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La Pena Negra: Mexican Women, Gender, And Labor During The Bracero Program, 1942-1964

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LA PENA NEGRA: MEXICAN WOMEN, GENDER, AND LABOR DURING
THE BRACERO PROGRAM, 1942-1964

MAYRA LIZETTE AVILA

Doctoral Program in Borderlands History

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2018

Dedication

To the people of La Noria, Jalisco, México who allowed me to share their memories.

LA PENA NEGRA: MEXICAN WOMEN, GENDER, AND LABOR DURING
THE BRACERO PROGRAM, 1942-1964

by

MAYRA LIZETTE AVILA, M.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
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for the Degree of

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Abstract

Most research on México and the Bracero Program has centered on the experiences of men. The scholarship details their decision to leave México, their experiences crossing the border and working in the fields, and their return migration home. “La Pena Negra: Woman, Gender, and Labor, During the Bracero Program, 1942-1964” adds to Bracero scholarship by looking at how the Mexican consulate dealt with Bracero treatment and death. However, the program did not only impact male laborers, but their spouses and family who they left behind in México. Women and families’ survival depended on the female ability to adapt and negotiate the circumstances of uncertainty caused by the male absence. Focusing on the female experience in México provides a unique view of the changes women underwent in the social, political, and private sphere of México and the borderlands during the mid-twentieth century.

“La Pena Negra” historicizes the negotiation of empowerment and disempowerment of women in Mexican society during the Bracero Program. Using archival documents and oral histories, this dissertation links and examines the roots and routes of discourses, cultural practices, and political strategies shaping the female experience in México while the male members of their families worked in the United States between 1942 and 1964. This dissertation brings forth the personal, emotional, and social changes women underwent for survival and addresses themes such as family provider, family networks, abandonment, and divorce.

This study adds to the literature on women and Mexican history during twentieth century México and the Bracero Program and is unique as it provides an intimately transnational gendered perspective to what has typically been addressed from the lenses of migration, economics, and geo-politics. Most importantly, these personal experiences add to an understanding of the effects a transnational immigrant labor program had on women.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables	ix
List of Illustrations.....	x
Introduction: Women during the Bracero Program: An Overlooked History	1
Historiography	5
Methodology	18
Migration, a Social Impact on Women's Role.....	20
Chapter 1: Connecting the Borderlands: The Immigrant, The Worker	25
Mexican Labor and Identity.....	31
Historical Context	35
The War and Depression.....	41
Creating ANTI-Mexican Xenophobia	56
Chapter 2: The Bracero Program: Foreign Policy and Opportunity	65
The Inception	71
Shifting the Power of Negotiation	89
In Response to Changes	93
The Reshaping of Immigration and Labor.....	97
The Legacy.....	101
Chapter 3: The Human Dimension of Policy.....	103
The Male Experience in the Camps	108
The Fight Back.....	122
The Ultimate Sacrifice	128
A History of Deception.....	137
Chapter 4: La Pena Negra: The Female Experience.....	139
Female Vulnerability	155
Maintaining Family Connections.....	159

Family Connections and Survival.....	164
Chapter 5: Mi Madre fue Padre y Todo	166
Motherhood and Patriarchy.....	169
Remittances.....	171
Surviving at Home	174
The Decision Not to Send.....	176
The Impact of Low Remittances.....	179
Venturing Outside the Home	181
Male Reaction to Female Labor.....	184
Changing the Female Role.....	185
Abandonment and Divorce	189
La Calle y La Casa	192
Normalizing the Public Presence of Women	194
Chapter 6: Our Savings: La Marcha Sigue	197
The Struggle to Attain Their Savings	210
Rediscovering Their Savings	214
Legacy.....	230
Epilogue: Legacy: The Changes in Memory	232
Community Involvement and Preservation of Bracero History	237
The Discovery of My History	240
Learning My History.....	242
References	247
Vita.....	262

List of Tables

Table 2.1: The Repatriation of Mexicans from 1929-1933	50
Table 7.1: Amount received in pesos.....	201
Table 7.2: Amount received in dollars per Year.....	202
Table 7.3: Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, S.A. (Agriculture).....	203
Table 7.4: Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, S.A. (Locomotive).....	203
Table 7.5: Workers individual and collective pay in pesos	204
Table 7.6 : “The box of Mexican Migrant Workers” Banco Nacional de México, S.A.....	206
Table 7.7: Movement of the account 66701 Moneda Nacional de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores for the month of November of 1952.....	208

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1.1: Bracero and Wife, La Noria	1
Illustration 2.1: David Yañez and friends	25
Illustration: 3.1: Jose Luis Briseño' Hernández Bracero visa.....	65
Illustration 4.1: Jose Luis Briseño with Braceros in California.....	103
Illustration 5.1: Briseño Family portrait	139
Illustration 5.2: Three women outside their home in La Noria.....	139
Illustration 6.1: Mother cooks for her children	166
Illustration 6.2: Mother poses with her two daughters	166
Illustration 7.1: Braceros in the United States posing after work	197
Illustration 7.2: Ezequiel Manzano- Jimenes Bracero identification card.....	228
Illustration 7.3: Bracero and His Wife, La Noria.....	232

Introduction: Women during the Bracero Program: An Overlooked History



Illustration 1.1: Bracero and Wife, La Noria¹

As a male figure began approaching, Natividad did not recognize this man. Realizing Natividad did not recognize him because of his dirty appearance, he asked for a hug. Natividad knew his voice; her husband had returned from a ten-month contract as a Bracero.² Natividad assumed he came back more miserable than when he left. However, Ruben brought \$300, enough to buy land and cows. Ruben and Natividad sacrificed themselves and their family to raise enough money to buy a small ranch.³

¹ Photographs are in author's possession. Yáñez Family Collection.

² Bracero comes from the Spanish word for arm. Mexican men who worked under contract from 1942-1964 were called Braceros.

³ Natividad Luna Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009).

The United States experienced a labor shortage brought about by World War II and wartime manufacturing. The shortage of labor was a result of American men enlisting in the military or moving into the war industry. As skilled labor jobs opened for Americans, commercial agriculture industry did not have the work force to maintain production for the military and civilian population. The Mexican and United States governments began to discuss the sanctioned reopening of the United States-México border to address the need for workers. This negotiation led to the importation of temporary Mexican contract laborers under the Emergency Mexican Farm Labor Program, more commonly known as the Bracero Program on August 4, 1942. Although it evolved, expanded, and contracted over its nearly twenty-year lifespan, the Bracero Program (1942-1964) was a bi-national labor program crafted between the United States and México. The program was meant to alleviate the alleged labor shortages that emerged, first while American men served in the military, and second, when economic, political, and cultural shifts in the United States made agricultural work undesirable.⁴ The Second World War increased agriculture production in the United States as European countries demand for food, and a growing American Army substantially augmented agricultural production. During its 22-year lifespan, the program accounted for the migration and return of millions of men who worked in fields and on railroads throughout the United States. These temporary laborers accounted for billions in production, sent billions in remittances (money sent back home), faced

⁴ Erasmo Gamboa, *Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), Juan Gómez-Quíñones, *Mexican American Labor 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1994), Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), Ronald Mize and Alicia S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Tonawanda: University of Toronto Press, 2010), Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 2010), Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

discrimination and poor treatment, and frequently suffered injury or death on the job. Since the 1980s, various scholars have viewed the Bracero Program as increasing "human capital investments in México, either through positive income shocks or imported ideas that fueled institutional change."⁵ The ability to educate their children, invest in land and goods, was a common hope of the men who labored as Braceros, yet the physical and psychological abuse men and their wives underwent was at a higher cost than the pay men received and sent. In retrospect, the men working as Braceros sent dollars to their loved ones, which increased investment in México by 70 percent according to economist Miguel D. Ramirez.⁶ Consequently, from solely a binational financial perspective, the program might be seen as a success. From the perspective of the Braceros, the impact is more complicated: they worked 14 to 16 hour-a-day, and despite contracts guaranteeing them a paycheck, sometimes they labored for free, as they paid for their own boarding and food, leaving them with nothing.⁷ To fully understand the significance of the program, however, one must look beyond the financial dimensions and investigate conditions of work in the fields, the quality of life for the men, the survival of the women back home, and the families and individuals impacted over two decades.

⁵ Edward Kosack, "The Bracero Program and Effects on Human Capital Investments in México, 1942-1964" (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2013), <http://eh.net/eha/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Kosack.pdf> (Accessed November 19, 2017), 1-2.; D.S. Massey and Z. Liang, "The Long-term Consequences of a Temporary Worker Program: The U.S. Bracero Experience" *Population Research and Policy Review*, (1989): 8(3), 199-226.; J. S. Reichert, and D.S. Massey, "Guestworker Programs: Evidence from Europe and the United States and Some Implications for U.S. Policy" *Population Research and Policy Review*, 1(1), 1-17; J.A. Sandos and Cross, H.E. "National Development and International Labour Migration: México 1940-1965" *Journal of Contemporary History*, (1983): 18(1), 43-60; N. Hildebrandt and D.J. McKenzie, "The Effects of Migration on Child Health in México." *Economia: Journal of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic Association*, (2005): 6(1), 257-284.; D. McKenzie, and Rapoport, H. "Can Migration Reduce Educational Attainment? Evidence from México." *Journal of Population Economics*, (2011): 24(4), 1331-1358.

