’ racial ideal of a Mexican laborer. As a result of this encouragement, agribarons not only strengthened Mexican stereotypes by selecting one ‘kind’ of bracero, but they also propagated this standard as a positive for California agribusiness.

This continued racial narrative contributed to agribarons using their control over the labor force to disobey provisions that protected braceros: including hiring braceros over domestic workers, using braceros to depress wages, and providing inferior living conditions. From the onset of the program, growers used braceros to replace Americans, who agribarons still perceived as racially inferior and inadequate at stoop labor. The creators of the bracero program never intended this—rather, they believed the bracero

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<sup>41</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 24-27.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Gorman, "They Help Feed America, February 1957" Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 21 folder 7, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

program would supplement growers with extra hands to prevent labor and food shortages.

The legislation behind the program specifically outlined this: “Employers must, as a condition to obtaining Mexican workers, hire all qualified domestic workers who are willing to work...[and] must be given preference over Mexican contract workers in the best available jobs, whether vacant or filled by Mexican contract workers, for which they are qualified.”<sup>43</sup> Growers clearly knew these standards existed; in a presentation to the House Agricultural Subcommittee, a representative of Imperial Valley farmers reported:

This Association would like to state that...the United States Employment Service must **first** [original emphasis] certify that there is no domestic labor available before supplemental Mexican field labor can be imported to any area...We wanted the official record to show that [the bracero program] is a supplemental labor program, operating under the law and jurisdiction of the United States Department of Labor.<sup>44</sup>

However, despite their awareness of the legal provisions of the bracero program, agribarons continued to fill their fields as they wished. In a letter to California Governor Edmund ‘Pat’ Brown, George Rice, former Associate Director of the Agricultural Wage Division, wrote:

Time after time, in my travels throughout the agricultural regions of California, owners and managers of huge farm properties, as well as spokesmen for grower associations, “confided” in me...in matters relating to the procurement of Mexican National “Braceros” as replacements for the domestic agricultural workers, whom they (the growers) almost universally considered undependable, untrustworthy, and “radical”...Conversely, the hundreds and hundreds of domestic farm workers...universally complained of the strong and obvious desire of the growers and their association labor procurement officials for the use of

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<sup>43</sup> Don Larin, “Letter to All Employers of Contract Foreign Workers, August 15, 1961,” Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 21 folder 1, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

<sup>44</sup> Danny Danenberg, “Presentation Before the House Agricultural Subcommittee, March 1, 1958,” Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 21 folder 7, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

imported workers rather than domestic workers, American citizens who chose to make their living from the land.<sup>45</sup>

The Department of Labor also sent multiple notices to growers demanding compliance with the bracero program's hiring terms, or else the agency would their remove braceros and blacklist their ranches.<sup>46</sup> However, given that these notices span across the 1950s, a decade after the establishment of the bracero program, it becomes apparent that the federal government could not successfully curb growers' abuses of the power. Without significant consequences, growers continued to ignore the employment provision of the bracero program, and instead used it to maintain legal control over their racially suited alternative to domestic labor.

California growers also used their influence in agriculture to manipulate the wage system built into the bracero program. This not only depressed wages for American laborers competing with braceros, but ensured the continued presence of braceros in the workforce. When negotiating the bracero program, the Mexican government demanded that its nationals receive wages equal to American workers. Both governments agreed to a prevailing wage system, which required that employers pay braceros according to what American workers earned doing the same work in that area. While the bracero program dictated that the Secretary of Labor controlled the standards for prevailing wage, in practice, growers usually determined the wage scale themselves. Agribarons in California reported the wages they preferred to pay braceros to the Department of Labor, not the

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<sup>45</sup> George L. Rice, "Letter to Governor Edmund G. Brown, February 4, 1959," Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 22 folder 10, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

<sup>46</sup> Edward F. Hayes, "Letter to Farm Placement Supervisors and Farm Placement Representatives, February 23, 1954" Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 22 folder 9, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.



wages Americans earned in the marketplace. The Department of Labor rarely challenged these reports, allowing growers to legally pay what they wished; as a result, contractually-bound braceros could not object to their wages, and American workers could not afford to stay in the fields.<sup>47</sup> Ernesto Galarza, a labor activist, sought to confirm the mythical existence of prevailing wage in California agriculture. In a letter to the State Department of Employment in California, Galarza inquired, "...what formula or procedure [are] the State authorities...now using to determine the 'prevailing' wage..."<sup>48</sup> The reply: "I do not think there is a prevailing wage that can be referred to for California agriculture," confirming Galarza's suspicion that prevailing wage carried no weight outside of the bracero contract.<sup>49</sup> With no specific definitions outlined by the bracero program, no regulations to catch false wage reporting, and no consequences for agribarons attempting to depress wages, growers used their free reign to drive American workers from the fields, and solidify their access to Mexican braceros.

With precedents set in the realm of hiring practices and wage standards, growers proceeded to also ignore provisions in the bracero program that outlined housing conditions guaranteed to braceros. As in wages, agribarons' abuse of power went unchecked and caused the bracero program to flourish, strengthening both growers' desire for braceros and their dependence on Mexican labor. Legally, bracero contracts held employers responsible for providing suitable housing while in the United States.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 135-141.

<sup>48</sup> Ernesto Galarza, "Letter to James C. Bryant, November 28, 1950," Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 22 folder 8, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

<sup>49</sup> Edward F. Hayes, "Letter to Ernesto Galarza, December 1, 1950," Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 22 folder 8, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

<sup>50</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 22-23.

But in practice, most growers viewed workers' living quarters as an extension of their farm, and saw federal regulation as an intrusion of their private domain. Consequently, growers either ignored the standard set for braceros' housing entirely, or fulfilled them according to their own guidelines.<sup>51</sup> Informed by the racial stereotypes that dominated agricultural labor, many employers believed any accommodation would suffice for braceros, and assumed that even the most meager living quarters would improve upon the conditions they left in Mexico. In addition, a cultural differences (such as housework conflicting with Mexican conceptions of *machismo*) caused growers presume that braceros did not appreciate quality living conditions. Therefore, growers felt their only guide "should be their pocketbooks and their consciences," not the regulations of the bracero program.<sup>52</sup> Despite providing substandard living conditions, braceros continued to travel to California by the thousands, further reenforcing that abuse of the bracero program did not have significant repercussions on agribusiness.<sup>53</sup> Growers' ability to hire, pay, and house braceros as they saw fit culminated in their embrace of Mexican workers. By overriding regulations in the bracero program, agribarons manipulated Mexican workers into cheaper substitutes for domestic labor, and used them to continue the expansion of agribusiness in California.

When World War II concluded in 1945, growers had become so dependent on the bracero program that they ensured it outlasted the war, and entered a second phase in 1948. After Germany and Japan's surrender, the Department of State notified Mexico that

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<sup>51</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Anderson, *The Bracero Program in California*, (Arno Press, 1976), 74-76.

<sup>53</sup> Truman Moore, *The Slaves We Rent*, (New York: Random House, 1962), 93.

the bracero program should end with the war, proposing its official termination within ninety days of November 15, 1946.<sup>54</sup> The Mexican government, frustrated with the American government's inability to enforce the terms of the bracero program, obliged this request, refusing to renew their end of the bilateral agreement. Growers panicked. They insisted agribusiness depended on access to bracero labor, and their outcries led to unilateral extensions of the program through executive orders.<sup>55</sup> Even without Congress' renewal of Public Law 45 or the Mexican government's involvement with the program, these executive orders kept the bracero program intact, although with even less organization since it operated without federal oversight.<sup>56</sup> Adding to the instability, the bracero program saw a shift in governing agencies, with the dismantlement of the War Manpower Commission in early 1948 deferring responsibility for braceros to the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Employment Security. This transformation of the bracero program from a bilateral to a unilateral exchange, coupled with a shift in the program's administration, created a dramatic change in the bracero program that growers used to further their control over bracero labor.

The second phase of the bracero program became the height of agribarons power in California, due to their direct employment of braceros. Instead of growers pressuring a middleman to satisfy their demands, in this unilateral phase, they could freely recruit their own braceros. While on paper the Immigration Service still supervised recruitment, it provided no effective oversight, and allowed agribarons to easily bypass many

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<sup>54</sup> Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Calavita, *Inside the State*, 2.

legislative formalities. Growers shortened bracero contracts to forty-five days, increasing the number of trips braceros needed to profit from their time in the United States. These changes, combined with the blind eye of the federal government, caused complaints of abuse to soar. Braceros reported deficient food, substandard housing, appalling work conditions, and often times growers employed too many workers for each to receive adequate work. Seeing no other alternative, many braceros broke their contracts and ‘skipped’ from farms, causing desertion rates to hover around fifty percent in some areas.<sup>57</sup> While growers generally exercised their will during this phase in the program, eventually they hit limits; due to the overwhelming amount of complaints from braceros, the federal government forced growers to extend contracts to at least eighteen months.<sup>58</sup> These exceptions aside, the new policy permitting agribarons to directly recruit braceros allowed growers to maximize their benefit in the bracero program, with the federal government enforcing minimum restrictions.

In addition to the federal government permitting growers to recruit braceros, in this unilateral phase, the government even supported compulsion for Mexican labor. In response to growers’ claim that recruiting from Mexico had become too time consuming and expensive, the Immigration Service condoned on-the-spot legalization for undocumented Mexican workers. Historian Barbara Schmitter Heisler depicts the state of recruitment at this stage in the bracero program, writing that the Labor, Justice and State Departments awarded labor contracts to Mexican migrants crossing the border against the wishes of the Mexican government. This encouraged thousands of Mexicans to crowd the

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<sup>57</sup> Calavita, *Inside the State*, 42-43.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.

border daily near Mexicali, California, in hopes of joining braceros in the fields. The federal government even allowed the Border Patrol to encourage undocumented Mexicans to bypass federal regulations; by briefly stepping over the border, displaying their ‘expulsion’ to Mexico, and reentering the United States, undocumented Mexicans now qualified for INS sanctions.<sup>59</sup> By 1950, this INS policy grew to such magnitude that ‘legalized illegals’ outnumbered recruited braceros five to one, with both groups crippling domestic labor. Although not braceros themselves, the special provisions given to undocumented labor along with the unrestricted use of braceros displayed federal support of growers’ access to foreign labor.<sup>60</sup> However, due to the extreme conditions that accompanied this stage of the bracero program, the federal government could not sustain growers unchecked power indefinitely. As the United States prepared to enter the Korean War, the federal government again entered agreements with Mexico to codify the bracero program, reigning in—although not dismantling—growers’ power in agribusiness.

From the beginning of agribusiness’ presence in California, vast inequalities between worker and employer existed with no significant attempts to rectify them. With the support of large capital investments through water and land, in addition to power fostered by grower collectives, industrialized agriculture and its control over labor boomed in California. When racial conceptions of stoop labor entered California’s fields, growers developed a taste for cheap and temporary Mexican labor—and even took advantage of America’s place in World War II to solidify access to them. When viewing the bracero program in the context of agribusiness, it should come as no surprise that the

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<sup>59</sup> Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Calavita, *Inside the State*, 2.

bracero program did not function as an equal exchange of labor. Instead, the bracero program subjected Mexican workers to exploitation, increased American dependence on foreign labor, and reinforced the standards of racialized labor upon which California agribusiness thrived.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “STRANGERS IN OUR FIELDS”:

#### THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND LABOR

Labor unions and civil rights groups exist for protection. Caught in a liminal space between oppression and equal rights, these types of organizations give hope to the desperate, power to the vulnerable, and justice to the exploited. But during the bracero program, domestic unions and Mexican American civil rights groups believed the presence of Mexican contract labor impeded them from serving their purpose. From a union perspective, braceros replaced domestic labor in the fields and on the railroads of California. For civil rights groups, Mexican Americans felt that braceros perpetuated negative stereotypes of Mexicans. Already entrenched in their own battles for fair treatment, many unions and civil rights groups consequently vilified bracero labor in addition to the bracero program itself. Through the reactions of these organizations to braceros and their subsequent decisions to include braceros in their activism, I argue that unions and civil rights groups ultimately helped define contract labor in the United States by determining what they represented to Americans.

While many railroad unions, agricultural unions, and Mexican American groups designated braceros as a threat, each had distinct reasons for doing so. In addition to the agricultural program, a second bracero program during World War II gave contract labor to the railroad industry to combat wartime labor shortages. However, because railroad unions held more power in their industry than farm unions possessed in agribusiness,

braceros only posed a temporary risk to American jobs. With railroad unions as a driving force, the federal government terminated the railroad bracero program by the end of World War II. Meanwhile, the agricultural unions felt the effects of bracero labor into the 1950s. As unions engineered multiple strikes to protest depressed wages and loss of jobs, because growers misused braceros as scabs, not one strike successfully changed conditions for domestic workers. Mexican Americans likewise felt competition with braceros in the labor force, but also believed that the importation of Mexican nationals prevented assimilation for anyone with Mexican heritage. As a result, both unions and civil rights organizations faced internal struggles within their respective communities about how to respond to braceros, and how they affected their struggle for rights.

One prominent labor advocate during the bracero era, Ernesto Galarza, personified these intersections between race and labor. As a Mexican-born American and a prominent farm labor union leader, Galarza identified with both American workers and Mexican nationals. As a result, Galarza became one of the first union representatives to vocally push for the inclusion of braceros in domestic labor activism. Instead of allowing the bracero program to divide workers of different races, he believed their similar oppression in agribusiness made braceros allies of domestic workers. With this position, Galarza fought for fair treatment of braceros in addition to leading American farm workers in strikes. Through his political action, Galarza provided unions and Mexican American civil rights groups with an alternative and inclusive conceptualization of braceros—one that benefitted both Americans and Mexican nationals.



Similar to their counterparts in agribusiness, the American railroad industry had long relied on Mexican track laborers as a more desirable alternative to domestic labor. As railroads developed nationally from the 1830s through the 1920s, in California specifically, railroads rapidly expanded to foster the movement of commercial goods and crops.<sup>1</sup> With the growth of railroads came the subsequent need for labor. The railroad industry quickly realized that using foreign migrants to construct and maintain railroad tracks not only cut costs, but also provided a controllable source of labor. Like agribusiness, national railroad employers experimented with a variety of ethnic workers—Irish and Germans on the East coast, African Americans in the South, Italians in Florida, and Chinese and Japanese in the Southwest and on the Pacific Coast. In addition to extensions in California’s rail system for commercial reasons, railroad companies in the late nineteenth century attempted to cross the deserts and mountains of the Western United States. Although railroad industries had contracted Mexican laborers since the Civil War, the proximity of these new railroads to the Mexican border and lax immigration restrictions put Mexican rail labor in high demand once again. This prompted recruitment campaigns by many regional railroads, particularly the Southern Pacific, to bring Mexican labor back to the United States. As a result, the railroad industry increased dependence on Mexican labor to such an extent that when the United States entered World War II, railroad companies believed it would benefit from its own

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<sup>1</sup> Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 162-169.

bracero program—an effort that eventually brought over 100,000 Mexicans to over 30 railroads, and secured their access to foreign labor.<sup>2</sup>

When designing the railroad bracero program, its creators relied heavily on the precedents set by the agricultural program. This caused both programs to mirror each other in legislative structure, and produce similar effects in practice. On paper, the five-page document codifying the railroad program contained three sections, the first of which outlined the general principals of the program. This included provisions that protected braceros from discrimination, acknowledged their rights as Mexican citizens, and reinforced the wage structure for American workers. The second section delegated the War Manpower Commission to regulate the program, and serve as braceros' primary employer. The last and most detailed portion of the agreement outlined the minimum standards for braceros' wages and conditions. It specified that braceros sign contracts with the WMC, while the WMC signed individual contracts with railroad companies and the Mexican government to ensure that employers never directly recruited braceros. By borrowing the terms and language of the agricultural program, the legislation behind the railroad program failed to specifically outline the roles of both governments as supervisors of the program. This opened a window for railroad companies to abuse the terms of the bracero program, essentially duplicating the exploitive conditions braceros faced in rural California.<sup>3</sup> While the railroad bracero program never employed as many braceros as the agricultural program, after its implementation, it seemed to follow its predecessor in every other way.