⁶ Miguel D. Ramirez, "Public and private investment in México, 1950-90: an empirical analysis." *Southern Economic Journal*. (July, 1994): Section: Vol. 61; No. 1; Pg. 1 <https://cs.uwaterloo.ca/~alopez-o/politics/pubprivinv.html>

⁷ Steve Velásquez, "Isidoro Ramírez," in Bracero History Archive, Item #142, <http://Braceroarchive.org/items/show/142> (accessed October 3, 2008).

This dissertation analyzes the Bracero Program from a gendered perspective by investigating the experiences of women who Braceros “left behind” with *La Pena Negra*, a phrase that the women in La Noria (a village outside Guadalajara) used to describe their pain, desperation, and anguish. Although the program affected Mexican communities throughout México, this dissertation focuses on the town of La Noria, Jalisco, México. La Noria is a small town of farmers, an hour east from Guadalajara. The pueblo has a rich history dating back the Spanish colonial era, when residents of the hacienda grew corn, garbanzo beans, and raised cattle. Some residents recall the old hacienda homes and worker quarters, which they tore down or converted into their current residences. La Noria’s rich history has been preserved by the residents who have remained there for generations and have witnessed time’s impact on the people and community. The Bracero Program, a male-only labor program between México and the United States, brought vast changes for women in La Noria as they took on new roles, faced new responsibilities, weathered new experiences, and endured new emotions to ensure their family’s survival while attempting to adhere to patriarchal ideals.

While considering the broad social, economic, cultural, and political impact of increased female power in communities across México, this dissertation analyzes the negotiation of empowerment and disempowerment of women in Mexican society during the Bracero Program using oral histories and archival research to recreate the experience of Braceros and their spouses. This dissertation concentrates on the personal, emotional, and social changes undergone by women for survival and necessity and address themes such as female-provider, family networks, abandonment, and divorce. This study adds to the literature on women's and Mexican history during twentieth-century México, as well as to the fields of labor history, migration history and the growing historiography of the Bracero Program, by providing an intimately

transnational-gendered perspective to what has typically focused on the male labor experience. Most importantly, these personal experiences help to understand the effects a transnational immigrant labor program had on Mexican women during mid-Twentieth Century.

This dissertation historicizes the transnational effect the Bracero Program had on women in Mexican villages, specifically in of La Noria, Jalisco, and on Mexican society as a whole. Mexican as well as United States archival sources and oral histories show that women embodied, appropriated, and challenged governmental and patriarchal conceptualizations of domesticity, work, family, and progress. This argument proposes that the Mexican government altered and adapted their laws to negotiate the proper role of their female population during the Bracero Program. Consequently, women had to adjust to this change and develop skills believed to be strictly male-oriented. These new skills was how those Mexican women, although living La Pena Negra, became the Bracero Program's mother and father, nurturer, and a figure of authority.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Since the 1960s, the field of United States labor history has contributed to the knowledge of Mexicans in the American labor force. The scholarship illustrates Mexican workers' ability to organize and establish their rights as workers. The historiography of Braceros and Mexican labor in the United States, in general, has traditionally emphasized the economic, social, and political struggles of workers and their families as they face acceptance or oppression as ethnic minorities in a new and sometimes hostile nation. Many of the scholars in this rich and vibrant field have centered their examinations of Mexican labor and migration on the popular themes and topics of seasonal labor programs, unionization, and gender. For instance, Erasmo Gamboa in *Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* finds that "scholars have broken new ground by interweaving the study of Mexican labor with the Chicano experience and the

history of the United States” by employing archives, union records, grassroots organizations, Mexican archives, and oral histories of leaders, laborers, and delegates.⁸ These new perspectives and historical analyses enable Mexican labor history to expand as a field, such as labor, migration, gender, demography, and transnationalism, explicitly.

Some of the most important scholarship on the Bracero Program emerged from non-historians, who used sociological, and sometimes ethnographic methodologies. Ernesto Galarza’s 1964 groundbreaking book, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, chronicles the interaction and abuses of Braceros in California through first-hand accounts.⁹ His work is the first to focus on Braceros’ personal experiences and work conditions. Galarza acknowledges the manifestation of prejudice for various ethnic groups that were affected by economic need and specifically traces the events that shaped the experiences of an ethnic labor force. Although he investigated the Program from a contemporary lens, Galarza historicizes the United States’ response to “foreign” labor through immigration policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and social reaction such as the rejection of “Okies” during the Great Depression. Most importantly, he points out that Braceros prevented unionization and displaced native labor furthering American and Mexican-American xenophobia.¹⁰

Broadening the lens to include men and women, historian Emilio Zamora focuses on “Texas Mexican labor to illustrate a historical pattern of mistreatment and organizing capabilities

⁸ Erasmo Gamboa, *Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), xvii.

⁹ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchant of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1964).

¹⁰ Ernesto Galarza was a labor organizer whose efforts were thwarted by the Bracero Program. He did seek to fight for the rights of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. His involvement with Braceros caused the program to become a topic of study for him.

of Mexicans in the United States.”¹¹ Zamora highlights economic expansion and labor organizing among Mexican laborers in the twentieth century.¹² His 1993 book, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, finds that from 1900 to 1960 industrialization and the rising cost of living in the early twentieth century forced Mexican women into the Texas labor market, a unique contribution to the literature. Despite the entrenched patriarchal order that characterized the larger American society, as well as Tejano and Mexican male-dominated culture, Spanish-speaking women came together in associations and clubs. Zamora finds that women participated in unionization efforts as they lent their support to men at the grassroots level, established sexual harassment regulations, organized strikes, and took other actions against worker and racial exploitation. Zamora’s examination of women is limited to his pages focused on the Federal Labor Union (FLU), which advocated the incorporation of women into labor unions.

Juan Gómez-Quiñones’ book, *Mexican American Labor 1790-1990*, offers an analysis of Mexican labor over two centuries and explains that low wages and working conditions led to collective resistance from agricultural and industrial workers through trade unions and community groups. He situates the Bracero Program within this broad chronological context and finds that the “The Bracero Program... gave the United States government the ability to regulate Mexican immigration and use cheap labor” to address the wartime labor shortage.¹³ Mexican laborers demanded equality with their white counterparts. Women sought out equality with white women in work, wages, and treatment. As Mexicans increased their participation in the labor force during the twentieth century, workers began organizing efforts to advocate for themselves.

¹¹ Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1993), 5.

¹² Ibid., xi. Mexican is used to describe Mexican nationals and Mexican-Americans interchangeably.

¹³ Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican American Labor 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1994), xii.

Gómez-Quíñones' extensive look into two hundred years of Mexican labor finds "workers have organized to overcome the results of being part of a vulnerable working class, rather than indulge in their union membership."¹⁴ Gomez- Quiñones' study is highly significant because it establishes an overall narrative of two centuries of Mexican labor in the United States.

Chicano historian George J. Sánchez charts a new direction in the scholarship by interweaving Mexican and Mexican-American history. He centers his examination on the social construction of identity. Sánchez, answers Gomez- Quiñones' "call to debate culture" by explaining "Chicanos' uneven participation in American society or racial intolerance has been used to explain the disadvantage of Mexican workers."¹⁵ Mexicans crossed the border for "temporary residence and better wages to help the family survive."¹⁶ Their crossing of the border was not just physical but symbolic as Mexicans had to transform themselves and traditions to blend with those of Americans.¹⁷

Historian Camille Guerin-Gonzales expands Sánchez interdisciplinary examination of cultural adaptation and ethnic identity. Her 1996 book, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939*, examines the construction of the complex national, ethnic, racial, and gender identities of Mexican nationals in the United States. Guerin-Gonzales uses the concept of domination based on differences to illustrate the patterns of Mexican immigration and the construction of a system of exploitation.

¹⁴ Ibid., 329.

¹⁵ George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

Mexican workers between the borders were labeled "birds of passage" because of their constant crossing of the border.¹⁸

Guerin-Gonzales uses the notion of the American Dream as a framework that explains how immigration patterns shaped economic need and opportunity. The American Dream is a concept used by Guerin-Gonzales to describe the financial decisions made by migrants to immigrate. The historical significance of the American Dream, with its myths, symbols, and ideas, informed and shaped how Mexican laborers understood this choice to advance their lives in México or remain in the United States. According to Guerin-Gonzales, the American Dream "shaped immigration communities and returned seasonal labor migration of Mexican farm workers who sought out economic opportunity and security as workers."¹⁹ Guerin-Gonzales points out that the dream is different for each race because of racial inequalities, struggles, and rights, which caused individuals to create their idea or concept of the American Dream.

Labor historian Erasmo Gamboa continues Guerin-Gonzales' work on the Mexican experience in the United States by focusing specifically on the Bracero Program. Gamboa's 2000 book, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947*, concentrates on the Bracero Program during the war years in the Northwest states of Oregon, Idaho, and Washington, placing the farm labor program there in a broader national context. When Gamboa wrote his regional study on the program in the Northwest, historians like Zamora had begun focusing on historical analyses of specific regions to highlight the differences between geographical areas. Gamboa points out the legal, economic, and social hardships of Braceros, which caused Mexican laborers to unite and call upon their government officials to rectify their

¹⁸ Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers, and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

working and living conditions. Braceros in the Pacific Northwest were much more militant and willing to challenge abuses than in the Southwest. Their militancy was due to the support of the Mexican consulate and the influence of pre-existing labor unions in New México. In the Northwest, they engaged in widespread strikes, desertions, and demands for repatriation, mostly in response to the failure of growers to comply with contract requirements, particularly concerning wages and food. Mexican American laborers from Texas replaced Braceros because they were less troublesome.

Gamboa's book is the first extended examination of Mexican labor history in the Pacific Northwest. It advances the literature by showing how local, federal, and state officials shaped the Bracero Program to meet regional labor demands. Gamboa, unlike previous scholars, focuses on Braceros' complaints to Mexican delegates and representatives to show the Mexican government's response to the program. He limits his study by not using the personal experiences of Braceros themselves.

Sociologist Ronald D. Mize and Alicia S. Swords have contributed to the historiography by looking at economic trends, labor migration, and border surveillance through an interdisciplinary approach. Mize and Swords' 2010 book, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA*, focuses on the economic growth in the United States that was made possible by Mexican labor.²⁰ Their central interest in the relationship between the United States and México focuses on capital accumulation and the exploitation of immigrant labor. Mize and Swords also expand the study of Mexican labor by looking at the passage of laws at the state level that ended public services for immigrants such as bilingual education in public schools. However, unlike previous scholars, they look at the 2006 rallies across the United States

²⁰ Ronald Mize and Alicia S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Tonawanda: University of Toronto Press, 2010), xxxii.

opposing legislation criminalizing undocumented labor. The authors trace immigrant labor activism on the local and national levels to address Mexican legal status and human and labor rights. Mize and Swords' contribution to the historiography is their analysis of the national and state laws of México, Canada, and the United States that affected legal and illegal migration of Mexican labor by connecting United States immigration policy, Mexican legislation, and international law to the adaptation and transformation of Mexican society and women.

Mize and Swords' examination of the impact of migrant labor legislation on Mexican workers ties into the work of criminologist Kitty Calavita, who focuses on labor legislation and immigration agencies' actions. Calavita's 2010 book, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, highlights the activities of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to show its impact on migrant agricultural labor.²¹ The INS often took the lead in policy formation to further the agency's priorities, which ranged from deterring to alternately, permitting labor migration. Calavita's analysis aids in connecting the history and government structures that dictated the use and treatment of Mexican labor by American farmers.

Deborah Cohen adds to Calavita's examination of Braceros by providing a transnational approach to the program by examining the impact international labor has on the modernity of the Bracero and productive capacities of bracero families. Cohen's 2011 book, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México*, finds "Braceros simultaneously became the United States racially marked aliens, Mexican citizens, workers, and transnational subjects as they moved and interacted within and between the United States and Mexican national spaces."²² As Braceros' situation changed depending on their legal status and

²¹ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 2010).

²² Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 6.

locations, Cohen reveals how their determination not to be victims shaped their identities as providers for their families. Cohen argues that the Bracero Program was not just cheap labor but symbolized manhood and modernity. As men returned to México, they reinforced their manhood as they paid back loans, bought land and livestock, and aided their families, reinforcing their roles as providers. Building off Cohen's work, this dissertation explores how these notions of masculinity impacted women who, though temporarily, held the role of "patriarch" while Braceros worked in the United States.

Since the 1960s, the field of United States labor history has contributed to the knowledge of Mexicans in the American labor force yet have limited their examination to men minimizing the role of women. The scholarship illustrates Mexican workers' ability to organize and their role in establishing their rights as workers. Calavita explains that the outspokenness and perseverance of Mexican laborers was responsible for changes in social policies and their effects on workers. Despite labor unions and organization, the demand for Mexican labor continued due to the capitalist inequalities between México and the United States, which made migrant laborers seek employment opportunities regardless of treatment or unequal wages. The United States inability to stop immigration of Mexican laborers is due to the demand for them, according to scholars.

Mexican labor scholars briefly mention women as if they were minor actors in the changes that occurred in society and the workforce. For the most part, labor historians have focused on re-telling the experiences and memories of Braceros or Mexican laborers in the United States, much to the oversight of the complex and demanding work on Mexican women's labor and the female experience in México during labor migration. Labor is not a single field and it does not stand alone as a subject of analysis as men, women, society, and economies are directly affected by labor. Patriarchy has directly affected gender inequalities, resulting in men's

power over women. Gender, according to historian Heidi Tinsmen, is an “ideological construction of male and female as different and unequal, centrally shaped by sexuality. Sexuality is critical to understanding the division of labor and male authority over women,” as the female is deemed weak and vulnerable and the male her provider and protector.²³ Furthermore, Joan Scott points out that politics and gender intertwine due to the economic needs of the country and state.²⁴

Labor history scholarship best integrates the contributions of numerous disciplines and historical fields that have examined the Bracero Program in its analysis of social change and migration legislation. Historians such as Jocelyn Olcott’s and Ana Rosas assess the changes experienced by women in México throughout the twentieth century, as they sought to aid in the survival of their families. The importance of these works is that they talk about women as laborers and providers in patriarchal México, but most importantly, they explore how the government encouraged the family necessity for women’s labor, and the social adaptation of women outside the home.

Women’s labor history involves an analysis of the economic, social, and political realities that shape the acceptance or oppression of gendered laborers in the United States and México. Mexican women share the inequality of Mexican men but have faced more exploitation in the workforce because of their perceived status as a weak and naive gender. Vicky Ruiz, in her 1987 groundbreaking work, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950*, offers a path-breaking model for future work

²³ Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Duke University Press, 2002), 11.

²⁴ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review*, 91.5 (1986): 1055.

about women by acknowledging their agency and role in the labor force.²⁵ As one of the first books by a Chicana historian to analyze race and gender, *Cannery Women* is significant to the fields of women's history and labor history as it addresses the experiences of Mexican women in the canneries of Southern California from 1930 to 1950. Women's presence in the canneries challenged their traditional roles as housewives because they supplemented the family income, making them financial providers instead of dependent spouses. Although women remained under male supervision, as they were not allowed into managerial positions. Ruiz looks at the changes women underwent in the canneries as they negotiated promotions and protected their sexual reputations through family labor networks. As Ruiz examined the social and cultural world of the Mexican worker focusing on women, she answered social historian Herbert Gutman's challenge to the "traditional boundaries of the 'old' labor history, which focused exclusively on trade unions in United States labor history."²⁶

Historians have overlooked the history of women during the Bracero Program (1942-1964), even though their narratives provide first-hand accounts of the social changes that occurred in México as men migrated as laborers into the United States.²⁷ According to historian Ana Rosas, "Historians cannot afford to underestimate the formative roles of family disruption,

²⁵ Vicky L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: New México University Press, 1987), 121.

²⁶ Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working Class and Social History* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 9.

²⁷ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 2010); Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); Ronald Mize and Alicia S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Tonawanda: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Vicky L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1987); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*, (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1993).

and remittances for the family survival throughout the Bracero Program's history."²⁸ Although a handful of scholars in sociology, internal relations, and Chicana Studies have only recently begun to scratch the surface of women's experiences during the Bracero Program, the vast majority of academic work has focused on the impact the male-only program had on Braceros, international economics, and trans-national flows of labor.²⁹ Historians of the immigrant and labor experience more broadly have overlooked Mexican women as historical actors in the Mexican's governments' construction and management of society and the family in their respective towns, even though these women held together entire communities through their multi-faceted roles as parents, property owners, and managers of the home. Only recently have historians such as Ana E. Rosas and Mireya Loza begun to look at women, the transnational family, and the struggle of Braceros as a collective group.³⁰

The 2014 publication by Ana E. Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-México Border*, is the first book that looks at the "governments -sanctioned family separation, by focusing on the unequal terms that compelled Mexican immigrant families, especially women to defy program ideals."³¹ Rosas looks at Mexican immigrant families as historical actors in both México and the United States due to the increase of the transnational family caused by the Bracero Program. She argues that historicizing the Bracero family

²⁸ Ana Rosas, "Flexible families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2006), 4.

²⁹ Ana Rosas, *Abrazando El Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-México Border* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 2010); Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

³⁰ Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, And Political Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 139.

³¹ Ana Rosas, *Abrazando El Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the Us-México Border* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014),6.

experience reveals how these transnational families challenged the political concept of immigrant work, family, and progress for the family to economically advance.³² She defines the transnational family as “government-sanctioned family separation, cyclical temporary reunification and resettlement under economically, racially, culturally and emotionally unequal terms compelling Mexican immigrant families” to live on both sides of the border, which “created nontraditional roles and relationships.”³³ The changes women and the family would undergo as a transnational unit were not discussed or emphasized by the Mexican government. The program promoted itself as permitting men to provide for their family, women, mothers, and daughters had to wait for remittances from their male family member. According to Rosas, Braceros tried to convince their families to value and preserve their family relationships in México by encouraging their families to make sacrifices and remain behind in México.³⁴ Rosas is the first scholar that focuses, not only on the impact male labor had on men, but on the entire family. Her thorough examination of Mexican women’s negotiation as female heads of households shifts labor history to look not only at the workers but also at the role of those they leave behind.

Mireya Loza takes Rosas examination of the family and the program further in *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom*, by looking at the extended family, growers, farmers, foremen, mistresses, and sex workers.³⁵ She explains how the government promoted a “respectable” Bracero’s image, whose remittances would

³² Rosas, *Abrazando El Espiritu*, 23.

³³ Ibid., 5 And 2.

³⁴ Ibid., 25.