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, (CMAS Books, 1999), ix, 13-18.

<sup>3</sup> Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero*, 72-74, 119.

While both bracero programs shared a legislative base and functioned similarly, the authority commanded by railroad unions became a crucial factor in the program's termination after World War II. When the Southern Pacific and other Western railroads petitioned the federal government for braceros in 1941, they claimed that the market alone could not meet wartime demands. Railway unions protested, demanding the industry raise wages and exhaust domestic labor first. With such widespread opposition, the Immigration Service acquiesced to the unions, informing all railroad companies hungry for braceros that they must first convince the War Manpower Commission of a real labor shortage. From the Southern Pacific's first request for braceros in 1941 to the program's passage in 1943, the railroad industry transported American workers to areas with labor shortages, hired women, unskilled workers, African Americans, and raised wages for domestic workers before claiming they still needed braceros. While unions never supported the bracero program, they accepted its passage after years of attempts to contract domestic workers—a step never taken in the agricultural program. When bracero negotiations took place with Mexico, the WMC not only kept unions informed about policy changes, but promised the Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees that the program would not last beyond World War II.<sup>4</sup> Unions would continue to influence the bracero program beyond just its initial stages, and eventually became integral to the bracero program as a whole.

The power held and exercised by railroad unions helped keep the railroad bracero faithful to its original intention—a temporary wartime program meant to supplement, not

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<sup>4</sup> Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero*, 61, 121, 132.

replace, American labor. In her analysis of the railroad bracero program, historian Barbara Driscoll concludes that one cannot overemphasize the significance unions had on the program's termination. While she admits union influence never equaled that of the federal government or railroad employers, she still characterizes the symbolic power of unions as an extremely effective reminder of domestic labor. Due to this presence, the federal government and railroad companies gave unions limited oversight over the program until its termination. For example, before increasing quotas for braceros in the workforce, the Immigration Service first contacted the Brotherhood of the Maintenance of Way Employees and the American Federation of Labor for their approval. Railroad companies likewise informed unions before transferring braceros to other positions. When World War II came to a close in 1945, unions advocated for immediate bracero repatriation. The railroad industry begged for the program's extension for at least another year, or until they felt domestic labor could fill the holes left by braceros. The federal government held a range of positions; while the INS believed in immediate repatriation, the State Department supported a repatriation rate similar to the rate at which braceros arrived. The War Manpower Commission initially supported the unions, and when they declared that all railroad braceros return to Mexico in thirty days, the Mexican government protested this sudden infusion in the workforce, believing it would lead to disaster.<sup>5</sup> Instead the WMC compromised, allowing braceros to finish their contracts, and leave the United States within a six months.<sup>6</sup> Although not the only factor contributing to

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<sup>5</sup> Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero*, 134-135, 152-154, 168.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*, (Charlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1964), 54-55.

the railroad program's end, unions' watchdog role ensured that it did not last beyond World War II—while growers would continue hiring braceros for two more decades.

After railroad unions channelled their power into sending braceros back to Mexico, in the realm of agriculture, the bracero program entered its third and final phase. When the United States declared war on Korea, preventing labor shortages became a higher priority than appeasing growers' contentment with unregulated bracero recruitment. In 1951, when the United States sent representatives to Mexico City to propose a new bilateral agreement, the Mexican government used their new leverage accordingly. Unhappy with growers directly recruiting braceros, they demanded politicians introduce a new bill in Congress to reestablish government sponsorship of the bracero program, or Mexico would refuse to participate. While the current state of the bracero program pleased growers, the American government and the bracero laborers saw it deteriorating into chaos. In order secure their access to Mexican labor, especially in the new climate of the Korean War, the United States had no choice but to reclaim the bracero program from growers and bend to Mexico's demands.<sup>7</sup> Thus, with federal authority renewed, the bracero program escalated once again, and entered its longest phase.

While federal officials labored to recreate a bilateral bracero program, President Harry Truman established a Commission on Migratory Labor in 1950 to assess the state of American farm labor during the 1940s. However, the Commission's report failed to impact stoop labor due to its vague and ineffective policy recommendations, particularly

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<sup>7</sup> Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1992), 43.

for states with rampant agribusiness control such as California.<sup>8</sup> While the Commission's findings revealed the inefficiencies of the bracero program, it only confirmed common knowledge; domestic workers could not compete economically with braceros, braceros depressed wages for Americans, and growers preferred braceros because they worked under constant threat of deportation. The report also included accounts of bracero abuse, and blamed lax federal oversight for braceros' subpar living and working conditions.<sup>9</sup> While measuring the consequences of the bracero program, the report's writers downplayed the impact of contract labor on local labor markets by viewing the program on a national scale. After acknowledging that braceros only spent several months in the field during the growing season, the Commission's writers determined that "the proportion of the nation's farm work performed by foreign workers [in 1945] was probably less than 1/2 of 1 percent," while going on to mention that California received sixty-three percent of all braceros. As a conclusion, the writers merely offered that, "Future efforts be directed toward supplying agricultural labor needs with our own workers and eliminating dependence on foreign labor."<sup>10</sup> Without taking regional disparities of bracero use into consideration, the report produced ambiguous and unproductive recommendations to states who abused the bracero program the most, such as California. Therefore, while revealing, the Commission on Migratory Labor did nothing to prevent the continuation of the bracero program, or influence its effects.

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<sup>8</sup> Noble Clark, William M. Leiserson, Robert E. Lucey, Peter H. Odegard, Maurice T. Van Hecke, *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: Report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor*, (1951).

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 167.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, Leiserson, Lucey, Odegard, Van Hecke, *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture*, 28-29, 36.

Despite its critical report, legislators largely ignored the Commission on Migratory Labor and Congress again ratified bracero program legislation, exemplifying the continued power held by agribusiness employers over the federal government. Representative W.R. Poage and Senator Allan Ellender introduced Public Law 78 before Congress, with intentions to formalize and stabilize the bracero program with the federal government again as contractor. With Representative Poage from 11th District in West Texas, a highly agricultural area on the Southern Plains that produced cotton, and Senator Ellender as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture from Louisiana, these congressmen represented grower interests through their rural, conservative constituencies.<sup>11 12</sup> The American Farm Labor Bureau, an organization of growers, also lobbied for PL 78's passage. With their combined influence, Congress hastily approved the bill on July 12, 1951, with little opposition. Although its creators designed it to increase the effectiveness of the program, they failed to address many issues unveiled by the Commission of Migratory Labor, such as what constituted a labor shortage and defining the term 'prevailing wage.' Nevertheless, with flaws intact, Congress would renew PL 78 four times through 1959, and it would generally outline the bracero program until its end in 1964.<sup>13 14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "POAGE, William Robert, (1899 - 1987)." <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=P000398>.

<sup>12</sup> Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "ELLENDER, Allen Joseph, (1890 - 1972)." <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=e000112>.

<sup>13</sup> Calavita, *Inside the State*, 44-45.

<sup>14</sup> As a national lobby with local offices, the American Farm Labor Bureau represented agricultural employers and helped them obtain foreign labor with the least regulation possible. For more, see: John Mark Hansen, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919-1981*, (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

While farm unions attempted to reverse Public Law 78 and oppose the continued importation of braceros, previously passed anti-union legislation crippled their effort to protest in a way that had not affected railroad unions. Agricultural unions entered the bracero era with the Wagner Act still in effect; passed in 1935, it guaranteed workers the right to strike and negotiate, or collectively bargain, with their employers as unions. While this legislation covered unions in a variety of industries, it specifically excluded agricultural workers. In 1943, because of the wartime context, significant economic expansion and President Franklin Roosevelt's anti-strike measures made agricultural unions even more ineffective. However, once the war concluded in 1945, unions resumed fighting for higher wages and the right to strike.<sup>15</sup> Conservatives within the federal government responded to this renewed union action with the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947; overriding President Harry Truman's veto, the bill reversed many of the provisions of the Wagner Act, effectively prohibiting closed shops, jurisdictional strikes, secondary boycotts, and national emergency strikes for unions in all industries.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, when PL 78 passed in the early 1950s, agricultural unions already significant faced restrictions that impeded their ability to protest, putting them at a greater disadvantage than railroad unions lobbying against the bracero program.

While braceros often interacted with American farm labor unions, several obstacles prevented the unification of Americans and Mexican nationals, which resulted in tension instead of action. In the decades before the bracero program, Mexican

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<sup>15</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 42, 146.

<sup>16</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, "In the Years of Darkness and Torment; The Early Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1963," *New Mexico historical review*, 76, no. 4 (2001), 14.



immigrants and Mexican American workers never fully integrated into American unions. According to historian George Sánchez, during the 1930s and 1940s the Mexican American community identified with the domestic blue collar worker. This informed their increased participation in organized labor activity.<sup>17</sup> However, from his own observation, labor critic and activist Carey McWilliams reported that almost every strike in which Mexicans participated in the 1930s failed due to a lack of union support. He wrote, “In most of these strikes, Mexican workers stood alone, that is, they were not supported by organized labor, for their organizations, for the most part, were affiliated neither with the CIO nor the AFL.”<sup>18</sup> After the bracero program’s enactment, the role of contracted Mexican workers in organized labor remained unclear. The Mexican government debated outlawing cooperation between unions and braceros, and could deport braceros for striking, joining unions, or refusing to cross picket lines.<sup>19</sup> However, in their contracts, braceros could elect a representative to speak for them in conflicts with employers.<sup>20</sup> While contracts did not specifically prohibit union representation (stating that the spokesman “be members of the group electing them”), in a letter from H.L. Mitchell, president of the National Agricultural Workers Union, he writes that the Department of Labor did not specifically condone union representation either.<sup>21</sup> This ambiguity led to

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<sup>17</sup> George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 229.

<sup>18</sup> Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1949), 194.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 165-166.

<sup>20</sup> War Manpower Commission, “Individual Work Agreement for Fausto Sánchez Aguilar,” August 13, 1945, in possession of author.

<sup>21</sup> H.L. Mitchell, “Letter to Secretary of Labor Maurice J. Tobin, July 8, 1952,” Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 22 folder 13, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

some unions advocating for braceros as fellow laborers. But others, such as the American Federation of Labor, refused to distinguish legal braceros from illegally hired Mexican migrants or “wetbacks,” concluding that both groups negatively impacted domestic workers.<sup>22</sup> While unions unanimously denounced the structure that brought Mexican workers to the United States, on an individual basis, they failed to reach a consensus regarding braceros as workers. This ultimately rendered most union action ineffective, consequently leaving labor progress at a standstill.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the bracero program, the National Farm Labor Union became the most vocal union in California opposing the use foreign contract labor.<sup>24</sup> An offshoot of the American Federation of Labor, the NFLU committed itself to dismantling the bracero program and securing rights for domestic laborers. While sometimes sympathetic to braceros as workers, the NFLU categorized the program itself as a ploy for agribarons to control the labor market, not to fill labor shortages. With braceros as a large and easily dominated labor force, the NFLU believed their presence depressed wages, perpetuated subpar working conditions, and undermined union efforts to reverse these effects. In

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<sup>22</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Labor Organizations in the United States and Mexico: A History of Their Relations*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 209-210.

<sup>23</sup> While considered a derogatory term today, in the 1940s and 1950s, “wetback” commonly denoted a category of undocumented Mexican laborers, and appears frequently in primary sources from the bracero era. As the bracero program continued past World War II, many scholars argue that this encouraged the rise of illegal migrant labor in the 1950s. Managing “wetback labor,” and distinguishing it from bracero workers became a critical issue for both unions and civil rights organizations in the 1950s. While it became a significant problem on its own, for my analysis, I will only look at undocumented labor as it affected braceros and the bracero program. For more on undocumented Mexican labor during this period, see: Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-business in California, 1947-1960*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> Although originally named the National Farm Labor Union, the group changed its name to the National Agricultural Workers’ Union in 1956, and has also been referred to as the National Farm Workers Union. For purposes of clarity in this chapter, I call the group the National Farm Labor Union or the NFLU regardless of its formal name changes.

1948, the union spokesperson took these conclusions to Congress, petitioning it to pass legislation that guaranteed the same protections for domestic workers as offered to braceros in their contracts. When undocumented Mexican employment increased in the 1950s, the NFLU likewise attempted to curb their use, and prevent them from joining braceros as “perfect strike breakers” who impeded rights for domestic laborers.<sup>25</sup> A fierce advocate for domestic interests, the NFLU unanimously opposed the bracero program as an institution. However, the decision to accept and include braceros in the union as laborers became less clear, marking the NFLU as influential in an entirely different realm as well.

While agribusiness oppressed both National Farm Labor Union members and Mexican workers as stoop laborers, the union initially hesitated on whether to embrace braceros as equals. At the onset of the bracero program, the NFLU’s efforts to include minority groups extended to primarily Southern whites and African Americans, and often flippantly dismissed local ‘native Americans of Spanish descent,’ as they mislabeled them. The union’s emphasis on rights for farmworkers through an expansion of the Wagner Act may also have implicitly excluded Mexicans, since many local Mexican workers only spoke Spanish and often remained and identified as citizens of Mexico.<sup>26</sup> On a local radio program, union organizers officially described the NFLU as “made up of racial...groups of many colors and creeds,” which would seemingly include Mexican workers and braceros. But they went on to state that, “[our goal is] to win our jobs back and care for our fellow farm workers of American background, before we allow

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<sup>25</sup> David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), 156-158.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Pitti, "Ernesto Galarza, Mexican Immigration, and Farm Labor Organizing in Postwar California," *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America* (2001): 167-168.

temporary imported labor into our area.” Drawing lines of inclusion at citizenship, the NFLU viewed braceros as an inherent antagonist to the American laborer. Despite their misleading rhetoric as a group, many individual members of the NFLU showed clearer displays of animosity toward braceros. Many blamed braceros for depressing wages and hindering union action, not realizing that braceros could not strike according to their contracts. On a deeper level, cultural resentment also existed; for some, braceros represented the replacement of American labor, and “were national interlopers, not brothers in a working-class fight.”<sup>27</sup> During the late 1940s the NFLU’s position on foreign labor centered on thinly veiled American chauvinism, but with the coming phases of the bracero program, this would change dramatically.