³⁵ Loza, 2-3.

reinforce his patriarchy and fulfill their economic need.³⁶ The program ignored that children viewed their fathers as strangers and women had to adapt to their new roles as the head of the household. More importantly, Loza looks at infidelity by examining Braceros' mistresses and some of their vices- drinking and gambling that affected the family left behind. *Defiant Braceros* also looks at contemporary issues such as men's and widows struggle to gain the *Cuenta de Ahorro* through their participation in The Bracero Justice Movement.³⁷ She expands the literature by explaining that Braceros were a "legal contingent of workers" whose experiences dictated immigration policy.³⁸

Rosa and Loza utilize the methodology of the path-breaking work of Chicana feminist scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and Deena Gonzalez, whose examinations of gender bridge the gap between theory and history as a way to study the division between males and females. Anzaldúa and Gonzalez used poetry, literary works, sayings, and other dynamics of language to develop a history that went beyond the archives.³⁹ Loza's recent works expand the scholarship with their exploration of sources through the lenses of race, gender, and sexuality, providing scholars with new ways of comprehending power structures.

This dissertation draws on this recent scholarship to situate the gendered dimensions of the Bracero Program within broader debates about economic development, immigration, transnationalism, and women's history. Additionally, this work contributes to the field of labor

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Cuenta de Ahorro is a ten percent deduction from Bracero pay for a savings account that was to be returned to men upon arrival in México. The Bracero Justice Movement is a fraternity that men created during the struggle to get their Fondo de Ahorro.

³⁸ Loza, 5-8.

³⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa's, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute, 1983); Deena Gonzalez, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

studies as it demonstrates that labor migration has a social impact on women's role in society and the family. The Bracero Program, being a male-only program, has caused scholars to look at the male experience and completely overlook the family they set out to maintain. Secondly, this dissertation adds to the examination of women in the public and private sphere of the 1940s to 1960s, a period that has been overlooked by scholars. In addition, no scholarly work published at any time has focused solely on the impact the Bracero Program had on female labor in their villages. By re-centering the narrative through a gendered framework, this dissertation brings forth the personal, emotional, and social changes undergone by women for survival and necessity and addresses themes such as provider, family networks, abandonment, and divorce.

METHODOLOGY

Current Bracero historiography portrays only a small portion of the community's complex and vibrant history. This dissertation methodology is heavily influenced by oral histories collected from family members, family friends, and anyone willing to recollect their life, providing a unique view of the program. Oral histories were conducted with both women (spouses of Braceros) and men (ex-Braceros) residing in La Noria, Jalisco, México. Some oral histories of women and Braceros in other geographical areas in México were conducted to emphasize the impact the program had in México, and not just La Noria. Additionally, oral histories and documents collected by the Oral History Institution at the University of Texas, at El Paso were utilized.

Oral histories fill in gaps left by the history books while providing other views on the subject at hand. Oral histories are interpretations of memories and feelings about events often captured after countless years and experiences. However, oral histories are also interpretations and memories of events years later, which can be distorted by time, emotions, or ability to

recollect it. Oral histories are invaluable in recreating the narratives of women in México as they are memories and pieces of history that capture the changes, emotions, opportunities, and obstacles created by the departure of men due to the Bracero Program. The experiences and memories of a single or a few men or women do not speak for every individual affected by the program, but they give a glimpse into the lives, struggles, and experiences of those who have shared their recollections. Oral histories show the ideology of the proper place and actions of a woman in a patriarchal society while showing how women contested their roles and relationships to survive.⁴⁰ It reveals their abilities to adapt and negotiate their roles within the family during male absences. The personal oral histories of women and men “provide spaces for people to express their thoughts and feelings in their words and on their own terms.”⁴¹ Oral histories allow each person to recall their personal memories and experiences as they felt and remembered them.

This dissertation also relies on standard archival documents and manuscripts to illuminate the transnational and gendered complexity of the changes a patriarchal society underwent when women recreated their social norms. The research took place in both Mexican and United States archives and research centers. In México, the essential archive consulted was the Archivo General de la Nación and Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores in México City. I consulted the Archivo Municipal de Zapotlán del Rey for the region surrounding Guadalajara. In La Noria oral histories were conducted connecting the experiences of both men and women to the archival research and the social changes that occurred in Mexican villages and society. The archives in México aided in linking and examining the transnational roots and routes of discourses, cultural

⁴⁰ Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Lydia R. Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Vicky L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), xvi.

practices, and political strategies shaping the female experience in México and its relationship to a long history of gender and immigrant labor. Newspapers from both México and the United States were utilized to examine how the program was covered. The coverage of the program provides a view on how each country responded to the program, as well as its focus. In the United States, research was conducted at the United States National Archives and Records Administration and the Smithsonian Institution Archives, located in College Park, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., to historicize the Mexican and United States governments' negotiation of the program's agreement.

The wide range of sources provides a unique view of how the program not only impacted men but women in México. Additionally, through consulate records, this dissertation demonstrates how Mexican officials failed to aid its people in their time of need. Newspaper provide headlines of Bracero deaths and women's pleas. While oral histories offer emotion and memories of the people, who lived and were impacted by programs reality. The sources bring a new perspective of how Bracero's actions, experiences, and absence had on women in México.

MIGRATION, A SOCIAL IMPACT ON WOMEN'S ROLE

Without the female personal accounts, the effects and understanding of the Bracero Program remain concentrated on the male experience, overlooking the dramatic changes women underwent in Mexican villages. Most importantly, "the male experience can [not] be understood in isolation making the female experience necessary to understand the impact the program had on gender roles and society."⁴² Women became empowered as they were now undertaking male roles as protector and provider of the family. Their duties were no longer solely being a mother

⁴² Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (Oxford University, Press, 1987), 11.

but provider and head of household. Women and family survival depended on the women's ability to adapt and survive the circumstances of the male absence. The program resulted in the (re)negotiation of proper gender roles for women to financially survive during the cyclical absence.

The chapters are organized to provide historical background in labor history and the Bracero Program, which demonstrate how the experiences of men impacted women. The first chapter, "Connecting the Borderlands: The Immigrant and the Worker" offers an overview of the international historical context of labor, immigration, and gender in the borderlands, to explain the migratory and labor movement prior to the Bracero Program. This broad and thematic summary provides historical context for the creation of the Bracero Program, as it drew upon numerous labor patterns and economic relationships established in the previous decades. It is also essential to understand the foreign policy that created the relationship between the United States and México that contributed to the movement and renegotiation of Mexican society.

Chapter two, "The Bracero Program: Foreign Policy and Opportunity" provides information on the Bracero Program and highlights the more significant context associated with the negotiation of the binational agreement during the mid-twentieth century. By understanding the relationship and international discourse between the two countries, one can comprehend how the inequality between the nations negotiation in the program created poor conditions for Braceros. The program affirmed the historical ties between the United States and México because it exposed the ways in which the two economies were and had always been inextricably linked together.

The third chapter, "The Human Impact of Policy" shifts attention away from large transnational economic and policy concerns and focuses on the experiences of Braceros

themselves, particularly their experiences as workers in the United States. Of particular interest here is the inability of the Mexican government to protect its citizens from broken labor contracts, labor abuse, racism, low wages and poor housing conditions. The conditions that men experienced were not only the responsibility of American farmers but Mexican officials who blamed the Bracero and failed to act in their citizens' aid. The chapter also highlights ex-Braceros' recollections of their experiences in the processing centers, work in the fields, and living conditions during the Bracero Program. By understanding the Bracero Program and the first-hand accounts of men, the reader can understand that what occurred in the United States directly affected the circumstances and situation that each woman found themselves in, in México.

The fourth chapter, "La Pena Negra: The Female Experience" focuses on the behavior and experience of women who remained in México while husbands, fathers, and sons worked in the United States. It offers a first-hand account of the emotional and social impact that male absence had on women. By looking at the different experiences women underwent as they depended on their family or themselves to survive, this chapter provides a small glimpse into the life women lived due to the dislocations caused by the Bracero Program. The chapter analyzes how women utilized their extended family to aid each other in housework but most importantly, to maintain their honor and virtue. Some women who found themselves alone and participating in the public sphere underwent scrutiny and sexual assault as they were unchaperoned and deemed vulnerable. It also examines letters that were confiscated for the purposes of national security by the United States, to showcase the concerns and fears of women throughout México. Additionally, it gives a comparative examination of women whose experiences are dictated by their relationship with their husband, family networks, and personality. These women found

themselves without their husbands, yet their experience was not unique or isolated incidences but can speak to the feelings and memories women across México underwent.

Chapter five, "Mi Madre fue Padre y Todo" looks at the patriarch's absence that allowed women to make decisions for the well-being of their family without question. This chapter historicizes how women negotiated their role in private and public places due to remittances-money their husband would send to them for debt and expenses. Most importantly, it focuses on marriage and divorce cases caused by "abandonment" from men and women. Chapter six "Our Savings: La Marcha Sigue" looks at the Cuenta de Ahorro and traces its deposits and disappearance. It looks at the attempts of men and women to cash in the ten percent deduction, much of which was absorbed by the Mexican national government, banks, and other intermediaries. This chapter also looks at protest and court case that caused México to acknowledge the money they owed Braceros and their kin. In the Epilogue, "Changes in Memory" looks at how the Bracero Program is remembered in the United States and México.

The Bracero Program, if only temporarily, altered the matriarchal role of women in Mexican society. The typical role of women before the Bracero Program was highly circumscribed by oppressive gender traditions, institutions such as the church, school, and the family itself. Indeed, rural Mexican women were limited to a domestic role in México's "patriarchal society in which the marginalized them from industrial work, discriminated against them in divorce cases, and told them that domesticity and motherhood constituted their [Mexican] citizenship" a system that became altered by male absence.⁴³ The absence of hundreds of thousands of men at any one time during the span of the program transformed Mexican

⁴³ Mary Kay Vaughan, "Women School Teachers in the Mexican Revolution: The Story of Reyna's Braids" *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 2 No. 1, (1990): 143-168, 143.

women from dependents to self-reliant individuals who were responsible for the Braceros' sons and daughters. Comparable to the expanded roles of middle-class white women in the United States that took jobs in industries associated with the war effort as their male counterparts went overseas, these women played a central role in the survival of the Mexican nation in a time of profound dislocation and upheaval.

This dissertation historicizes the experiences of Bracero's spouses to gain firsthand accounts of the impact a male-only labor program had on their unnoticed lives. Furthermore, it probes the lives of Bracero's wives and daughters to understand their empowerment as women, mothers, providers, and temporary single parents by closely examining what difficulties, experiences, and changes occurred in the patriarchal society during the twenty-two years of the Bracero Program. The program caused women to adapt and develop skills believed to be strictly male. The preservation of the transnational family was due to women's ability to adjust and negotiate her role as the head of household's in patriarchal Mexican society. Overall, this dissertation brings forth a new understanding of the program's impact on Mexican women as they participated in society and adapted to their new roles. By addressing Mexican women's alteration and adaptation of their new roles as single parents and heads of household during and after the Bracero Program, the author sets out to show the impact went beyond the fields of the United States. The new roles women undertook impacted how their children viewed them as they witnessed the strength and courage their mother possessed.

Chapter 1: Connecting the Borderlands: The Immigrant, The Worker

MOJADO

*Empacó un par de camisas, un sombrero,
Su vocación de aventurero, seis consejos, siete fotos, mil recuerdos,
Empacó sus ganas de quedarse,
Su condición de transformarse en el hombre que soñó y no ha logrado,
Dijo adiós con una mueca disfrazada de
sonrisa,
Y le suplicó a su Dios crucificado en la repisa
el resguardo de los suyos,
Y perforó la frontera, como pudo.*

*Si la luna suave se desliza,
Por cualquier cornisa sin permiso alguno,
Por qué el mojado precisa,
Comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno.*

*El mojado tiene ganas de secarse,
El mojado está mojado por las lágrimas
que bota la nostalgia,
El mojado, el indocumentado,
Carga el bulto que el legal no cargaría, ni obligado,
El suplicio de un papel lo ha convertido en fugitivo,
Y no es de aquí porque su nombre no aparece en los archivos,
Ni es de allá porque se fue.*

*Si la luna suave se desliza, Por cualquier cornisa sin permiso alguno,
Por qué el mojado precisa, Comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno.*

*Mojado, Sabe a mentira tu verdad, sabe a tristeza la ansiedad,
De ver un freeway y soñar con la vereda que conduce hasta tu casa.
Mojado de tanto llorar sabiendo que algún lugar,
Te espera un beso haciendo pausa desde el día en que te marchaste.*

*Si la luna suave se desliza,
Por cualquier cornisa sin permiso alguno,
Por qué el mojado precisa,
Comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno.
Si la visa universal se extiende el día en que nacemos y caduca en la muerte,
Por qué te persiguen mojado, Si el cónsul de los cielos,
Ya te dio permiso.⁴⁴*



Illustration 2.1: David Yañez and friends

⁴⁴ Ricardo Arjona, *Mojado*, Produced by Ricardo Arjona and Tommy Torres, 2006 by Sony BMG Music.

In the twenty-first century, the media has brought international attention to the migration of people into the United States, labeling everyone from Latin America, "Mexicans." In various news channels and social media, people are quoted stating, "Go back to México," as if all immigrants were solely Mexican. Consequently, in American society, the word "illegal" is synonymous with Mexican. Historian Mae M. Ngai suggests that the United States created illegal aliens by implementing repressive policies that enforced racist quotas and highlighted racial views of immigrants defining them as un-assimilable subjects.⁴⁵ She adds that American immigration policies are the byproduct of racist ideologies that create the conditions for illegal immigration to exist as they fulfill an economic need through their low wages—a direct result of their illegal status.⁴⁶ Following Ngai, historian Erika Lee points out that the negative image of exclusion and "gate keeping" immigration legislation caused Mexican immigrants to be perceived as inferior to white Americans.⁴⁷ Ngai sees the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act as a policy that focused on restricting entry and limiting immigration through broad means. She points out that quotas allowed United States officials to decide which immigrants were more desirable, choices that demonstrated racial and ethnic prejudice.⁴⁸

The legislation to ensure the protection of the border lead to the establishment of the Border Patrol (in 1924), whose creation was due to anti-immigration sentiments, as their crossing was symbolic of the destruction of the American culture.⁴⁹ Historian Kelly Lytle Hernández

⁴⁵ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5-7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5-7.

⁴⁷ Erika Lee. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 20.

⁴⁸ Ngai, 7.

⁴⁹ Alexandra M. Stern, "Nationalism on the Line: Masculinity, Race, and the Creation of the U.S. Border Patrol, 1910-1940," in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-México Borderlands History*, ed. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 300.

explains that the Border Patrol has never wavered from their original objective to deter undocumented immigration.⁵⁰ Immigration policy has made the United States-México border a simultaneously open and closed door that depends on the economic need for productive immigrants. The Border Patrol continues its presence along the border but has expanded beyond border cities to patrol courtrooms, hospitals, school streets, and private residents throughout the United States.

The presidential election of 2016 candidate (and now president) Donald J. Trump, who called Mexicans' rapists and "bad hombres," sparked a more open wave of racism and discrimination against Mexicans. His campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," directed itself to working class and middle-class Anglo-Americans, who claimed that the economy had left them behind. President Trump gave his constituents a target to blame for their declining wages: the Mexicans who crossed the fence, which he would remove and build a wall to deter them. President Trump gave license to open racism by blaming the Mexican for the crime and inadequacies that plague the American people.⁵¹ Social media contains endless videos of people speaking Spanish or having brown skin being told to "go back to their country," or questioned by undercover Border Patrol agents as if language and skin pigmentation indicate legal status.

Public policy regarding immigration is directly correlated to the threat to the American worker as portrayed in the media and politics.⁵² An example of such threat is the individual or

⁵⁰ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: California State University Berkeley Press, 2010), 10 and 14.

⁵¹ *BBC News*. "Drug Dealers, Criminals, Rapists": What Trump Thinks of Mexicans." August 31, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-37230916/drug-dealers-criminals-rapists-what-trump-thinks-of-mexicans>. (Accessed December 18, 2017).

⁵² Oksana Yakushko, "Xenophobia: Understanding the Roots and Consequences of Negative Attitudes toward Immigrants" Digital Commons @University of Nebraska- Lincoln, January 1, 2009. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1089&context=edpsychpapers> (Accessed May 18, 2017), 10.

cultural perception that foreigners are taking jobs from native workers, which results in the desire to create and apply public policies that actively discriminate against foreign individuals.⁵³ The perception of economic strain or cultural differences and the lack of assimilation result in the receiving country's population to feel threatened. The expansion of industrialization and economic opportunities in the United States has caused immigrants who have faced internal events, such as war, depression, and lack of job opportunities, to migrate. Consequently, the history of migration to the United States continues to be an intricate web connecting groups and countries, while simultaneously changing and affecting one another.

The present diversity in the United States and México is a direct result of transnational labor and migration: workers negotiating their movement along borders and borderland regions between 1924 to the present day. Americans and Mexicans both adopted traditions and customs from one another, influencing language, food, and ideology. A popular belief is that nations were made and unmade at their boundaries, yet the fluidity of people, ideas and culture transcend man-made lines influencing both sides of the border.⁵⁴ Scholars that focused on identity in the borderlands have to pay close attention to how communities and societies dealt with the interconnection of the two national economies. Borderlands historiography has explained that in United States-México Border, culture is neither completely Mexican nor American for those that reside at the border. Noting the severity of class and race division, historians have not fully integrated the role and power of gender in creating a hybrid culture that integrates both the United States and México. Borders symbolized culture, traditions, and citizenship, indicating the identity of the respective country. The United States immigration history in the twentieth

⁵³ Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1995), 2.; Yakushko, 11.

⁵⁴ Adam McKeown. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2008), 8.

century, specifically from México, illustrates the fluidity of not just people, but of a culture that has created a hybrid identity and customs that have been adopted by an entire population, making no single race homogenous.⁵⁵

This chapter offers an overview of the complex labor and migration patterns along the international boundary, and how those movements impacted Mexican identity, from the end of the United States México War in 1848 to the onset of World War Two in 1941. This broad and thematic summary provides a historical context for the creation of the Bracero Program, which drew upon many of the precedents established in the previous decades. Although the chapter focuses on migration to the United States, it will discuss several related issues such as the socio-economic and political factors in México that have shaped its policies towards immigration. It will also look at the impact on Mexican communities that have migrated out of the country, and the flow of migrants back to México, whether due to personal volition or because of state-sponsored deportation projects. It is important to note that México's emigration policies were determined by the state's economic, political and foreign policy's interests, which became varied and transformed at the domestic, transnational and international level.