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The career of labor leader Ernesto Galarza represented not only the potential for unity between Mexican and American labor, but the idea that social justice knows no borders. Born in the state of Nayarit, Mexico in 1905, as a child, Ernesto Galarza and his family emigrated to the United States to escape the Mexican Revolution. Eventually settling in California, Galarza spent his teenage years working odd jobs in the cannery and farm industries to support his family. As an adult, Galarza supplemented his personal experience as a stoop laborer and his identity as a Mexican American with formal education—studying Latin American history, international politics, and economics. After attending Occidental College in Los Angeles, he earned his masters degree at Stanford

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<sup>27</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 163-164.

University, and his Ph.D at Columbia University in 1944.<sup>28</sup> Showing a consistent passion for equal rights and the conditions in farm labor, Galarza eventually became the most prominent activist in the bracero program—fighting for all workers regardless of race.

When Ernesto Galarza joined the National Farm Labor Union as their director of research and education in 1948, his connection to the Mexican American community allowed him to shift the NFLU's perception and treatment of bracero workers. Interestingly, Galarza used his position to protest the bracero program *and* advocate for fair treatment of braceros from 1948 through 1960. Galarza became one of the first labor unionists to realize that the issues stirred by the presence of braceros and other Mexican nationals went beyond just economics, politics, and labor. The use of Mexican workers not only hurt the interests of American citizens, but created animosity amongst the Mexican American community, who felt that braceros and undocumented workers likewise impeded their chances for work. With this in mind, Galarza diverted blame from individual Mexican nationals, who he viewed as merely trying to make a living, to the growers who exploited braceros and the American government who permitted their abuse. As such, Galarza influenced the NFLU to gradually change its focus away from the Mexican migrants, and instead use its energy to combat the larger structure that created problems for all laborers—the bracero program.<sup>29</sup> Galarza's involvement in the NFLU helped the union join domestic laborers and the Mexican American community, maximizing their potential to dismantle the bracero program and achieve progress for all.

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<sup>28</sup> *Guide to the Ernesto Galarza Papers, 1936-1984*, <http://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf2290026t>.

<sup>29</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 156-160.

Beyond helping the National Farm Labor Union shift its perspective on the bracero program, Ernesto Galarza also worked to bridge the gap between individual braceros and domestic laborers. Noting that Mexico had a strong union tradition, Galarza identified the underlying problem: growers' use of the bracero program as a divisive structure between domestic and Mexican labor.<sup>30</sup> As one solution, Galarza attempted to include braceros directly in the NFLU. But this proved difficult, as the United States and Mexican governments strongly dissuaded braceros from union and political activities. Galarza also faced more tangible obstacles—because most agricultural braceros in California lived in rural areas, agribusiness could isolate them from outside influences. In addition, braceros faced deportation from growers if found in a union, decreasing their interest in the NFLU.<sup>31</sup> Despite these setbacks, Galarza persisted in his effort to unite domestic and Mexican workers for shared progress. He used the NFLU to advocate for Americans negatively impacted by the bracero program, while simultaneously defending the rights guaranteed to braceros. For instance, in an NFLU document written by Galarza entitled “Statement on the Importation of Agricultural Workers from Mexico,” the majority of objections to the bracero program pertained to violations that affected braceros.<sup>32</sup> Galarza, again through the NFLU as a whole, reiterated his stance on the harmful effects of the bracero program for both domestic and bracero workers.<sup>33</sup> With

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<sup>30</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 164.

<sup>31</sup> Pitti, “Ernesto Galarza,” 177-178.

<sup>32</sup> Ernesto Galarza, “National Farm Labor Union: Statement on the Importation of Agricultural Workers from Mexico,” George I. Sánchez Papers, box 16 folder 15, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>33</sup> Ernesto Galarza, “Mexican-United States Labor Relations and Problems,” George I. Sánchez Papers, box 16 folder 15, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

Galarza as a link between braceros and NFLU members, he facilitated the most effective effort to challenge both growers and the bracero program.

Arguably, Ernesto Galarza's most valuable contribution to the National Farm Labor Union and the unification of American and bracero workers came from his leadership in the DiGiorgio strike of 1947, the largest agricultural strike of its kind to that point. Founded by Giuseppe "Joseph" DiGiorgio, the DiGiorgio Fruit Ranch operated out of Kern County, California. Comprising of 20,000 acres, employing at least 1,500 men and braceros with additional men hired as needed, the DiGiorgio Ranch made over \$18,000,000 in revenue growing fruits, vegetables, nuts and other crops. Despite DiGiorgio portraying himself as a father figure to his employees, he refused to meet with them after union members requested a ten-cent hourly wage, and recognition of their local NFLU chapter, among other demands. DiGiorgio insisted union action threatened his "right to cheap labor," prompting 850 NFLU members to formally strike on October 1, 1947.<sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> In addition to NFLU workers striking, many employees of Mexican descent struck to protest the use of braceros and undocumented laborers on the ranch. Ironically, about 130 braceros left the fields as well to show solidarity with the union. Within two days, members of the DiGiorgio Ranch, in conjunction with the Associated Farmers and the federal government, threatened the braceros with repatriation unless they crossed the picket line. Farmers feared that union action at DiGiorgio would set a precedent that braceros could not only break their contracts, but strike. As a result, a DiGiorgio

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<sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 146-148.

<sup>35</sup> Clarence H. Yarrow, "Report of the National Farm Labor Union Strike at the DiGiorgio Labor Ranch near Bakersfield," Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 35 folder 3, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

spokesman dismissed braceros' role in the strike, and told the *Bakersfield Californian* that there "was no dispute between [braceros] and the ranch. Conditions are favorable; they are satisfied with the pay and housing and meals and working conditions. They do not want to be moved away or to go on strike."<sup>36</sup> Because growers at DiGiorgio forced braceros to become scabs, their role in the strike quickly became crucial to the ranch's production, and therefore, the success of the NFLU's walkout. When Galarza joined the NFLU the following year in 1948, the DiGiorgio strike became an ideal opportunity to Galarza to employ his doctrine of union inclusion, and repair relations between Mexican and domestic workers.

Ernesto Galarza quickly recognized that not only did the National Farm Labor Union need braceros to join union activity for the success of the strike, but he needed to address racial disunity within the union and the field of labor in general. In a report on the DiGiorgio strike written by Galarza in May of 1948, seven months after the walkout, Galarza addressed the underlying issues that threatened to undermine union action:

The DiGiorgio strikers have a sober and rational view of race relations in the valley. Practically all of the strikers are white workers from Arkansas and Oklahoma. There are a few Mexicans among them. In the past the white has been pitted against the Negro, the Negro against the Mexican resident, the Mexican resident against the illegals, the illegals against the Nationals...The "Okies" and "Arkies" look back upon their own mistakes in their relations with workers of other nationalities and races and generally take the view that union membership, equality of opportunity for jobs based on competence and joint sharing of privileges and responsibilities should not be affected by racial differences. This small beginning of racial sanity...may not stand on the strain of real economic pressure in the months to come. Several damaging trends work against it...

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<sup>36</sup> H.L. Mitchell, "Report to Sub-Committee of the House Labor Committee Investigating the DiGiorgio Strike," George I. Sanchez Papers, box 16 folder 16, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.



[for example] In this brew of potential racial strife, DiGiorgio continues to fish for replacements for his strike breaking crews.<sup>37</sup>

As a personal effort to rectify the racial tensions in labor, Galarza educated white NFLU members about ethnic Mexicans and the rural conditions they experienced in Mexico in an attempt to discourage discrimination. After unionists could better conceptualize Mexicans as “workers and citizens” with a common cause, Galarza then reached out to Mexicans, regardless of citizenship status, to participate in union activity and receive full inclusion in the NFLU. Particularly in the context of the DiGiorgio strike, this became crucial—a union official estimated that at the time Galarza joined the NFLU, the union most likely had less than 50 Mexican members.<sup>38</sup> Involving braceros, undocumented workers, and members of the Mexican American community in the NFLU not only became vital to the longevity of the DiGiorgio strike in the short term, but it allowed Galarza to fight for a cohesive, diverse labor community as the bracero program aged into the 1950s.

Although Ernesto Galarza made progress uniting domestic and Mexican workers as laborers, the DiGiorgio strike ultimately failed because of growers’ ability to employ scabs—reflecting a longstanding dynamic of power inequality between growers and laborers. In the practical conflict between employer and employee, braceros became a bargaining chip that determined the victor in strikes. For example, even though bracero contracts explicitly prohibited their employment during a strike, the National Farm Labor

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<sup>37</sup> Ernesto Galarza, “Poverty in the Valley of Plenty, A Report on the DiGiorgio Strike,” George I. Sanchez Papers, box 16 folder 16, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

<sup>38</sup> Pitti, “Ernesto Galarza,” 168-169.

Union had difficulty getting braceros removed from struck fields.<sup>39</sup> With jurisdiction poorly delegated by the bracero agreement, it took six weeks for the federal government to prohibit the DiGiorgio Ranch from using braceros. But these six weeks proved crucial—it gave the DiGiorgio Ranch sufficient time to recruit scabs from other ranches and finish production for the year.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, a two-year “endurance contest” began between the DiGiorgio Ranch and the NFLU: which included hiring undocumented Mexicans, boycotts of DiGiorgio products, pickets from NFLU supporters, communist allegations, hearings before the House of Representatives, and periodic outbreaks of violence. Finally, a lengthy and expensive lawsuit over a propaganda film ended the strike. The president of the NFLU could not afford to contest the lawsuit, so Joseph DiGiorgio offered to settle out of court for one dollar, plus the recall of the film and the return of domestic workers to the ranch.<sup>41</sup> Beyond these tangible reasons for the strike’s failure, historian Deborah Cohan believes braceros’ lack of agency and the oppression of unions significantly impacted the strike’s outcome. Not only did braceros have two governments and a legal contract impeding their free will, but their employers deported braceros participating in union activity. Furthermore, growers used their power and status to assert their dominance over unions, and continually prevent any attempts at economic progress.<sup>42</sup> Even though the DiGiorgio strike failed due to inequalities in agriculture, it

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<sup>39</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Ernesto Galarza, “Poverty in the Valley of Plenty,” George I. Sanchez Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-business in California, 1947-1960*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 103-117.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 159-160.

nonetheless remains significant not only as a protest, but a movement that made braceros a crucial factor in labor action.

Beyond the attempts of unions to reconcile their definitions of braceros, braceros also caused prominent Mexican American civil rights groups to reevaluate their platforms to accommodate both the bracero program, and the bracero workers themselves. In a move similar to that of unions, many Mexican American activists extracted braceros from the guest worker program—extending their support to the laborers, while denouncing the institution.<sup>43</sup> The Asociación Nacional México-Americana serves as a primary example of these inclusive groups. The ANMA strove to fuse cultural identity and labor rights to achieve progress for Mexican Americans—which they believed applied to braceros as well. Formed in 1948 in El Paso, Texas, the creation of the ANMA responded to second-class conditions for Mexican Americans after World War II. The group included members regardless of citizenship status or nationality, and in 1950 committed itself to five goals: the political unification of Mexicans in the United States, democratic rights for all Americans, increasing ethnic and political awareness, renewal of ties with Mexico, and democratic practices within the ANMA. To achieve these ends, the ANMA focused on uniting workers. Since about ninety-five percent of Mexicans in the United States identified as laborers by 1950, they faced oppression both as an ethnic community and as a labor class.<sup>44</sup> Similar to Ernesto Galarza's perspective in the National Farm Labor

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<sup>43</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, & Identity, 1930-1960*, (Yale University Press, 1991), 202-206.

Union, braceros did not represent a vilified class of Mexican nationals to the ANMA—but rather oppressed migrants who needed the same protections as American citizens.

For Bert Corona, arguably the most active leader of the Asociación Nacional México-Americana, the group's ideology included bracero workers but protested the bracero program as a whole. While the organization already supported bracero strikes when Corona joined, under Corona's guidance as chief organizer of Northern California, the ANMA strengthened their direct support of braceros. In historian Mario T. García's oral history of Corona, Corona explains, "[the ANMA] took food, clothing, and shoes to the strikes and found places for [braceros] to live temporarily. We organized dances and used the proceeds to support the strike. Above all, we gave them moral support, which they very much appreciated—a sense that they were not alone, that others cared about them." While the ANMA set radical and inclusive standards for itself, tensions within the group mounted. Some found the group too confrontational, and feared its loyalty to Mexican American political issues made it a separatist group. Corona himself disagreed, arguing that if the ANMA failed to advocate for Mexican Americans in all ways, Mexican Americans would fall between the cracks of American society. However, the organization never had time to disintegrate, as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's involvement (as a result of McCarthyism) shut down the ANMA by 1954.<sup>45</sup> While relatively short lived, the ANMA stood as an example of how Mexican American progress included braceros, both on the basis of their status as laborers, and on their cultural status as Mexicans.

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<sup>45</sup> Mario T. García, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994), 170-171, 179-181, 191, 211.

Unlike the Asociación Nacional México-Americana and Ernesto Galarza, many Mexican American activists felt pressure to convince the federal government and white Americans that their American identity came before any allegiance to Mexico.<sup>46</sup> As a result, groups like the League of United Latin American Citizens prioritized the protection of Mexican American citizens from discrimination over the exploitation of braceros and Mexican nationals—and defined braceros as an impediment to equal rights as Americans. After the bracero program’s enactment in 1942, LULAC initially lobbied against it because of bracero abuse. But when the federal government extended the program into the 1950s, LULAC opposed it on the basis that now Mexican Americans competed with braceros for jobs.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, many LULAC members believed that the mistreatment of braceros encouraged intolerance of Mexican American citizens in greater American society. In 1946, one LULAC member articulated:

The American citizen of Mexican ancestry is weak because he is a minority citizen. Discrimination will pursue him until he blends with the majority group of this country enough to lose his present identity. This is a discouragingly slow process...[but] if we fail to do it, we shall continue to be discriminated against, insulted and abused; and complaining of injustice in the name of democracy will not help us. We shall simply be begging for things that must be paid for.

For LULAC, braceros and undocumented Mexicans represented undiluted ties to Mexico, and their presence became an obstacle to assimilation. To discourage identification with Mexico, LULAC stressed distinctions between between American citizens of Mexican descent, and the “Mexican alien”—advocating Americanization through education (in

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<sup>46</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 133.

<sup>47</sup> García, *Mexican Americans*, 52.

particular, learning English), unionization, and citizenship.<sup>48</sup> Despite their position as Mexican American civil rights groups, the ANMA and LULAC had radically different ends. Whereas the ANMA hoped to unite Mexican laborers regardless of citizenship, LULAC drew strict citizenship lines, and made its priority to uplift Mexican Americans first.<sup>49</sup>

Although the National Farm Labor Union, Asociación Nacional México-Americana, and League of United Latin American Citizens all opposed the bracero program, unions and civil rights organizations based their advocacy on their imposed definitions of braceros in the United States. Not only did their range of assumptions disrupt the unity of unions and civil rights groups—who all attempted to fight systems of economic or racial oppression—but their perceptions of braceros more importantly took the humanity out of contract labor. Excluding notable exceptions such as Ernesto Galarza and Bert Corona, many Americans and Mexican Americans only saw braceros as roadblocks to personal ends, instead of similarly exploited workers or racially discriminated Mexicans. This ultimately turned unions and civil rights groups from protectors of the abused to abusers by extension, leaving braceros to fight for agency alone.