This chapter adds to the Borderlands historiography by tracing the dimensions of economic and social interaction across and along the border. Originating in the early scholarship of Hubert H. Bancroft, Herbert E. Bolton, and John Francis Bannon, Borderlands historiography dramatically shifted its intellectual scope due to the social and cultural changes caused by the social movements in the 1960s that derived from injustices towards different groups in the United States and other parts of the world. Rather than focus on Spanish Colonial institutions, the processes of colonization, and indigenous assimilation into European societies, modern

⁵⁵George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicanos Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7-8.

Borderlands scholarship has addressed the nature of borderland communities, tensions between nation-states, and the persistence of localized identities. These changes brought together scholars from different disciplines introducing new perspectives. Through the development of Chicana/o Studies, women's history, environmental history, immigration history, and American Indian history, scholars now investigate the diverse ways in which individuals in different cultural groups in the borderlands create political and social definitions of who they are and how they relate to "mainstream" society. With these changes, scholars have shifted away from top-down or centrist approaches to Borderlands history that argue for rigid boundaries between nation-states, to embrace notions of cultural, racial, economic, and even gender fluidity, in which categories such as citizenship are contested and continuously in flux.⁵⁶

⁵⁶John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier: 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press); Herbert E. Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Oct., 1917): 42-61; David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under México* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1982); David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Erick Langer and Robert H. Jackson, eds., *The New Latin American Mission History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Cheryl Martin, *Governance and Society in Colonial México* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New México, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002; Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008; Roxanne Lynn Doty, *The Law Into Their Own Hands: Immigration and the Politics of Exceptionalism* Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009; Timothy J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-México Border 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* Texas: The University of Texas at Austin, 1996; Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007; William B. Griffen, *The Janos Presidio: Apaches at War and Peace, 1750-1858* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998; Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1994; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005; Andrew L. Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680: Conquest and Resistance in Seventeenth-Century New México* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995; Erick Langer and Robert H. Jackson, eds. *The New Latin American Mission History* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995; Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002; Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010; Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001; Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975; Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern México, 1700-1850* Durham: Duke University Press, 1997; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New México, 1800-1850* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Edward H. Spicer,

MEXICAN LABOR AND IDENTITY

The economic opportunity that caused people to work and live on both sides of the border influenced the way in which Mexican communities and their identities evolved. Through the development of identities, individuals in different cultural groups in the borderlands created political and social definitions of who they were and how they related to society.⁵⁷ The focus on socially constructed identities came into focus after the impact of the 'cultural turn and the linguistic turn' as byproducts of postmodernism. Socially constructed categories influenced the ways society implemented and maintained power structures built on specific social understandings that promoted and constructed identities. These new identities were formed and governed by wealth that American dollars provided men in México. Yet, it also constructed a racial hierarchy in which Anglos remained prominent, enabling and creating racial conflict, discrimination, labor issues, and resistance on both sides of the border by Mexican nationals and Mexican-Americans.⁵⁸

A border meant more than two states agreeing on a geographical boundary, yet the United States México border was created by the Treaty of Guadalupe (1848) when the United States México War (1846-1848) ended, which favored the victor, the United States. The line created by the treaty signified where one country began and the other ended. The Treaty also demanded the exercise of national authority, most noticeably in the form of border policing. The Mounted Watchmen and Border Patrol enforced the boundary and symbolically attached the

Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, México, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960 Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1962; Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-México Border* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011; Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American," in *Frederick Jackson Turner: Wisconsin's Historian of the Frontier* edited by Martin Ridge, 1-19. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

⁵⁷ Omar Valerio-Jimenez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-14.

respective loyalties of residents on each side of the border to their respected government. As a result, states engaged in a nation-building process that demanded the drawing of clear distinctions between citizens and foreigners. But the treaty gave Mexicans residing in newly acquired lands American citizenship causing these individuals to have connections on both sides of the border. These new American citizens with Mexican culture produced this imagined community with a duo-national identity that developed through their individual understanding of culture, language, and tradition.⁵⁹ Society categorized Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as one community, however, each group self-identified with their individual concept of ethnicity and citizenship. Since the end of the United States-Mexican War and through the late nineteenth century, Mexicans on both sides of the border maintained close community ties based on family networks, economic interests, and cultural commonalities.

Race, like ethnicity, can certainly exist independently of a state, but it can also emerge from nation-building that justifies one group's dominance over another. A nation also sets terms for defining national identity based on racial hierarchy regardless of the diversity of its citizens.⁶⁰ The United States and México had a history of a multiethnic population. Both were occupied by Europeans who conquered vast zones inhabited by indigenous groups. México's population, like that of the United States, intermixed with the indigenous and African inhabitants, creating a complex caste system. Anglos arriving in the 1820s to the Mexican colony of Texas created multiple ethnic identities to differentiate between Mexicans, Tejanos, and indigenous people. The Mexican government encouraged settlement of its northern region by granting land grants to Anglo settlers.

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006), 7.

⁶⁰ James N. Leiker, *Racial Boundaries: Black Soldiers Along the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 8.

The Texas Revolution of 1836 not only led to the establishment of an independent Republic of Texas, but it also generated long-term disputes over the status of Texas and its boundaries. México refused to recognize the independence of Texas, maintaining it was an internal rebellion and not a separate political entity. One must note that even if México recognized the independence of Texas, it was not prepared to accept the Rio Grande as its border. The border conflict continued between the United States and México after Texas became a state in 1845. The United States declared war on México after the Mexican cavalry attacked a squadron of American troops north of the Rio Grande in April of 1846. The clash caused President Polk to receive congressional approval for a war against México.⁶¹

Many Anglo men married Mexican women to own land and established themselves in the Mexican community in Texas. The settlers that México saw intermixing with its people and aiding the establishment Texas launched the 1836 revolution and fostered biases against Mexican people.⁶² Often these biases arose more from cultural differences, such as religious or political customs. American pioneers favored Protestantism and a republican government; México was Catholic and federalist.⁶³ The sentiments and prejudices of the Old World continued as English-speaking settlers maintained the idea that Spaniards were low in the European social hierarchy. Sentiments reflecting the heritage of the Old-World prejudice grew during the Mexican-American War. By the 1840s when the United States seized vast portions of land in the Southwest, Americans had begun to see Mexicans no longer as members of an inferior institution but as inferior people.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, *Texas and the Mexican Revolution: A Study and National Border Policy 1910-1920* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1984), 7.

⁶² Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at The Frontier: Texas And New México, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 60.

⁶³ Leiker, 21.

⁶⁴ Reséndez, 207

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) addressed citizenship in Article VIII which stated that all Mexicans established in the acquired territories had one year to declare their citizenship as Mexican or American. But after that year they would automatically become American citizens if they remained in the United States. Many Mexicans became American citizens, but the lack of knowledge about property rights and deeds caused many to lose their land and have their political and economic rights violated. Article IX granted them all the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution, officially identifying them as Americans.⁶⁵ The people in the newly acquired lands "identified themselves racially and culturally as Indians, mestizos, Españoles, Euro-Americans, and various other combinations."⁶⁶ Consequently, in the United States Mexicans are seen as mestizos and therefore could not be Americans. The term 'Mexican' became a national and racial identifier people could not escape, regardless of citizenship. Their skin color and customs maintained them as Mexican.

The beginning of economic and social integration between the United States and México brought about economic and territorial expansion. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war in 1848 and also created two neighboring nations that were completely sovereign from one another. Each country had its ideas of culture and policy that would best benefit its people without regard to the other.⁶⁷ The physical and legal obstacles to moving across the border were nonexistent. The official territorial boundary created by the Treaty of Guadalupe and Gadsden Treaty in 1853 was not specified or policed during its establishment. The areas on both sides of Rio Grande River to capitalist investors are economic epicenters where goods and services are

⁶⁵ Oscar J. Martinez, ed., *U.S.-México Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Washington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 25-26.

⁶⁶ Anthony Mora, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New México, 1848-1912* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 5.

⁶⁷ Valerio-Jimenez, 8.

exchanged instead of an environmental division between two countries. The Rio Grande was a connecting force instead of a divider to the inhabitants of the area as people traveled back and forth trading and selling to one another.⁶⁸

Several factors gave shape to Mexican immigration into the United States during the twentieth century. The most obvious and decisive is the geographical space they share, and this is in common dating back to the Mexican-American War. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 created the first wave of migration into the industrializing United States. One of the first actions on the part of México regarding its population in the United States was to assist its nationals who wanted to return to México after the Treaty of Guadalupe. México's main objectives were for immigrants to maintain cultural ties, family connections, and patriotic loyalty to their home country while preventing disputes and confrontations with the United States. Despite the absence of a formal agreement to address the causes and consequences of immigration from México, many Mexican representatives were active in the United States through migrant organizations as they had little to no authority in intervening in American politics.⁶⁹

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of Mexican labor is a struggle in which economic, social and political realities of each period from the Treaty of Guadalupe (1848) to the Great Depression (1930s) had directly affected the acceptance or oppression of ethnic laborers in the United States. As a receiving country, the United States had tried to regulate the flow of migration through exclusion laws, quotas, and labor programs. However, as Alexandra Délano explains "the general stability

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁹ Alexandra Délano, *México and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies and Emigration since 1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 70.

in the United States-México relationship, despite economic, diplomatic, or political crisis strengthen the view that 'the cost of disagreeing with the United States is manageable' and sharing the border with the United States is not an obstacle but an opportunity."⁷⁰ Considering the inescapable reality of sharing a border with a global superpower with the world's strongest economy, México's focus was the money workers brought back and invested in México.