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<sup>48</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 143-144.

<sup>49</sup> Another prominent Mexican American civil rights group, the American GI Forum, also shared many of LULAC's core goals and beliefs. The American GI Forum functioned as a Hispanic veterans and civil rights organization, and individual chapters focused on issues such as education, police brutality, discrimination, and labor exploitation. During the bracero-era, the American GI Forum consistently protested the program despite communist charges during the 1950s. For more, see Henry Ramos, *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983*, (Arte Publico Press, 1998).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *SOMOS LOS BRAZOS DE MÉXICO:*

#### BRACERO VOICES

“I didn’t even know where the United States was or anything like that, by the way!” my grandfather Fausto Aguilar, a former railroad bracero, laughed as he told me his initial reaction to joining the bracero program. Aguilar represents one story out of thousands of conflicting bracero testimonies, showing that no universal characterization sums up the experience of all braceros while in the United States. The status of their lives in Mexico, the factors that drew them to the bracero program, the states in which they served their contracts, and the disposition of their employers all affected how braceros perceived the program, and what memories they retained after the program’s conclusion. While all braceros remember the program uniquely, many oral histories overlap on specific events, including recruitment, life in the barracks, and a range of reactions to leaving Mexico. Through these collective memories, former braceros built one unifying tie—a reclamation of the bracero experience from outsiders who systematically oppressed them.

As discussed in earlier chapters, outside agencies affected by the use of contract labor often let their perceptions of bracero workers determine their role in program. For the Mexican government, the bracero program served a dual purpose; it became a way to both control migration to the United States, and transform what they perceived as Mexico’s most racially and economically undesirable peasants into productive workers.

For growers, obtaining a cheap and disposable source of manual labor to support a new form of agriculture became paramount. The proximity of the border made Mexican workers the ideal source of temporary racialized labor, and explains growers' unanimous support of the bracero program. American unions and Mexican American civil rights groups developed their image of braceros largely in response to growers. As agribarons increased their dependence on braceros and allowed domestic wages to reflect depressed bracero wages, many unionists blamed braceros for impeding the progress of the American worker. Similarly, many Mexican American civil rights activists believed that braceros' encouraged negative stereotypes of Mexicans, and held braceros responsible for their discrimination. Consequently, as braceros arrived in the United States, they not only learned to survive the program itself, but navigate the complex framework of racially-based assumptions created by these outside sources.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, bracero testimonies show the subtle balance between agency and oppression in the bracero program. While tangible assertions of power—such as any form of protest—could easily get a bracero deported back to Mexico, braceros found more subtle ways to reject the definitions of outsiders. They circulated songs celebrating their migration, knowingly played into racial stereotypes to secure employment, and supported each other through loneliness and backbreaking stoop labor. But braceros most clearly asserted their agency after the program ended. By utilizing the opportunities of the bracero program, many former braceros achieved upward mobility in both the United States and Mexico by improving their condition and providing a future of their families. In this way, many former braceros cultivated their



own individual identities after the program's conclusion, and instead chose to define themselves by what the bracero program helped them accomplish, not by the bracero program itself.

Braceros first established their own conceptions of the bracero experience through culture—by creating and spreading folklore about the bracero program. Braceros primarily used *corridos*, or Mexican folk ballads sung with an energetic or dramatic voice, as a means to tell stories about their time working in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Historian María Herrera-Sobek argues that braceros' reliance on folk songs made it a form of lower class expression, and way to process the different phases of the bracero program.<sup>2</sup> During the 1940s, when the bracero program replenished American labor during World War II, many *corridos* positively reflected braceros' desire for adventure and their patriotism for Mexico. For example, the song "*Soy Bracero Mexicano*" shows a bracero's pride as a guest laborer, and the privilege he felt serving the United States:

I am a Mexican bracero,  
I have come to work  
For this sister country  
That has called on me.

They [The United States] ask for arms  
To substitute  
Those that are fighting  
Without fear of dying.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song*, (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), xxii-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience: Elitelore Versus Folklore*, (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979), 120.

<sup>3</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 82.

Other *corridos* likewise reflect this theme of excitement and sense of purpose when traveling to the United States. In the song “*Me Voy Para el Norte*,” the bracero narrator explains to his lover that after the bracero program, they will build a better life together in the United States. Just as he commits himself to a promising future with his sweetheart, he also vows to never forget his homeland, or love another country more than Mexico.<sup>4</sup> These two *corridos* represent braceros’ initial optimism for guest labor during the 1940s, and the self-worth they carried with them as proud Mexican citizens. But just as the nature of the bracero program changed, so did braceros’ portrayal of it.

As braceros’ reports of abuse skyrocketed in the 1950s, braceros turned to these folk songs to combat their oppression and reclaim their sense of self. Many *corridos* during this phase of the program used subtle tricks to portray the American *gringo* as stupid and clumsy, compared to the macho, witty, and clever bracero.<sup>5</sup> One popular song, “*Chulas Fronteras*,” tells the story of a bracero who outwitted an American sheriff on the border, most likely hoping to deport the bracero:

[The sheriff:] “Hey, you Mexican. Are you a wetback?”  
[The bracero:] “Wait a minute, blondie. I am working here. This  
is my picture. My mustache is big but this is my  
picture.  
“Well, yes, but you are drinking tequila. It is very hot.”  
“Only the first gulp, after that one cannot stop.  
Here, have a drink.”  
“Oh no, another time!”  
“Well, I will wait for you. Or you wait for me.  
Better yet, you wai[t]!”

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<sup>4</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 167.

<sup>5</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 92.

In her translation of the *corrido*, María Herrera-Sobek explains that the last word of this stanza, ‘wai,’ plays on language—when not fully annunciated, it can either sound like the English ‘wait,’ or the Spanish ‘guy’ or ‘buey,’ which means ‘ox’ or ‘stupid person.’<sup>6</sup> In addition to these sly plays on words, other folk songs used metaphors to exact a private sense of revenge on Americans. In “*El Burro Norteño*,” the song uses a donkey traveling to the United States to represent the *bracero*. In one stanza, the protagonist meets—and subsequently rejects—a *gringa burrita*, or the manifestation of an American woman:

Her blue eyes coquettishly danced  
And said to the donkey: “Come here  
with me.”  
And then the donkey answered so:  
“Sorry, honey, I already have my lady  
donkey.”

On the surface, Herrera-Sobek notes that this song spoofs a common *corrido* theme of American women finding *braceros* irresistibly attractive.<sup>7</sup> But more implicitly, the *bracero*’s rejection of the American woman allows him to insult a country that, through their treatment, did not value him either. In this way, *braceros* used *corridos* as not only a personal response to American exploitation, but as means to reassert their intelligence, worth, and most importantly—their agency.

In addition to cultural displays of agency through song, within the physical system of contract labor, *braceros* more tangibly defended their agency by self-consciously performing racial definitions of a *bracero*—rather than genuinely fulfilling them. When recalling their experiences in recruitment, many former *braceros* in their

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<sup>6</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 172-173.

interviews and oral histories emphasize the ritual of contractors in Mexico checking their hands for calluses. For Mexican officials, callused hands not only identified a seasoned laborer, but became synonymous with the rural *mestizos* that the Mexican government desired for the program. In response to this racial standard, many prospective braceros manipulated their hands to falsely represent the ‘ideal bracero.’<sup>8</sup> Former railroad bracero Fausto Aguilar admitted, “...boy, they check for calluses on your hands if you’re a worker, and I didn’t have any cause I didn’t do nothing! [laughs] But I used to go to, uh...swings, you know, and put some, something on my hands so I get some calluses, because you know they gonna check you hands to see if you have calluses for work.”<sup>9</sup> While screening for callused hands originally measured a worker’s worth, by *knowingly* playing into this bracero stereotype, bracero hopefuls showed that the Mexican government could not define them.

In American recruitment, braceros likewise altered their appearance and behavior to ensure that growers offered them a contract—continuing their self-conscious performance of race, and their ability to retain an individual identity. Historian Deborah Cohen argues that growers equated Mexicans with “the rural, the uneducated, the peasant, the Indian,” and wanted their braceros to fit this model. Benny Caranza’s time in recruitment reflects these perceptions: “You’d be surprised how growers would treat [us]. They even opened [our] mouths and looked at [our] teeth—like a horse. We felt degraded.” Through these types of inspections, growers used their conceptions of

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<sup>8</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 96-98.

<sup>9</sup> Fausto Aguilar, conversation with author, 15 July 2012, 14:20-14:41.

‘Mexican’ to determine whether or not a bracero candidate could adequately perform stoop labor. Braceros quickly learned to conform to growers’ Mexican stereotype and “perform backwardness” to greatly improve their chances of employment in the United States. An anonymous bracero remembers, “We learned how to stand [to get chosen], you couldn’t stand up too much, stand too erect. [That person] was considered too independent, too rebellious,” while another unknown worker confirms, “They wanted us to be dumb and dirty.”<sup>10</sup> While braceros worked within this framework out of necessity, their deliberate effort to act uncivilized proved that they defied the stereotypes they performed, rather than proving their validity.

Although braceros could reclaim some semblance of agency in particular recruitment rituals, in others, they simply could not escape racialized treatment. While most former braceros suffered varying degrees of trauma in American contracting centers, almost all of them remember one ritual as particularly degrading— when officials sprayed them with dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, or the toxic pesticide DDT. An anonymous bracero described the procedure, saying, “Once we got there, they’d send us in groups of two hundred, naked as we came into the world, in a big room about sixty square feet. Then men would come in masks, with tanks on their backs, and they’d fumigate us from top to bottom. Supposedly we were flea-bitten and germ ridden.”<sup>11</sup> Fumigation remained a standard practice of recruitment throughout the program, and many braceros became aware of the implication this practice had on their perception by growers. According to agricultural bracero Santiago Aguilar-Álvarez, “...in that moment,

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 107-109.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 99.

you were treated like an animal.”<sup>12</sup> Rodolfo Jacobo-Páramo, a lettuce picker in the 1960s, confirms the process of fumigation as dehumanizing, recalling:

They undressed us and, once again, sprayed us with some powder as if we were some kind of *lacra* [pestilence]. The powder gave us horrible headaches. It was very strong. The powder used was like the one used to disinfect or kill some sort of plague. I wondered why they did that. We were offended because we felt that they saw us as inferior; at least we felt that way. But we came with the desire to work, so we did what we were told. That’s the thing. That is how it was.<sup>13</sup>

While braceros knew racialized stereotypes inspired fumigation, unlike artificially giving themselves calluses and performing backwardness for growers, braceros could not resist DDT showers and still receive a labor contract. Instead, they suffered in silence. While bracero recruitment represented the delicate balance between a braceros’ ability to retain their identity and submit to their employers’ preconceived definitions, once admitted to the bracero program, braceros sought other means to assert their agency.

To cope with repeated instances of abuse in both recruitment and on the job, many braceros formed close friendships with one another for two primary purposes: emotional support, and empowerment. Maria Herrera-Sobek’s bracero character ‘Pedro,’ a composite bracero she created by blending multiple bracero interviews, remembers how his friendships with other braceros helped him navigate stoop labor:

Since none of us knew [how to hoe beets], the *patrón* [boss] went to show us how we should do it. He told us how we should stand so that our backs would not hurt so much. Heck, our backs hurt anyway. By evening time we could not straighten ourselves! And how everybody laughed! Yes, there was so much laughter and teasing. We were all laughing and poking fun at each other. Yes, I am telling you someone would start—“Hey, you lost

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<sup>12</sup> Jose Rodolfo Jacobo, *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers 1942-1964*, (San Diego: Southern Border Press, 2004), 107-108.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobo, *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers* 96.

your step! You lost your step!” “Well, so did you!” another would answer. Sure enough, we were all in the same fix.<sup>14</sup>

Camaraderie between braceros allowed them to tolerate not only harsh physical labor, but relieve each others emotional pains, such as adjusting to life away from Mexico. Rufilio González-Sánchez, a cotton picker in Texas during the 1950s, remembers, “...that was the way it was when you came to this country. You make good friends with your fellow men. One could become very lonely as a bracero, and good friends were very important for company and for protection.”<sup>15</sup> Juan Saldaña Bravo depended on his friends for a similar purpose, recalling, “There were moments in which I felt homesick, and there were times in which I just forgot about everything, like when we were singing or just talking, that’s when we’d forget about the sadness we’d feel because one’s land is what one misses the most.”<sup>16</sup> Beyond just camaraderie, Deborah Cohen argues that braceros formed relationships to share information necessary to their survival in the United States. Just as growers used word of mouth to identify troublemaking or ‘blacklisted’ braceros, braceros in turn helped each other learn farm work, interpret contracts for workers who could not read, and generally counteract their presence at the bottom of an oppressive hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> For many braceros, the relationships they cultivated because of their exploitation helped them not only endure stoop labor and homesickness, but safely resist domination by their employers.

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<sup>14</sup> Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobo, *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Gonzales, Vivian Price, and Adrian Salinas, Directors, *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*, 2010, 32:46-33:06.

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 136.

Braceros also used their relationships with other workers to navigate blurred gender roles in the labor camps, and redefine their masculinity in an all-male space. Because the Mexican government prohibited braceros from taking their families with them to the United States—ensuring that they returned to Mexico with wages and skills—once employed, braceros barely interacted with women. Consequently, in the barracks where they lived, many braceros lacked the domestic skills typically performed by their mothers or wives back in Mexico. Álvaro García describes the dual roles of most braceros: “All day we worked in the fields...Then we went to our barracks and we cooked dinner; we washed our clothes, we cleaned, we went to bed...After doing ‘men’s work’ all day, every evening we did ‘women’s work.’”<sup>18</sup> Some braceros had difficulty adjusting to this change due to Mexico’s cultural emphasis on *machismo*, or manliness, resulting in rigid distinctions between the domains of men and women. Because it violated cultural norms, many braceros saw it as an affront to their reputation to sweep floors, make beds, or wash clothes.<sup>19</sup> Some braceros avoided performing these chores entirely. For example, Fausto Aguilar recalled relying on his friends instead of teaching himself to cook:

...you had to make your own lunch, you cook it—I don’t know how to make nothing like that! [laughs] But the other guys were older than me, they know, or know somebody who knows how to cook, make tortillas, heat some beans, or whatever. And I got my little box with groceries, but I don’t know how to, how to use it. But I told the guys, I say, “Well, uh...I give you my box so you cook for me.” “Okay!”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 138.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Anderson, *The Bracero Program in California*, (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 76.

<sup>20</sup> Aguilar, conversation with author, 25:24-25:58.



While in this case, Aguilar's relationships with other braceros allowed him to retain his masculinity according to Mexican culture, other braceros did not have friends as domestically oriented. These braceros needed an alternative outlet to assert their masculinity while in the bracero program—one they often found outside the labor camps.

In response to the new gender roles that existed because of the bracero program, many braceros went out to bars or saloons to reaffirm their masculinity. When writing about braceros and bars, Deborah Cohen found that age determined two distinct methods of securing a grasp on manhood. For younger, unmarried braceros, bars became a space to not only find refuge from stoop and railway labor, but to assert their cultural conception of manhood in a way that proved difficult within bracero labor camps.<sup>21</sup> This rationale did not uniquely affect braceros. In other historically all male-spaces, such as mining towns in the early twentieth century, workers would drink, fight—with reason and for no reason at all—and generally cause trouble to prove their manhood to themselves and to each other.<sup>22</sup> For braceros, this outlet sometimes proved unproductive. Some, like Fausto Aguilar, got in bar brawls and subsequently arrested, causing them to miss work (although in our interview, he insisted, “I wasn't drunk by the way, the other guy was!”).<sup>23</sup> Other braceros spent all their money on alcohol, negating their financial purpose in the bracero program. But for many young braceros, drinking and frequenting bars became a means to keep their personal identity—both as a Mexican, and as a man.

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 131-132.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-1941*, (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 112-113.

<sup>23</sup> Aguilar, conversation with author, 32:55-33:40.

For other, older braceros, abstaining from bars during the bracero program proved their manhood. Deborah Cohen argues while braceros may have been workers in the United States, in Mexico, their identities as husband, father, and provider came first. Consequently, they carried a responsibility as a bracero that younger workers did not share. Some braceros like Alejandro Medina, sent most of their wages back to Mexico because their families depended on it for survival. Medina explains, “It wasn’t that I didn’t want to [go out]—I did. But I had a family to support, I couldn’t spend my week’s wages in just one night. I had young children...I couldn’t drink very much...I behaved myself.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, by not spending money on alcohol, these braceros equated their restraint and familial duty with masculinity. In this way, getting drunk, visiting bars, and the decision to abstain all helped develop individual selfhood as a bracero in an environment that redefined Mexican conceptions of identity.

While braceros struggled to reclaim agency and identity from obvious oppressors—such as Mexican and American officials in recruitment, and growers at sites of employment—braceros also faced discrimination from similarly exploited groups, like unions and Mexican American civil rights organizations. Because these groups failed to fully comprehend braceros’ position in the labor force, they likewise contributed to braceros’ struggle for agency and self-determined identity. For instance, many unions and civil rights groups held braceros responsible for sabotaging their progress in workers’ rights and anti-discrimination efforts. But these unionists and activists often took their limited agency as Americans for granted, and did not realize the restrictions placed on

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<sup>24</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 131-132.

braceros during the bracero program. Fausto Aguilar remembers feeling a lack of control beginning right at recruitment. He recalls the uncertainty he felt traveling by train from Mexico to the United States, unaware of where he had been contracted:

They decided that for you. They didn't tell you where you're going. Your name is Frank, or Pete, or something like that, [they say] "You stay here," [letting off] two or three and they kept going. North twenty-five miles, the train stopped there, another two or three or four [braceros] or whatever they need there, they keep going, keep going, keep going. And we just sit there, you know...we didn't know where we go, or how far, or where we're going.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond braceros' inability to determine where they worked or lived, their powerlessness extended to wages and working conditions, which concerned unions and civil rights organizations the most. After working for a particularly tight employer, former bracero Jose Hernandez remembers thinking, "How could one make any money? Even if you picked 100 crates, what they paid you was crap...In Somerton, Arizona I once got a check for one cent for a week's worth of work. Subtracting what went to boarding and food, I would be left with a penny."<sup>26</sup> While unions and civil rights groups often viewed braceros as competitors and impediments to rights, they failed to take into account that with deportation as a constant threat, most braceros *could* not join unions. Unable to appreciate braceros' subtle, private forms of agency, American unionists and Mexican American activists only added to braceros' oppression in the United States.

While the majority of braceros did suffer from a lack of power while in the United States, a select few bravely protested their abusive employers, despite almost certain consequences. While one former bracero remembers the repercussions that resulted from

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<sup>25</sup> Aguilar, conversation with author, 20:35-21:08.

<sup>26</sup> Gonzales, Price, and Salinas, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 29:31-30:15.

his political action, he still believes his atrocious living conditions justified it: “I protested because there was no air conditioning, the temperature was above 120 degrees. We lived worse than animals. The food was not for human beings. Then the association split us all up. They told us that they were assigning people to other fields. I still believe it was because [I was a] young man and I protested.”<sup>27</sup> Enough braceros shared this sentiment that as abuses increased in the late 1940s, a small group called the Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de México en los Estados Unidos formed. Established in 1943 by bracero workers themselves, Alianza served as perhaps the only organization in which the contract laborers defended their own rights. Through Alianza, braceros pressured the Mexican government to take a more active role in the bracero program, and worked with Ernesto Galarza and other unions in protests such as the DiGiorgio strike.<sup>28</sup> While Alianza disbanded by the end of the bracero program because it failed to successfully protect braceros, their very existence nonetheless proves significant.<sup>29</sup> Clearly some braceros felt that even within an exploitative framework, they needed to reclaim their agency despite the structural obstacles, consequences of protesting, and low probability of success. In this way, these braceros disproved the assumptions of some unions and civil rights groups that braceros passively accepted their treatment, and more importantly proved that braceros could and did attempt to reclaim their power.

Although braceros generally used a variety of methods to assert agency and maintain their identity during the bracero program, no one universal bracero experience

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<sup>27</sup> Gonzales, Price, and Salinas, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 38:28-38:55.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 164-165.

<sup>29</sup> Mireya Loza, “Braceros on the Boundaries: Activism, Race, Masculinity and the Legacies of the Bracero Program” (Doctorate diss., Brown University, 2011), 23-26.

exists. But regardless of whether braceros choose to focus on their struggles for agency and identity in their memories of the bracero program, the program did not define these men later in life—but rather, served as a chance for upward mobility. Given the rampant abuse in the bracero program, many braceros remember the high price they paid for this opportunity. Maria del Carmen Gutierrez, the wife of a former bracero, describes the program’s effect on her husband: “They must talk about it with some pain in their heart. If one didn’t live through it, one could talk about it...But if [braceros] talk about it, they might shed some tears.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Yolanda Perez, the daughter of a former bracero, knows the meaning of the bracero program for the men in her family: “If I want to offend my husband’s uncle, I’d ask him, ‘Did you come here as a bracero?’ And his response would be, ‘Do not ever remind me about that.’”<sup>31</sup> However, even braceros with negative memories of the program recognized it as a means for economic improvement, and that their temporary status of braceros would not define their lives after the program. For example, Felipe Castañeda remembers, “They said [the bracero program] was an opportunity. For me, it was an opportunity, sort of. My family has a house. My kids got shoes. I went lots of times. Although life got better, the opportunity came at a cost.”<sup>32</sup> Due to their time in the United States, some braceros went on to own property, rise to the middle class, educate their children, and even become United States citizens. Thus, the bracero program existed as a liminal space, instead of an experience that permanently defined braceros.

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<sup>30</sup> Gonzales, Price, and Salinas, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 52:29-52:42.

<sup>31</sup> Gonzales, Price, and Salinas, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 52:42-53:02.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 202.

Despite the abuse that existed in bracero program, other braceros retain primarily positive memories of the program, and more clearly emphasize its purpose as a means for social and economic mobility—demonstrating braceros’ success at retaining agency and individual identity. Some braceros, for instance, do not report experiencing any incidents of oppression, such as Juan Saldaña Bravo, who remembers, “There were many places where...on the door there were signs that said, ‘Mexicans and blacks not allowed’...but personally, I never suffered discrimination, never.”<sup>33</sup> Liborio Santiago Pérez recalls similar satisfaction: “My boss treated us marvelously. There have been a lot of comments about how we were treated badly, and who knows? I don’t really have anything to say about the Americans...I was never harassed or anything, we were never discriminated against.”<sup>34</sup> But these braceros more importantly remember what the bracero program gave them after it concluded. For Liborio Santiago Pérez, his work as a bracero allowed him to leave a legacy for his family in Mexico: “I was [in the United States] for a long time, I’m calculating...like six years. I set a goal for myself to send money every month. Finally I bought a lot [in Mexico]...It was a lot of work to have all of this [motions to his house], it’s an inheritance for my family. The day I die, I can say, ‘This is for you.’”<sup>35</sup> Pérez represents the experiences of many braceros who did not define themselves by their time in the bracero program, but rather used it to improve their futures, and provide for their families. Although only some braceros choose to remember its benefits over its

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<sup>33</sup> Patrick Mullins, Director, *Bracero Stories*, 2008, 27:15-27:51.

<sup>34</sup> Mullins, *Bracero Stories*, 28:35-29:00.

<sup>35</sup> Mullins, *Bracero Stories*, 49:07-49:36.

failures, almost all braceros remember what the program helped them accomplish—the ultimate act of agency, and self-identification.

“One remembers everything,” concludes José Santos Guevara, “almost as if you could go back and walk around those places. And one almost does! You have to remember everything, good things, bad things, that you suffered...there are so many things.”<sup>36</sup> While the bracero program yielded a variety of experiences, braceros’ voices significantly assert their power in a system designed and used to render them powerless. Braceros neither saw themselves as representatives of the Mexican government, nor destined for stoop labor, nor the enemy of the American worker or the average Mexican American citizen. Rather, during the bracero program, most braceros merely attempted to survive what would have most likely been the hardest and most alien experience thus far in the lives of these young men. But almost all braceros used the bracero program to forge better lives for themselves, creating an individual identity that superseded the Mexican government, growers, unions and rights groups, and the entire bracero experience itself.

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<sup>36</sup> Mullins, *Bracero Stories*, 37:34-38:03.

## EPILOGUE

After codifying the bracero program throughout the 1950s, on December 31, 1964, Congress finally allowed Public Law 78 to expire—marking the official end of the bracero program.<sup>1</sup> While this Independent Study has thus far analyzed the conflicting roles of racial identity as it relates to contract labor, identity politics did not contribute to the conclusion of the bracero program. Rather, the recent election of President John F. Kennedy combined with a more liberal political climate resulted in improved relations with Latin America and Mexico—which included increasing restrictions on bracero labor. What growers once used as cheap and easily disposable alternatives to domestic labor now became a federally regulated commodity. Growers inevitably gave up their investment in braceros, and allowed President Kennedy to eventually terminate the program. In this way, the end of the bracero program simply meant the end of structured contract labor, and leaving the program's underlying issues of race, identity, and labor unresolved.

When President Kennedy took office in 1961, two primary factors influenced his foreign relations with Mexico—the arrogant policies toward Latin America exercised by previous administrations and the American public's growing awareness of bracero labor. In the two terms preceding President Kennedy, President Dwight D. Eisenhower took a unilateral approach toward Latin American affairs; for example, in 1954 he authorized a covert operation overthrowing the president of Guatemala because of his tolerance for leftist, and possibly communist, groups. Latin American citizens protested this chauvinist

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy*, (University of Texas Press, 1971), 150.



treatment through violent anti-American demonstrations, most notably when Vice President Richard Nixon toured Peru and Venezuela in 1958.<sup>2</sup> While Latin America reacted to Eisenhower's nationalist policies, on the domestic front, Americans responded to Latin American exploitation within the United States. In 1960, CBS broadcasted a documentary chronicling the mistreatment of migrant farm workers entitled "Harvest of Shame." The station deliberately debuted the film on Thanksgiving day to emphasize the origins of American produce, and prompted political outrage from viewers. As a result, members of Congress at the end of the Eisenhower era received floods of mail from constituents calling for an end to the bracero program.<sup>3</sup> With a history of condescending policies toward Latin America and a general public now conscious of Mexican stoop labor, President Kennedy entered office with an agenda to overhaul the United States' relationship with Latin America, Mexico, and by extension, braceros.

Within three months of his election, President Kennedy responded to the foreign policy situation he inherited by proposing the Alliance for Progress, a economic aid program he hoped would promote bilateral relations with Latin America. In an effort to reverse precedents set under the Eisenhower administration, President Kennedy responded to the needs and desires of Latin American nations (with the exception of communist Cuba) instead of solely defending American interests. Abstractly, President Kennedy used the Alliance as a tool to better understand and address underlying social,

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon*, (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 104.

<sup>3</sup> Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1992), 142-143.

economic, and political relationships between the United States and Latin America.<sup>4</sup> More concretely, the Alliance for Progress encouraged Latin American development; to reward initiatives for long term land and tax reforms in individual countries, the United States government would distribute foreign capital on concessional terms.<sup>5</sup> With this framework of cooperative change provided by the Alliance for Progress, President Kennedy went on to amend other existing exchanges with Latin American countries—including the bracero program.

Inspired by his new foreign policy agenda, President Kennedy prioritized federal regulation of the bracero program more than any of his predecessors. The president supported the use of Mexican contract workers, but he also recognized that growers often abused the program and exploited braceros in practice. As a result, President Kennedy viewed the bracero program as a symbolic example of American aggression that needed reform in order to effectively improve relations with Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Although President Kennedy emphasized protections for American workers instead of braceros themselves, no previous administration had ever attempted to seriously enforce the bracero program's terms regarding either domestic or bracero labor.<sup>7</sup> This made the president's commitment to federal oversight unprecedented, and promised significant changes to the bracero

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<sup>4</sup> L. Ronald Scheman, "The Alliance for Progress: Concept and Creativity," chap. in *The Alliance for Progress: A Retrospective*, ed. L. Ronald Scheman (New York, Westport, London: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Enrique Lerdaun, "The Alliance for Progress: The Learning Experience," chap. in *The Alliance for Progress: A Retrospective*, ed. L. Ronald Scheman (New York, Westport, London: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 167.

<sup>6</sup> Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Vernon Briggs, *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 101.

program. President Kennedy warned growers that tighter federal administration had now become the new price for contract labor, and without it, he would terminate the program as early as 1962.<sup>8</sup> But with a pledge to actively supervise the bracero program and build a new relationship with Mexico, President Kennedy approved a Congressional extension of Public Law 78 and the bracero program continued into the 1960s.

President Kennedy upheld his vow to reform the bracero program, although with varying degrees of effectiveness. For example, the president proposed four amendments to Public Law 78 before it went for Congressional vote. These included limits on the number of braceros employed by a single grower, requirements that braceros and domestics receive the same “conditions of employment,” banning braceros from off-season work, and insisting that growers pay braceros wages comparable to state and national averages. While some of these amendments did not survive Congress, historian Richard Craig argues that President Kennedy’s demand for restriction still foreshadowed changes in the bracero program.<sup>9</sup> In 1962 the Kennedy administration employed reform outside Congress by authorizing the Department of Labor to implement an adverse-wage rate system to increase braceros’ paychecks. Now, growers had to pay braceros according to federal standards, instead of arbitrarily determining the prevailing wage of a region.<sup>10</sup> President Kennedy further demonstrated his commitment to a new bracero program by ensuring that growers recognized the new changes in contract labor; in January of 1962, the Labor Department distributed a notice to all bracero employers that detailed the

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<sup>8</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 164.