As this migration of people indicates, the two countries have long been linked by "a bilateral economic relationship due to the high volume of trade and a shared 2,000-mile border."⁷¹ But most notably a "cultural connections between immigrants have provided México with \$21.7 billion in 2013 in remittances mainly being sent to women to pay for basic needs."⁷² These remittances constituted the third largest source of revenue for México while the workers who sent them helped the United States maintain its high rates of industrial productivity. The United States and México need one another to function, as both economies have become intertwined throughout the decades, one cannot function without the other.

The border economy took root in the nineteenth century causing the Mexican Northwest to undergo social and economic changes. After the Mexican-American war and the transfer of land to the United States, Sonora became a prosperous agricultural and mining economy influenced by the United States. The interconnection between border communities in Arizona and Sonora caused business groups to have a working consensus and minimized conflict and economic competition. During late nineteenth hundreds' and early twentieth century Sonora merchants and hacendados were active participants in American trade, politics, and its economy. The cross-border relationship brought new issues and ideas such as modernization and cultural

⁷⁰Ibid., 12.

⁷¹ M. Angeles Villarreal, "U.S.-México Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications" *Congressional Research Service*, April 25, 2015 (<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32934.pdf>), 7.

⁷²Ibid., 9.

integration as “the economy evolved at a time when no settlements existed along the boundary between both countries.”⁷³ Sonora's mineral wealth brought Anglo-Americans to the border region for mining opportunities. Arizona's isolation made it rely on Mexican merchants and rancheros. Saltillo and Hermosillo's farming production enabled them to become supply and trade centers for mining towns unable to produce agricultural goods or raise livestock. "The shift from livestock grazing to agriculture forced the raising of livestock both for meat and wool."⁷⁴ As the establishment of mining towns sprang up, livestock and agricultural regions developed synonymously. The discovery of silver in Zacatecas in the late eighteenth century, according to historians Miguel Tinker Salas and Leslie S. Offutt, caused the economy to shift from agriculture to mining opportunities. The rising demand for silver and copper, which existed in large quantities in Zacatecas and along the Sonora-Arizona border, brought American entrepreneurs there to build modern production facilities.⁷⁵

As a ‘new border empire,’ railroads connected México and the United States increasing trade, social, and political interaction.⁷⁶ Railroad projects in México attempted to connect themselves with important trading towns and ports mirroring the developments in the United States.⁷⁷ By the 1880s, railroads connected the main port, Guaymas, as well as the state of Sonora's capital, and the agricultural center of Hermosillo, with the international border of Nogales. The railroad developed Sonora's economic interaction between Mexicans and

⁷³ Miguel Tinker Salas. *In the Shadow of the Eagle: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

⁷⁴ Leslie S. Offutt, *Saltillo, 1770-1810: Town and Region in the Mexican North* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 178.

⁷⁵ Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscape: The Forgotten History of The U.S.-México Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4.

⁷⁶ Tinker Salas, 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

Americans. Hundreds of Mexicans migrated north during the 1850s to work in the mines of Southern Arizona.

The construction of the railroad south of the border brought workers from the interior of México to small border towns and into the United States. The construction progressed from the city of México to Coahuila and then to Chihuahua, also from South to North. Workers (some with their family) migrated with the construction of the railroad that was set to connect México and the United States. However, these railroad workers did not become immigrants overnight. This geographical closeness resulted in opportunities for them because the same companies contracted by the Díaz government recruited Mexican workers for the construction of the railroad in various parts of the Southern United States.

American mines used Mexican labor because owners could pay them less and because Mexican men did not leave to “prosper on [their] own” as Anglo men did. American contractors understood the importance of the family in Mexican society and capitalized on it by hiring the entire family at different rates, reducing the need for Mexican men to leave the mines, establishing a permanent emigrant labor force.⁷⁸ Many families became contract workers to escape the violence of the Revolution or following the construction of the train utilized the family networks for food and housing. The Mexican family was influential in the immigration experience, as they were destination points and resources in the emigration process. Many workers and their families lived in railroad boxcars assigned as living quarters (furnished with a stove and sink), located in the roadhouses where the train was serviced, while others emigrated to places where family members already were established and lived with them.⁷⁹ Many men working on the railroad or in other industries were family members or *compadres*, gaining

⁷⁸ Balderrama and Rodriguez, 35.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 40.

contracts and work due to a family connection. According to the Dillingham Commission Survey in 1911, Mexican railroad workers were accompanied by their family more than any other group.⁸⁰ Consequently, as families migrated many of them expanded their employment possibilities into agriculture, and industrial manufacturing jobs in the United States.

The expansion of the railway fueled border town's economic and population growth. The industrialization of the North and railroads linking the borderlands together created a 'bi-national frontier zone' with the establishment of border towns.⁸¹ The railroad developed Sonora's economic interaction between Mexicans and Americans. This economic progress developed the agriculture and mining sectors, which attracted workers from the center of the country to various border towns. Oscar J. Martinez argues that even though regions located near the border "develop at a slower rate than comparable interior areas," the United States Mexican border "has had a unique impact on development in this region."⁸² In tracing the history of Ciudad Juarez, for example, Martinez illustrates how the city's economy had a strong external orientation and how vulnerable the Mexican border communities were to foreign conditions. Additionally, Miguel Tinker Salas illustrates the fluidity of the borderlands specifically in Sonora as it experienced a transformation from a neglected internal frontier of México to an influential border state. The proximity to the border of the United States was even more tempting when some American companies were set up strategically in border cities to recruit Mexican workers for work in the United States.⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid., 39. The survey took place in 1911.

⁸¹ Mark Overmyer-Velazquez, *Beyond la Frontera: The History of México-U.S. Migration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxxiv.

⁸² Oscar J. Martinez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 5-6.

⁸³ Tinker-Salas, 25.

Mexican nationals sought opportunities across the border. Mining strikes throughout the United States Southwest pulled men from México into the mines of California, Nevada, Arizona, and Colorado. “The developing economy of the West caused villagers who had traditionally pursued seasonal employment in México now traveled back and forth from México and the United States.”⁸⁴ As laborers and *peones* worked in the United States, they accepted lower wages and inferior housing. Mine owners and agricultural managers exploited workers and treated them as racially inferior. Racial violence between Americans and Mexicans in Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora separated the regions into groups.

Throughout this ‘new border empire’ railroads connected México and the United States, thereby increasing trade, as well as social and political interaction.⁸⁵ The fluidity of the economy enhanced the economic exchange, as goods were purchased and crossed by people on both sides of the border. However, it did affect the image of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on both sides of the border. Scholars have examined how the impact of economic recession negatively impacted people of color in society and the job market. From the time in which the United States annexed part of the Mexican territory in 1848, Mexican people have been treated by Anglos as an inferior group. Albert Camarillo argues that with the introduction of American capitalism, the socioeconomic and political status of Mexican people became inferior.⁸⁶ Mexican’s substandard status was due to “their incorporation into the capitalist labor market, which locked them into the status of a predominantly unskilled/semi-skilled working class, that placed them at the bottom of

⁸⁴ Arnoldo De León. *Racial Frontiers: Africans, Chinese, and Mexicans in Western America, 1848-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2002), 16.

⁸⁵ Tinker-Salas, 3.

⁸⁶ Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 4.

the occupational structure.”⁸⁷ For the academic, Yolanda de la Mora, this phenomenon laid the groundwork for the emigration that continues to date.⁸⁸

THE WAR AND DEPRESSION

The Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) developed from North to South, in contrast to the railway, and the Revolution had at least two lasting effects in the history of Mexican immigration to the United States. Mass migration reinforced the negative image of the Mexican immigrant as violent and unmanageable. The violence of the Mexican Revolution marked the United States as safe and economically prosperous bringing in an increased migration.⁸⁹ Yet, at the same time public sentiment in the United States, particularly in reaction to the Revolution worsened the international image of Mexicans. The stereotype of the Mexican Warrior, lover of chaos, for example, manifested in some English-speaking daily editorial segments, such as *The New York Times* whose headlines in 1913 read “Barbarous México.” The article explained how Mexican men watched “the burning of dead bodies on the battlefield” lingering as if enjoying themselves.⁹⁰ Also, the earliest silent films portrayed Mexicans “as among the vilest of the screen’s villains. He robbed, murdered, pillaged, raped, cheated, gambled, lied and displayed virtually every vice that could be shown on the screen. Mexican became a synonym for the violent.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁸ Yolanda de la Mora, *Proceso sociopsicológico de la emigración legal a Los Estados Unidos* (México D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1983), 23-24.

⁸⁹ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-México Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 6-10.

⁹⁰ Allen Woll, “How Hollywood Has Portrayed Hispanics” *New York Times* Published March 1, 1981 <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/01/movies/how-hollywood-has-portrayed-hispanics.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed January 3, 2018).

⁹¹ Ibid.

The xenophobia and exclusion portrayed in film and newspapers mirrored the increasingly vitriolic politics of anti-Mexicanism.⁹² As American newspapers portrayed the Revolution as a Mexicans need for chaos, México romanticized it as saving the people. The Mexican official history presents this revolution that arose almost naturally from the oppressive government of Porfirio Díaz, to redeem and do justice to the country's most vulnerable citizens. Díaz's push toward modernity and progress not only fueled Mexican immigration to the United States, but it also facilitated it through the construction of the railroad linking key cities. But the railroads did not only transport people out of México but brought in new technological advances in agriculture and industrial manufacturing that had a devastating effect on the most unprotected social classes of the country.