<sup>9</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 164, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Briggs, *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*, 101.

federal interpretations of both PL 78 and its amendments.<sup>11</sup> While President Kennedy did not radically alter the bracero program, he nevertheless remained dedicated to the fair use of braceros. More than the president's legislative amendments alone, growers' response to new bracero regulations would ultimately doom the future of contract labor.

Federal limitations on bracero labor combined with growing anti-bracero sentiment in Congress caused agribarons to abandon their support of the bracero program, and allow the federal government to terminate it. Richard Craig writes that since the election of President Kennedy, Congress passed the bracero program by much narrower margins than during the 1950s, at the peak of the program's use.<sup>12</sup> For agribarons who already found a restrictive bracero program less attractive, the political climate in Congress signaled that they should decrease their stake in bracero labor. With growers' new disinterest and pressure from President Kennedy for reform, historian Vernon Briggs suspects that Congress would have terminated the bracero program sooner if not for intervention by the Mexican government. Mexico's government still supported a guest labor program, and feared that the sudden repatriation of braceros would overwhelm their labor market. In 1963 the Kennedy administration compromised—Congress once again renewed the bracero program with the understanding that it would end the following year.<sup>13</sup> Thus, with President Kennedy and liberal members of Congress satisfied, growers disinvested in saving bracero labor, and the Mexican government appeased with gradual repatriation, the bracero program officially concluded in 1964.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert C. Goodwin, "Proposed Interpretations of Recent P.L. 78 Amendments," Ernesto Galarza Papers, box 21 folder 7, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 196.

<sup>13</sup> Briggs, *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*, 101-102.

Despite the racial tensions that existed in the bracero program between growers, domestic workers, Mexican American citizens and braceros, the Kennedy administration terminated the program because of its effects on foreign policy. With this superficial closure, the bracero program consequently ended in structure only, and left issues of identity unresolved. The longstanding conflicts between race and labor inherent in the bracero program would ultimately continue, and impact Mexican migration and American agribusiness for decades to come.

## CONCLUSION

All my life I have been driven by one dream, one goal, one vision: to overthrow a farm labor system in this nation which treats farm workers as if they were not important human beings.

- César Chávez<sup>1</sup>

Although the bracero program ended in 1964, it left a legacy of dependence on Mexican labor and their exploitation by American agribusiness that continued even after the program's termination. While some braceros repatriated after their contracts expired, the Mexican government never saw the wave of national development and modernization it anticipated. Instead, many former braceros planned to emigrate permanently to the United States for higher qualities of life. Other braceros simply never returned to Mexico, and joined the thousands of undocumented workers who sought higher American wages. This growing pool of undocumented labor replaced the loss of contract workers, allowing California growers to continue strengthening agribusiness on the backs of Mexican migrants—just as they did during the bracero program. Consequently, the consistent use and misuse of undocumented Mexican farm workers impeded the goals of unions and Mexican American civil rights groups, replicating the struggles they faced in the bracero era. These ongoing patterns in migration and labor demonstrate the lasting impact of the bracero program, and the repercussions bracero labor had on American financial farming.

Despite the lingering consequences of the bracero program, agricultural workers and discriminated Mexican Americans found hope in the political and social activism of

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<sup>1</sup> César Chávez, “1984 César Chávez Address to the Commonwealth Club of California” (speech, San Francisco, November 9, 1984), The Commonwealth Club of California, [http://www.chavezfoundation.org/\\_cms.php?mode=view&b\\_code=001008000000000&b\\_no=16&page=1&field=&key=&n=8](http://www.chavezfoundation.org/_cms.php?mode=view&b_code=001008000000000&b_no=16&page=1&field=&key=&n=8).

César Chávez in the 1960s. As a Mexican American and former stoop laborer in California, Chávez had an intimate understanding of the inferior conditions for agricultural workers and prejudice against Mexicans. This experience not only inspired Chávez to form his own labor union in 1962, but in 1965 he would later join—and eventually win—the most influential farm labor strike of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> A virtually impossible feat during the bracero program, Chávez' infamous Delano grape strike both vindicated the unions whose protests failed because of braceros, and strengthened collective labor.

Just a year after the bracero program ended, all grape pickers in Delano, California left the fields over their exploitation by several large agricultural conglomerates. Growers reacted to the Delano strike like they did the DiGiorgio strike led by Ernesto Galarza in 1947—ironically, with a struck ranch owned by Joseph DiGiorgio participating in tactics to taunt picketers, incite violence, and use undocumented Mexican laborers as scabs. However, when César Chávez lent his support to the Delano strike, he employed strategies not used by Galarza to affect the outcome in Delano. Chávez first encouraged mass boycotts of grapes and wine sold by the struck ranches among the protesting workers, and later extended it to community members. This significantly lowered growers' profits, and gave economic power to the strike. Chávez also utilized Mexican symbols to emphasize union strength, uniting the support of laborers and Mexican Americans in a way that Galarza never could under the divisive bracero program. In 1970, after five years of striking, Chávez's union successfully

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Etulain, "Becoming an Organizer," *César Chávez: A Brief Biography With Documents*, ed. Richard Etulain (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 3-6.

reached a collective bargaining agreement with Delano's most powerful growers, a move that affected the livelihood of over ten thousand American and Mexican agricultural laborers.<sup>3</sup>

After his critical leadership in the Delano strike, César Chávez became a national icon and arguably the most famous Mexican American of the 1970s. Despite this new role, he remained conscious of the fragile relationship between race, identity, and labor. Chávez ensured that his union, the now infamous United Farm Workers, included men and women of different races, ethnicities, and various economic and educational backgrounds under its umbrella of protection. Reflecting his own Mexican American heritage, Chávez also encouraged all farm workers of Mexican descent to participate in the UFW, regardless of their self-identification as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Hispanic, Latino, Spanish, or any other name.<sup>4</sup> Chávez used his status as a national figure to create a union that embraced both political action and multiple racial identities—finally achieving what Ernesto Galarza strove for during the bracero program.

While César Chávez won the Delano grape strike, movements that successfully gained rights for Mexican farm workers peaked in the 1960s. Politicians and national culture have since grown less sympathetic toward Mexican laborers, despite their continued illegal use by American employers. In the early 1990s, construction began on a fence that divided Southern California and Mexico as a means to prevent illegal migration. The barrier has grown, and now currently extends from 1,300 feet into the

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<sup>3</sup> Etulain, *César Chávez: A Brief Biography With Documents*, 8-13.

<sup>4</sup> Etulain, *César Chávez: A Brief Biography With Documents*, 22.



Pacific Ocean to the Texas Rio Grande Valley over 650 miles away.<sup>5</sup> The image of a chain link fence winding along the border makes a powerful statement about the ostracized status of undocumented Mexicans in the United States. In a photo essay for TIME Magazine, Anthony Suau juxtaposes the fence's construction with depictions of a Mexican family scaling the fence, the arrest of three undocumented men along the border, and the interior of a deportation truck bringing migrants back to Mexico.<sup>6</sup> While the federal government builds structural dividers like the border fence and ratifies other symbolic boundaries through legislation, American agribusiness still heavily relies on Mexican stoop labor for crop production. In 2004, Bob Vice, the co-chair for the Agricultural Coalition for Immigration Reform, estimated that California employed about eighty percent of its farm workers illegally. He justified the practice as necessary for the industry's survival, saying, "If I pay a wage that is unrealistic in terms of cost to harvest [my crops], then my product will not be competitive in the world market in product from other countries that have a much lower labor force."<sup>7</sup> A conservative stance on Mexican immigration combined with the frequent use of undocumented Mexican labor has made it extremely difficult to achieve social justice for Mexican farm workers. Caught between oppression in the fields and their fear of deportation, many Mexican farm workers now simply suffer in silence.

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Clifford, "Border Fence's Devastating Toll," *Salon*, September 18, 2012, [http://www.salon.com/2012/09/18/border\\_fences\\_devastating\\_toll/](http://www.salon.com/2012/09/18/border_fences_devastating_toll/).

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Suau, "The Great Wall of America," *TIME*, <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1814377,00.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Kaye, "Immigration Reform," *PBS News Hour*, Read by Jeffrey Kaye, February 4 2004, Web, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/jan-june04/immigration\\_02-04.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/jan-june04/immigration_02-04.html).

I opened this Independent Study with President George W. Bush's proposal for a subsequent guest worker program. But as shown through the bracero program, even moderate restrictions on Mexican labor do not effectively satisfy the demands of agribusiness while maintaining control over who crosses the border. Instead, temporary labor programs permit the exploitation of workers, encourage illegal migration, and have significant repercussions on the formation and expression of racial identity. As long as employers still utilize manual labor, and domestic workers refuse to perform the work or accept the wages, Mexican labor will remain vital to the American workforce. The federal government and the American public must consequently accept the presence of Mexican migrant laborers—not on an illegal basis, and not as temporary workers—but wholeheartedly embrace them both as workers and as equals.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### *Primary Sources*

Adams, R.L. *Farm Management: A Text-Book for Student, Investigator, and Investor*. London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1921.

I used this textbook on California agribusiness similarly to how I used grower Charles Teague's personal memoir: as a representative document of how growers thought about and used Mexican and American labor. While this book encompasses a variety of topics pertaining to agriculture, it also spends a significant amount of time on the different races of farm labor, and how growers thought race affected their work and temperament.

Bush, George W. "President Bush Proposes New Temporary Worker Program." Speech, Washington DC, January 7, 2004. The White House. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040107-3.html>.

In this transcript of a speech given at the White House in 2004, President George W. Bush first publicly proposed a new guest worker program between the United States and Mexico as the primary component in his plan for immigration reform. This speech not only placed the possibility of a temporary worker program, potentially a 'second bracero program,' in contemporary political consciousness, but prompted a resurgence in bracero scholarship, due to its renewed relevance.

Chávez, César. "1984 César Chávez Address to the Commonwealth Club of California." Speech, San Francisco, November 9, 1984. The Commonwealth Club of California. [http://www.chavezfoundation.org/\\_cms.php?mode=view&b\\_code=001008000000000&b\\_no=16&page=1&field=&key=&n=8](http://www.chavezfoundation.org/_cms.php?mode=view&b_code=001008000000000&b_no=16&page=1&field=&key=&n=8).

While César Chávez mentions braceros in this speech advocating for protections for farm laborers, I used his union speech for a quote. Because I opened the introduction of my Independent Study with a quote from President George W. Bush, I thought it fitting to begin my conclusion with a quote from such a famous Mexican American labor leader.

Clark, Noble, William M. Leirserson, Robert E. Lucey, Peter H. Odegard, Maurice T. Van Hecke. *Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: Report to the President's Commission on Migratory Labor*. 1951.

This Commission reported to President Harry Truman regarding the status of both Mexican contract and undocumented labor, and its effect on domestic workers. The findings reflect common investigations of the bracero program—that the program exploited workers and negatively impacted domestic laborers. But this Commission both failed to take California’s extensive use of braceros into account, and merely offered vague policy suggestions to the President, allowing this report to enable bracero misuse.

Corman, Thomas. “They Help Feed America.” Article, February 1957. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

This magazine article contains two parts: a short article about the nature of the bracero program and the bracero workers themselves, and a photo essay depicting bracero life in California. I used this article as an example of how agribusiness sought to frame bracero workers as happy, subservient, and capable workers, which further reinforced stereotypes of Mexicans that had been growing in agribusiness for decades.

Danenberg, Danny. “Presentation Before the House Agricultural Subcommittee.” Presentation, March 1, 1958. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

In this presentation before the House of Representatives, several growers give testimony that they know the terms of the bracero program, such as hiring practices, and follow them. This document serves as proof that growers abused the bracero program, since multiple other primary and secondary sources show that growers did not abide by the program’s hiring procedures. I used this document in my second chapter, to make the point that growers used the bracero program as they saw fit.

Galarza, Ernesto. “Letter to James C. Bryant.” Letter, November 28, 1950. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

In this short letter, Ernesto Galarza asks an employee of the State Department of Employment in California for a specific definition of prevailing wage—the wage system used to pay braceros. Galarza, a labor leader, clearly writes this letter with the hopes of disproving its existence, since despite a ‘prevailing wage system’ growers did not pay braceros the same as domestic laborers. I used this letter as significant evidence to prove abuses of the bracero program in my second chapter.

Galarza, Ernesto. *Mexican-United States Labor Relations and Problems, 1950*. George I. Sánchez Papers, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

This document serves an additional example of Ernesto Galarza's advocacy for both braceros and American workers through the National Farm Labor Union. In it, he not only disproves the effectiveness of many provisions in the bracero program, but he also provides alternative ways to enforce fair labor through the program, and reaffirms his commitment to labor regardless of nationality.

Galarza, Ernesto. *National Farm Labor Union: Statement on the Importation of Agricultural Workers from Mexico, 1948*. George I. Sánchez Papers, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

In this seven-page document, Ernesto Galarza writes on behalf of the National Farm Labor Union and systematically deconstructs the failures of the bracero agreement. In my second chapter, I used this document to make the point that through Galarza, a national union objected to the bracero program because it negatively impacted braceros, and not just domestic workers.

Galarza, Ernesto. *Poverty in the Valley of Plenty, a Report on the DiGiorgio Strike, 1948*. George I. Sánchez Papers, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

Ernesto Galarza authored this report on the DiGiorgio strike, and provided an account of the events during the strike itself. I used this report because it contained a great quote about how racial labor had always been part of labor strikes, and how even some of the racial groups involved regretted the racial dynamics that divided them against an oppressor.

Goodwin, Robert M. "Proposed Interpretations of Recent P.L. 78 Amendments." Letter, January 9, 1962. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford, California.

This notice from the Department of Labor, distributed to all bracero users in 1962, specifically laid out the updated terms of Public Law 78, or the legislation that codified the bracero program. Written during the Kennedy administration, it signified the enforcement of new restrictions in the bracero program. I used this notice to demonstrate this point in my epilogue.

Gonzalez, Gilbert, Vivian Price, and Adrian Salinas. *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*. DVD. Directed by Gilbert Gonzalez, Vivian Price, and Adrian Salinas. New York: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2010.

This documentary utilizes interviews from several significant scholars on the bracero program, such as Kitty Calavita and Henry Anderson, in addition to oral testimonies from former braceros. While I used this film along with the other bracero documentary *Bracero Stories* to supplement my analysis of bracero

identity, this film analyzed the bracero program from a much more negative perspective. This provided an interesting comparison, and allowed me to build a more well rounded image of braceros with this range of experiences.

Hayes, Edward F. "Letter to Ernesto Galarza." Letter, December 1, 1950. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

This letter replies to an inquiry by Ernesto Galarza about the specific formula used to calculate prevailing wage, or the method by which growers determine braceros' pay. In it, the Chief of the Farm Placement Service tells Galarza that no formula for prevailing wage exists, confirming Galarza's suspicions that prevailing wage pays braceros arbitrarily. Prevailing wage remained a consistent component to the bracero program, and this letter helped confirm the bracero program's ineffective terms.

Hayes, Edward F. "Letter to Farm Placement Supervisors and Farm Placement Representatives." Letter, February 23, 1954. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

I used this letter as a representation of the many letters and notices given to growers about the proper use of bracero labor. In this specific example, the Chief of the Farm Placement Service in California detailed the appropriate situations to hire bracero laborers, and the resulting consequences for growers who did not comply. This letter provided evidence for my argument that not only did growers misuse the bracero program, but enforcers of the bracero program often did not follow through with punishment.

Larin, Don. "Letter to All Employers of Contract Foreign Workers." Letter, August 15, 1961. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

Although this letter to California growers dates to 1961, I used it in my second chapter which detailed growers' use of the bracero program from its inception to the late 1940s. Despite the discrepancy in time, this document very clearly spelled out growers' requirement to hire domestic laborers over braceros—a consistent and integral term in all legislative forms of the bracero program.

Loza, Mireya. "Braceros on the Boundaries: Activism, Race, Masculinity and the Legacies of the Bracero Program." Doctorate diss., Brown University, 2011.

I used this doctoral dissertation on the bracero program from Brown University to loosely guide my historiography, because the author used many of the significant secondary sources on the bracero program that I used in this Independent Study.

But more specifically, she included a chapter on the Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de México en los Estados Unidos, or bracero union. Because not much secondary scholarship on this union exists, I primarily used Mireya Loza's research when I mentioned it in my fourth chapter.

Mitchell, H.L. "Letter to Secretary of Labor Maurice J. Tobin." Letter, July 8, 1952. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

In this letter, the president of the National Farm Labor Union questions if braceros can legally join unions in accordance to their contract. More specifically, he notes that while the Department of Labor does not specifically prohibit it, they more importantly do not condone it either. This served as another example of the vague terms of the bracero agreement, leaving its users to interpret it as they wished.

Mitchell, H.L. *Report to the Sub-Committee of the House Labor Committee Investigating the DiGiorgio Strike, 1949*. George I. Sánchez Papers, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

In this report to the House of Representatives, the president of the National Farm Labor Union provides an incredibly detailed account of the DiGiorgio strike. In particular, I used this report for the details of how DiGiorgio representatives handled the strike, such as telling reporters that braceros were content with their living and working conditions.

Mullins, Patrick. *Bracero Stories*. DVD. Directed by Patrick Mullins. El Paso: Cherry Lane Productions, 2008.

This hour long documentary relies primarily of the oral testimonies of approximately ten former braceros to recreate a comprehensive retelling of the bracero program experience. Although some braceros contradicted one another in terms of how they characterized particular practices, several collective memories of recruiting and field labor emerged, which greatly informed my analysis of bracero identity in Chapter Four. Additionally, the last segment of this documentary discussed both President George Bush's proposal for a second contract labor program, and related the bracero program to the activism of César Chávez, and in this way helped me place the bracero program in greater historical context.

Rice, George L. "Letter to Governor Edmund G. Brown," Letter, February 4, 1959. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

In this letter to California's governor in 1959, the author personally shares that growers have confided in him about not only their use of the bracero program concerning hiring, but their depictions of domestic labor. This letter significantly confirms growers' preference of bracero labor over domestic labor through personal testimony. In my chapter on growers, I used this letter as evidence to prove that growers both abused the bracero program, and attempted to shut out domestic workers from farm labor.

Teague, Charles. *Fifty Years a Rancher: The Recollections of Half a Century Devoted to the Citrus and Walnut Industries of California and to Further the Cooperative Movement in Agriculture*. Charles Collins Teague, 1941.

I used this self-published memoir of a California grower as an example of popular theories shared by growers regarding the race and functionality of their laborers. Charles Teague spends sections on what race of laborers possess certain characteristics, including both Mexicans and Americans. This primary source confirmed many theories in secondary sources that growers viewed Mexicans as racially superior laborers to Americans.

War Manpower Commission. *Individual Work Agreement for Fausto Sánchez Aguilar, 1945*. In possession of author.

This worker contract for a railroad bracero laid out the legal terms and formalities of the bracero program, both in English and in Spanish. When I read about provisions in the bracero program from secondary sources, for example, that braceros could not work during a domestic strike, I checked this labor contract for evidence.

Yarrow, Clarence H. *Report of the National Farm Labor Union Strike at the DiGiorgio Labor Ranch near Bakersfield, 1948*. Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections, Stanford California.

This report provides an unbiased account of the DiGiorgio strike, providing background, and major sources of conflict. Because of the prominence of the strike in labor history during the bracero program, I did not need most of the information detailed. But statistics about the ranch's size and its production did help me put the magnitude of the strike into perspective.

Zapata, Emiliano. *Plan of Ayala. Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940*. Edited by James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels. Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.



In Emiliano Zapata's Plan of Ayala, he formally calls Mexico's first revolutionary president Francisco Madero a traitor to the true nature of the Mexican Revolution. He also recommits himself to rural agricultural traditions. While I briefly mention this document, it serves as a significant example of Zapata's political orientation during the Revolution, and marks his status as a defender of rural Mexico.

### ***Secondary Sources***

Anderson, Henry. *The Bracero Program in California*. Arno Press, 1976.

Henry Anderson's analysis of the bracero program sociologically assesses the health of braceros before and after their contracts in the United States. But Anderson also takes a more practical public health approach to the bracero program, by looking at the quality of their health care while working in California. Ultimately, after his study he comes to blame all of the shortcomings of the program not on its regulators, but to the nature of a labor exchange program itself, and sees this reflected in the health of braceros. While Anderson's book primarily focuses on health care in the bracero program, his work also has value as a general resource. In addition, Anderson includes an analysis of some cultural differences experienced between growers and braceros, which I use to give depth to issues of racial identity that existed when growers hired Mexican laborers.

Beezley, William, and Colin MacLachlan. *Mexicans in Revolution, 1910-1946*. University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

William Beezley and Colin MacLachlan's book serves as a comprehensive introduction to the history of the Mexican Revolution. While it contained helpful information and explained the basic narrative and players in the Mexican Revolution, it also had some drawbacks. Beezley and MacLachlan used different interpretations of the length of the Mexican Revolution, arguing that it spanned two decades longer than most historians believe it did. Despite this, the authors especially focus on the issues of land and urbanization throughout the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. Because my study focuses in part on a rural Mexican class who would eventually become braceros, this dynamic greatly informed my analysis of how the changes in Mexico led to the bracero program.

Brandenburg, Frank. *Causes of the Revolution. Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940*. Edited by James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels. Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

In this essay, historian Frank Brandenburg uses primary documents to supplement his analysis of the Mexican Revolution, with a specific focus on land reform in rural Mexico. This essay informed my own analysis of Dictator Porfirio Díaz'

effect on land in Mexico before the Revolution, and the resulting economic injustice.

Briggs, Vernon M. *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984.

Vernon Briggs' work focuses on United States immigration policy and the evolution of its effects on the American labor force. Briggs emphasizes that his study pertains to policy development after World War II, and not the explanations for immigration. Although Briggs only includes one short general overview on the bracero program, he details the program's termination during the Kennedy administration, which appears in my epilogue.

Brunk, Samuel. *¡Emiliano Zapata!: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press, 1995.

I used Samuel Brunk's book as my definitive resource for biographical information on Emiliano Zapata, and his role in the Mexican Revolution. Brunk ultimately viewed Zapata's career through the lens of a Robin Hood-type figure, but also strays from portraying Zapata as strictly heroic. In his account, Zapata drinks, swears, executes wealthy landowners, in addition to promoting the welfare of Mexican peasants. This puts him as a moderate biographer in the scope of scholarship on Zapata. This book allowed me explore Zapata as a representation of Mexico's poor in the Mexican Revolution, and how through concrete examples in Zapata's life, the war did not ultimately meet the needs of Zapata or the peasants he stood for.

Calavita, Kitty. *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.* New York: Routledge, Inc., 1992.

Kitty Calavita focuses on the bracero program from the perspective of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and how this agency affected the outcome of the program. While she agrees that the bracero program served as an avenue for growers to acquire cheap labor, she argues that the INS did not act out of pressure from growers. Rather, their aims often coincidentally overlapped with growers' interests. Calavita's research also presents the internal divisions of the federal government. Scholars writing about the bracero program frequently cite Calavita's work, making it significant in the field. One of its strengths comes from her focus on a narrative from the perspective of the government, when so many scholarly works analyze the bracero program with the laborer at the center. For my purposes, Calavita's analysis supplemented my narrative of the bracero program with the often uncovered angle of federal rationales.

Clifford, Frank. "Border Fence's Devastating Toll." *Salon*, September 8 2012. [http://www.salon.com/2012/09/18/border\\_fences\\_devastating\\_toll/](http://www.salon.com/2012/09/18/border_fences_devastating_toll/).

In this online article for *Salon*, Frank Clifford reports on the danger posed by a border fence between Mexico and the United States. While his story includes individual testimonies from those personally affected by the border fence, I primarily relied on his article for a succinct history on the border fence.

Cohen, Deborah. *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Despite being a recent contribution to the field, Deborah Cohen's work thoroughly analyzes the factors that drove the bracero program. She supports the argument the United States government imported braceros to provide agribusiness with expendable workers. She also furthers the idea that growers desired Mexican labor because they fit growers' qualifications for the ideal worker through perceived desirable ethnic traits. From the perspective of unions, organized American labor saw braceros as obstacles to their goals, and accordingly treated Mexican nationals as threats. But perhaps Cohen's strongest analysis centers on the Mexican government. She writes that in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, it used contract labor as a modernizing process. Cohen supplements all of her analysis with interviews she conducted with former braceros. Cohen's work serves as an incredibly detailed and informative resource, and provided me with a framework with which to read other sources on the bracero program.

Craig, Richard. *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy*. University of Texas Press, 1971.

Richard Craig's work often gets remembered as one of the quintessential sources on the bracero program. Craig uses interest group theory as a lens to analyze the program, primarily focusing on the interests of the United States and Mexican governments, agribusiness, and labor unions, and how their interconnected relationships affected the bracero program. He emphasizes that the influence of small groups, specifically agricultural growers, had great power in pushing for legislation that codified the bracero program. Craig also constructs the specific arguments of political parties supporting or opposing the bracero program, and the Congressional process that approved its passage. Craig writes with detail, reinforcing the idea of this text as an authoritative source on the bracero program, and allowing me to utilize his work as an account of the formal arrangements in the bracero program.

Driscoll, Barbara. *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*. CMAS Books, 1999.

Barbara Driscoll's work remains one of the quintessential texts on the railroad bracero program. Railroad braceros were only contracted for two and a half years, as compared to the agricultural program, which lasted for over two decades. Because of this vast discrepancy, the majority of secondary literature available focuses on agricultural braceros, making Driscoll's book even more valuable. She argues that the railroad program developed out of a wartime environment combined with a strong relationship between the railroad industry and the federal government, and concluded in part due to the strong presence of unions. I used Driscoll's work as my main source detailing the railroad program, since she focuses on it so extensively. I relied on her analysis of the role railroad unions played in the bracero program, since Driscoll repeatedly emphasizes their power, compared to the domination of organized labor in the agricultural program.

Etulain, Richard. *Becoming an Organizer. César Chávez: A Brief Biography With Documents*. Edited by Richard Etulain. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.

While this source came with useful primary source documents, I used it for bibliographic information on labor leader César Chávez, and information regarding his famous 1965 Delano grape strike. Chávez's story informs my conclusion, and helps me connect patterns left by the bracero program with more contemporary Mexican migration and labor.

Fletcher, Michael, Darryl Fears. "Bush Pushes Guest-Worker Program." *Washington Post*, November 29, 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/28/AR2005112800067.html>.

This article records the reactions of a variety of interest groups responding to President George W. Bush's proposal of a guest worker program in 2004, including Republicans, and a spokeswoman for the National Council of La Raza, a Latino civil rights group. While this article gauges the popularity of Bush's plan, it also demonstrates how it became a repeated solution for immigration reform.

Foley, Neil. *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. University of California Press: Berkley, Los Angeles, London, 1997.

Although Neil Foley's *The White Scourge* focuses on race relations in Texas agriculture, he writes that they closely resembled rural California rather than of traditional Southern culture. He writes about the prominence of the eugenics movement in early twentieth century America and how this affected race relations in Texas. According to Foley, in the eyes of agribarons not all whites could claim to be 'purely' white—poor whites supposedly had genetic components that made them inferior, which according to the eugenics theory, came from racial mixing. Because Foley writes about racial identities in Texas agriculture and labor, many

of his specific arguments did not apply to my analysis of braceros in California. But his overall framework of racial systems, which he elaborates on in his introduction, contributed to my writing on the identities of farm workers in California, and how growers perceived them and used race to justify the quality of their laborers.

Galarza, Ernesto. *Farm Workers in Agri-business in California, 1947-1960*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

Unlike *Merchants of Labor*, in this book Ernesto Galarza focuses more on labor protests than he does on the bracero program, although given his experience, the bracero program becomes a vital element in this work. It contains a chapter on the DiGiorgio strike, and although Galarza provides an extensive account, I used this book primarily for its details on the lawsuit filed by Joseph DiGiorgio, and how it ended the strike.

Galarza, Ernesto. *Merchants of Labor The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*. Charlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1964.

In *Merchants of Labor*, Ernesto Galarza chronicles the development of bracero labor in California and exposes the rampant abuse of these workers by their agribusiness employers. Galarza, a union leader, explains how growers used the holes in the bracero program to take advantage of the contracted workers, using statistics from the federal government to support his claims. Although Galarza left his mark as one of the most prominent bracero advocates, with *Merchants of Labor* frequently cited by historians as a quintessential text on the bracero program, Galarza's work contains significant flaws. Galarza does not analyze the program with a clear thesis in mind. He also cuts his narrative off at 1960, missing the termination of the program, a weakness he freely admits to in his introduction. Galarza published *Merchants of Labor* soon after the bracero program concluded, perhaps making it too early for any significant analysis of the program.

Galarza, Ernesto. *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.

Ernesto Galarza devotes this entire book to the DiGiorgio strike in 1948. While this book provided supplementary details to my own analysis, it covered the strike too extensively for my purposes. Galarza also devotes much of his focus to the lawsuit between the DiGiorgio Ranch and the National Farm Labor Union, which I only briefly mention in my third chapter.

Gamboa, Erasmo. *On the Nation's Periphery: Mexican Braceros and the Pacific Northwest Railroad Industry 1943-1946. Mexican Americans & World War II.* Edited by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.

In this essay, Erasmo Gamboa emphasizes that the bracero program shipped laborers all over the United States beyond just Texas and California. In studying braceros in the Pacific Northwest, Gamboa reflects the conclusion many other scholars reach—the conditions promised to the bracero workers in their contracts generally did not come to fruition. Gamboa's essay contributes to the field by focusing on the Pacific Northwest and the unique problems that braceros in these areas faced due to their geography.

García, Mario. *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona.* University of California Press, 1994.

In this work by Mario T. García, he tells the story of Chicano activist and labor organizer Bert Corona as an oral history, written in the first person and informed by years of interviews and conversations. García writes that Corona's memory has value because it serves as a 'social memory.' Corona's individual story revolve around themes of identity and social injustice, which characterize the experiences of other individuals and entire communities. For my purposes, I only utilized a chapter where Corona specifically talks about working with Mexican American unions in California and their interaction with braceros. Despite only using sections of Corona's testimony, his oral history helped to contextualize the role of the bracero program in larger narratives of both Mexican and labor rights.

García, Mario T. *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930-1960.* Yale University Press, 1989.

Mario T. García uses his work to study the 'Mexican American Generation,' or those Americans of Mexican descent who came of age between the 1930s and 1950s, collectively experiencing the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. The Mexican Americans of this generation, García argues, emerged out of Southwestern barrios to organize the first significant civil rights movement for Mexican Americans. García ultimately seeks to study the relationship between ethnicity to generational change. One of the strengths of García's work comes from his thorough study of a variety of Mexican American groups, such as the Spanish-Speaking Congress, the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA), and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Although his work does not specifically focus on braceros, García does mention how each group responded to the issue of bracero labor, which I used to inform my third chapter.

Gonzalez, Michael. *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940*. University of New Mexico Press, 2002.

Although Michael Gonzalez's account of the Mexican Revolution serves as a survey of this period in Mexico's history, it provides a much more detailed account compared with with Beezley and MacLachlan's book, which I used as a brief introductory overview. For my purposes, his analysis of how land issues drove the revolutionary effort and how revolutionary politicians impeded tangible progress helped my own analysis of how these unresolved tensions carried over into the bracero program.

Gutiérrez, David G. *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995.

In *Walls and Mirrors*, David Gutiérrez investigates how and why Mexican Americans feel they way they do about immigration. He concludes that Mexican Americans generally fall into two camps—the first view immigrant Mexicans as a threat, who only create economic competition, reinforce negative racial stereotypes, and prevent any Mexican American progress for civil rights or equality. Mexican Americans on the other side of the divide most likely see themselves as recent arrivals, and see a common origin and culture as a binding ties to immigrants. With this view of the immigration debate in mind, Gutiérrez argues that Mexican Americans' own sense of ethnic and political identity determines their stance on the immigration debate more than any other factors. I used *Walls and Mirrors* as a resource to analyze how issues of identity affected Mexican Americans' views on the bracero program in my third chapter on Mexican American civil rights groups.

Herrera-Sobek, Maria. *The Bracero Experience: Elitlore Versus Folklore*. Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979.

Maria Herrera-Sobek primarily analyzes the bracero program from both 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives, then compares the two. She begins with an in-depth study of the fiction written during the bracero program, and the overarching themes in its most significant novels. She then uses a combines interviews from braceros into a composite bracero story, and uses this and an analysis of Mexican *corridos* to build a perspective of the bracero experience from braceros themselves. While her analysis informed my chapter on the Mexican government and braceros' self-reported identity, her work posed one major problem. She calls all Mexican migrants working in the United States before the end of the bracero program braceros, meaning I had to limit her analysis to contract laborers only.

Herrera-Sobek, María. *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.

This book in some ways acts as a companion to María Herrera-Sobek's *The Bracero Experience: Elitelore Versus Folklore*. In her previous book, she compared conceptualizations of braceros in Mexico through literature, bracero testimonies, and Mexican folk songs, or *corridos*. This book focuses solely on *corridos* from the early twentieth century through the 1970s. In my fourth chapter on bracero identity, I used this book combined with Herrera-Sobek's other book to analyze bracero folk songs.

Jacobo, Jose Rodolfo. *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers 1942-1964*. San Diego: Southern Border Press, 2004.

In this book, Jose Rodolfo Jacobo compiles an anthology of translated bracero testimonies. There seems to be no central theme or tie between the men, other than their status as braceros. In his introduction, Jacobo argues that these bracero testimonies have new relevance because of President George W. Bush's proposal for a new bracero program. Furthermore, Jacobo argues that these stories need preservation as braceros become older. I used the oral histories he collected in my fourth chapter on bracero identity.

Jelinek, Lawrence. *Harvest Empire: A History of California Agriculture*. Heinle & Heinle Publishing, 1982.

Lawrence Jelinek primarily focuses on explaining the growth and function of agriculture in California, giving special emphasis on deconstructing it as a business. He explains what type of crops growers produced and how, where funding came from, how grower collectives worked, and the philosophies of growers when hiring and dealing with labor. Primarily, this source helped me get a more thorough understanding of California agriculture itself.

Kaye, Jeffrey. "Immigration Reform." *PBS News Hour*. Recorded February 4 2004. Public Broadcasting Station. Web, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/jan-june04/immigration\\_02-04.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/jan-june04/immigration_02-04.html).

Although this transcript of a news segment highlights how a possible second guest worker program would affect labor in California, I used it specifically to look at how temporary labor would once again affect agribusiness. In particular, I used a quote from an avocado grower in my conclusion to demonstrate how California growers viewed Mexican manual labor.



Kirstein, Peter. *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon*. San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977.

Peter Kirstein uses this work to analyze the role of different American governmental agencies during the bracero program, and how they balanced pressure from unions and growers as they advocated for their respective interests. While many of the information he highlighted gets repeated in other works, I used Kirstein's study because it contained often overlooked details about the bracero program during the Kennedy administration, which enhanced my epilogue.

Lerdau, Enrique. *The Alliance for Progress: The Learning Experience. The Alliance for Progress: A Retrospective*. Edited by L. Ronald Scheman. New York, Westport, London: Praeger Publishers, 1988.

This chapter, from L. Ronald Scheman's anthology on the President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, provided me with more specific details on the Alliance's function. While I did not discuss the Alliance for Progress or its lasting legacy in depth in this Independent Study, this resource helped me extract enough information to touch upon it in my epilogue.

Levenstein, Harvey A. *Labor Organizations in the United States and Mexico: A History of Their Relations*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971.

Harvey Levenstein's chapter on bracero labor primarily focuses on the general history of Mexican and American labor unions. He refutes the stereotypes of American unions as either tools of the American government that support American political imperialism, or as completely devoted to uplifting their Mexican brothers to the standards enjoyed by Americans. Levenstein writes that the true aims of these unions lies somewhere in the middle, and requires a much more complex explanation. I primarily used Levenstein's work for supplemental details in my third chapter.

McWilliams, Carey. *California: The Great Exception*. New York: A.A. Wynn, 1949.

In this book, Carey McWilliams provides a comprehensive history of California up until the late 1940s, when the book was published. He analyzes California through its population growth, politics, agriculture, industry, and social concerns. Although I primarily relied on McWilliams' other work, *Factories in the Field* for information about agribusiness, because scholars consider McWilliams an expert on California agriculture, I used this book to supplement my analysis on agribusiness as well.

McWilliams, Carey. *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1940.

At the time of its publishing, scholars regarded journalist Carey McWilliams' *Factories in the Field* as a definitive "hidden history" of California agribusiness and labor. McWilliams' reputation as an expert on the subject grew to such a degree that in 1939, the governor of California appointed him as Commissioner of Immigration and Housing, while historians painted this book as a factual version of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. McWilliams' details the mass amounts of power held by growers (which he likens to fascism), the ways in which growers viewed and exploited both foreign and domestic labor, and the successes and failures of the unions and strikes that challenge this power. McWilliams writes with enormous authority, and his allowed me to place the bracero program in contextual history of the relationship between growers and laborers in California.

McWilliams, Carey. *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*. Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1949.

McWilliams' analyzes the conflicts and struggles of Americans and Mexicans in the Southwestern United States. He focuses on the journeys of people from Mexico to the Southwest, stating that they did not cross a border so much as they carried their experience to a similar environment. In the chapter I used, McWilliams records the stereotypes of Mexican laborers primarily in California during the 1920s and 1930s, allowing me to place the bracero program into a larger historical context.

Moore, Truman. *The Slaves We Rent*. New York: Random House, 1962.

This book contains several chapters in which Truman Moore recounts the status of agriculture in California. Moore covers the treatment of braceros from growers' point of view, their take on prevailing wages, and some quotes and dramatized scenes describing the interaction between braceros and growers. While Moore only writes a few chapters pertinent to my Independent Study, he provided me with an insight of how secondary source writers interpreted agriculture and bracero labor during the program itself.

Pitti, Stephen, "Bracero Justice: The Legacies of Mexican Contract Labor." Paper presented at the Seventh Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference, Yale University, October 27-29, 2005.

This paper given at a conference at Yale University focuses on the Bracero Justice Movement, a movement in the late 1990s to receive back wages held by the

Mexican government during the bracero program. The movement combined efforts from former braceros themselves, along with descendants of braceros and their families. I used this article to supplement information on the savings clause in the bracero program, proving how this, like many other facets of the program, did not function how the creators of the program intended it to.

Pitti, Stephen. "Ernesto Galarza, Mexican Immigration, and Farm Labor Organizing in Postwar California." *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State; Political Histories of Rural America*. (2001): 161-169.

Stephen Pitti's article on Ernesto Galarza explores his activism, and how he used transnational ties to affect issues of migration and farm labor in the United States throughout his career as a labor organizer. Pitti draws connections between Galarza's personal experiences as a Mexican American and his stances toward immigration policy. In particular, Pitti details Galarza's role in the DiGiorgio strike, which involved labor unions and braceros. Pitti's article informed my analysis of the intersection between American unions, Mexican Americans, and the bracero program, because Ernesto Galarza fought for the interests of these three groups despite their sometimes conflicting aims.

Quintana, Alejandro. *Pancho Villa: A Biography*. Greenwood, 2012.

I used Alejandro Quintana's biography of Pancho Villa as a basic guide when writing about Villa's life as it pertained to the goals of the Mexican Revolution. Quintana's source emphasized both Villa's personal ties to rural Mexico, and his interactions with Mexico's presidents after the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz. Therefore, with this book as a basis, I could make parallels between Villa's personal biography and his role in the Mexican Revolution. With Quintana's analysis, I concluded that Villa served as an extension of the interests of poor rural Mexicans, and that he served as their representative when interacting with revolutionary presidents.

Sánchez, George. *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945*. New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

George Sánchez uses this work to study how Mexicans who migrated to the United States balanced assimilation and retaining their cultural identity. He finds that Chicano history has embraced a bi-polar model of cultural identity—either one acculturates into mainstream American society or finds avenues for cultural continuity. Sánchez believes this model impedes a full exploration of the complex process of cultural adaptation, which he attempts in this book. Sánchez provides a strong history of Mexican and Mexican American identity issues before the

bracero program, and which gave me valuable context to trace the continuation of these identity issues during the bracero program.

Scheman, L. Ronald. *The Alliance for Progress: Concept and Creativity. The Alliance for Progress: A Retrospective*. Edited by L. Ronald Scheman. New York, Westport, London: Praeger Publishers, 1988.

In this chapter of an anthology dedicated to the President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, I got an overview of the program's purpose, in addition to the president's intentions for the program. While the Alliance for Progress does not heavily influence my Independent Study, I did write about it in my epilogue.

Schmitter Heisler, Barbara. "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States." *Journal of the West*. 43. no. 3 (2008): 68-72.

Barbara Schmitter Heisler states that in her article, she intends to give historical perspective to the development of Mexican migration to the United States. She uses the bracero program as an example of the profound effect mass immigration has on the economies and politics of both nations. Furthermore, she argues that initiatives such as the bracero program only create and institutionalize social and political issues that are still felt in contemporary immigration. I primarily used Schmitter Heisler's analysis of the bracero program to supplement my writing on bracero migration.

Snodgrass, Michael. *The Bracero Program, 1942-1964. Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*. Edited by Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

In this essay, Michael Snodgrass analyzes the bracero program through the lens of Mexican policymakers, anti-emigration critics, and migrant communities. Although he does not attack other scholars directly in this work, Snodgrass comes to a variety of conclusions that contradict other writing on the bracero program, such as Deborah Cohen's. Although Snodgrass presents many of the same facts as other scholars on the bracero program, his alternative conclusions provided a useful analysis of the bracero program.

Suau, Anthony. "The Great Wall of America." *TIME*. <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1814377,00.html>.

This photoessay printed in TIME Magazine depicts the construction of the border fence between the United States and Mexico. In addition, it exemplifies the repercussions of such a fence, including Mexicans running back to Mexico in fear of the Border Patrol, a family climbing the fence, and the arrest of migrants.

Anthony Suau also takes arial shots of the border, giving the viewer a comprehensive visual understanding of the fence itself, and its meaning for Mexican migrants.

Vargas, Zaragosa. "In the Years of Darkness and Torment; The Early Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1963." *New Mexico historical review*. 76. no. 4 (2001): 382-413.

In this article, Zaragosa Vargas addresses labor's response to racial issues and civil rights, noting the role Cold War ideology played in impeding these goals for equality. He also writes about the goals and strategies of Mexican American political activist groups, who he interprets as acting in a locally based movement for social change, not a coordinated national movement. Although Vargas' article does include the responses of labor unions and Mexican American groups to the presence of braceros, the article details more generally what these groups did outside of the bracero program for almost the exact duration of the program. For my purposes, Vargas provided a backdrop for the activism that occurred during the bracero program, and helped me analyze the dynamics between unions, Mexican American groups and braceros.

Walker, Richard. *The Conquest of Bread: 150 Years of Agribusiness in California*. New York, London: The New Press, 2004.

Richard Walker's book serves as an all-encompassing guide to California agribusiness, and analyzes in detail the use of laborers, the nature of growers and landowners, land development, and mechanization, among other subjects pertinent to agriculture. In my second chapter on California growers, I used Walker as a guide to supplement other works more centered on the bracero program, since Walker focuses on agribusiness first.

Wasserman, Mark. *The Mexican Revolution: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

This compilation includes both primary sources relevant to the Mexican Revolution, and historical analysis of the documents and Revolution as a whole. When writing about Emiliano Zapata's Plan of Ayala, I relied on Mark Wasserman's writing on the document for historical context when constructing my individual analysis of this primary source from Zapata.

Werner, Erica. "Business, Unions Negotiating Guest Worker Program." *Associated Press*, February 5, 2013. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/business-unions-negotiating-guest-worker-program>.

In this article, Erica Werner covers the proposal of a guest worker program under President Barack Obama, as he met with business interests and union representatives to measure their reactions during the writing of this Independent Study. It further shows the relevance of a possible new guest worker program, making an understanding of the bracero program even more paramount.

Worster, Donald. *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

In his book, Donald Worster analyzes Western America, and specifically agribusiness in California, as a hydraulic society that depends on access to and ownership of water. This access to water through irrigation, and the diversion of major rivers to fertile areas in California, not only created the opportunity for large scale agricultural production, but put into motion dynamics of power that made agribusiness so dominant. Worster argues both private capitalists and public representatives needed to defend and promote this hydraulic society, necessary to progress in the West. I relied on this book in my chapter about agribusiness in explaining that access, use, and ownership of water led to power in agribusiness.