With the ease of transportation, farmers imported technology and machinery to increase the yield of products in demand. This situation had repercussions on the Mexican labor force because manpower was not as productive as machinery and foreign investment rose. The use of airplanes began for fumigation. While farm tractors started to speed up the process of plowing, tilling, disking, harrowing, planting, and similar tasks, reducing the amount of time, hours, and laborers needed. Additionally, it made large farms more productive while small and independent farmers could not compete with prices or produce the same amount of goods. Díaz continued granting investors special concessions and tax breaks. México's favoring of foreign investment instead of its citizens' wellness had permitted centuries of mistreatment and poverty, which lead to migration. American contractors encouraged Mexican labor migration to the agricultural fields

⁹² Stern, 300.

in the United States by promoting it as an opportunity to escape poverty and the violence of the revolution.⁹³

Prior to 1910, the main issue between the United States and México was not immigration but land conflicts with indigenous people. The United States attributed all crime along the border to México's inability to control and secure the border, and the United States threatened to send American troops into Mexican territory. Consequently, México and the United States agreed to manage the border through a cooperation of their armies to protect the increasing population along the border. But the disorder and violence of the Mexican Revolution, caused thousands of Mexicans from various social classes, to seek refuge in the United States. However, all these factors not only shaped immigration in the twentieth century around the world but at the same time defined the negative presence as a hindrance to the progress of the American nation.⁹⁴

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the immigrant population in the United States grew significantly as a result of the violence and hardship of the Mexican Revolution. The influx also increased the demand for workers in the United States during World War I. By 1910, the Mexican population in the United States had doubled to 222,000, and it doubled again in 1920 to 486,000.⁹⁵ The depopulation of México became such a concern that President Francisco I. Madero passed the Act of 1911, offering land to Mexican residents in the United States as an incentive to return home. However, as a result of World War I the demand for Mexican workers increased as white male agricultural workers joined the war effort causing the United States government a need for more food for the allied cause. Laborers entering the United States had to navigate through immigration laws set to curtail unwanted immigration. For example, the

⁹³ Lytle Hernández, 26.

⁹⁴ St. John 108

⁹⁵ Déllano, 68.

Immigration Act of 1917 imposed literacy tests and a head tax on all Mexican labor making immigration difficult, causing many to migrate illegally. But due to a shortage of labor, especially in the southeast of the country, the United States Department of Labor responded to the request of merchants and industrialists by permitting Mexican's with contracts to cross the border without being required to meet any requirement set by the act.⁹⁶

Interestingly, the Immigration Act of 1917 in the United States coincided with agrarian reform under the Mexican Constitution of 1917. This law destroyed the *hacendado* class but left newly created *ejidos*-communal land to the poor farmer, without enough resources for the development of agriculture in general, yet the ability to farm and freely labor eventually ended the crisis of the countryside.⁹⁷ This 'historical coincidence' was convenient at the time for the two countries. México had driven out enough skilled field workers to work in American agriculture without impacting Mexican production. This fluke was most evident in México's Article II of its Constitution which recognized Mexican's "citizens' rights to enter and exit the country, without government restrictions on emigration" making migrant labor subjected to American law, only.⁹⁸

When Mexican President Venustiano Carranza came to power in 1917, he proposed a national strategy for managing immigration based on three points: dissuasion, contract protection, and 'Mexicanization' of emigrants.⁹⁹ This proposal consisted of permitting exiles to return, preventing permanent settlement in the United States, and assisted in developing migrant organizations. The Mexican government used nationalistic rhetoric to argue that the labor

⁹⁶Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 47.

⁹⁷ De la Mora, 26.

⁹⁸ Délano, 70.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 69.

shortages in many areas of México were a result of the demand from American employers that México could not avoid. Instead, the Mexican government reframed the relationship of inequality as a positive asset since immigrants who worked temporarily in the United States gained valuable skills and techniques that contributed to the country's development upon their return home. Based on Article II of the 1917 Constitution, the plan gave Mexican citizens the right to enter and exit the country freely, and therefore did not impose restrictions on immigration. However, there were attempts to reduce the flow of immigrants by limiting the amounts of passports and requiring a contract with an American employer before crossing the border. The 1917 Immigration Act was quite flexible concerning the supply of Mexican labor. Employers asked the Secretary of Labor to exempt Mexican contract workers from literacy exams and an eight-dollar head tax to keep up with wartime production. The recruitment of Mexican workers was vital to the success of industrialists and farmers, and therefore for the economy of the country. However, nationalist groups and Mexican employers demanded consular protection to protect immigrants against hardship and mistreatment. The Mexican Consular Law of 1871 limited the consuls' commitment to defend Mexicans in the United States, as the ministry's activities and statements could not interfere with United States domestic affairs.

From 1917-1921, the United States government established a unilateral program for the recruitment of Mexican workers to maintain war level production demands. This program was considered by many as the First Bracero Program because it brought men to work in the fields as contract labor on a smaller scale (than the Bracero Program in 1942).¹⁰⁰ American companies

¹⁰⁰ Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *La comunidad mexicana en Estados Unidos: Aspectos de su historia* (San Luis Potosí [México]: El Colegio de San Luis Potosí: Conaculta, 2004); George Kiser and Martha W. Kiser, *Mexican Workers in the United States.: Historical and Political Perspective* (Albuquerque: The University of New México Press, 1979); Alexandra Délano, *México and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies and Emigration since 1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

could recruit Mexican laborers right at the border until 1921 when the economic recession following the war curtailed the need for immigrant labor. At the end of World War, I, many Anglo workers returned to their jobs in the fields and the industrial sectors of the economy. The exceptions made to the Mexican farmers in the Immigration Act of 1917 then ended. Either way, regardless of the increase in employment in the United States, the

“Labor Department ruled that employers who had contracts for Mexican laborers prior to December 15, 1918, could import workers without a literacy test or head tax until January 15, 1919, allowing Mexican laborers to work in agriculture, railroads, government construction and in mines until they were no longer needed, or their contracts expired.”¹⁰¹

The need for Mexican labor after the World War I decreased, workers were repatriated beginning in 1921, due to the return of men from war and the decrease in the production of war goods. ¹⁰²

By the early 1920s, a shift occurred within the American political landscape because of the influence of World War I and the Red Scare. This sharp turn away from internationalism and moderate cultural pluralism promoted nativism and the passing of laws such as the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, also known as the National Origin Act, which established the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to two percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890, except Mexicans who were excluded from the placed quotas. The Immigration Act of 1917, directly targeted Mexicans by imposing literacy tests and a head tax on Mexican labor. The Immigration Act of 1924, impacted Mexican national's facilitation in crossing by establishing the Border Patrol. Border surveillance began with Texas and Arizona Rangers, who were state governed. In 1915, Congress officially appointed a group of Border Patrolmen called the Mounted Inspector became

¹⁰¹ Garcia, 51.

¹⁰² Douglas W. Richmond and Sam W. Haynes ed., *The Mexican Revolution: Conflict and Consolidation, 1910-1940* (Arlington: The University of Texas at Arlington, 2013), 96-97.

a sector of the Public Health Service, which the Border Patrol replaced in 1924.¹⁰³ The Border Patrol became a division of the United States Department of Labor. The creation of a border police force began the United States policies focus on restricting entry and limiting immigration through militarization and broad means of the law. A byproduct of racist policies, ‘illegal aliens’ fulfilled an economic need through their low wages—a direct result of their illegal status. “Thus, the national origins quota system [preserved] the American nation [as a] white nation descended from Europe.”¹⁰⁴ The United States policies created the conditions for illegal immigration to exist by attempting to maintain a ‘white nation.’

The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 temporarily limited the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States by imposing quotas based on country of birth. Annual allowable quotas for each country of origin was three percent of the total number of foreign-born persons from that country, recorded in the 1910 United States Census. The exceptions to the quotas were made for government officials and their families, aliens who were passing through the United States or visiting as tourists or temporary workers. The Act restricted immigration to maintain the racial composition of past census. Americans found the law too liberal and felt it allowed for a departure from the original complexion of the nation. Consequently, the Immigration Act of 1924 set new quotas limiting the numbers of annual immigrants from particular countries. It based the quota on the 1890 census and reduced the percentage from three to two percent. This system favored old immigration from Southern Europe who had proven to assimilate. Furthermore, the law clearly identified "non-quota" immigrants. It also stated that preference would be given to family members of United States citizens and to immigrants who

¹⁰³ Stern, 303.

¹⁰⁴ Ngai, 27.

were skilled in agriculture.¹⁰⁵ "The quota system distinguished persons of the 'colored races' from 'white' persons from 'white' countries."¹⁰⁶

More importantly, México provided cheap labor that was necessary for the productivity of the country, exempting them from quotas. Large agricultural operations in Texas, Arizona, and California pressured their Congressmen to support loopholes and exemptions such as contract labor and work visas for Mexicans to work in the United States regardless of quotas. At the same time, farmers and agricultural associations promoted exemptions to the 1924 Act to allow Mexicans to work in the United States. American society perceived Mexicans as the cause of several social and economic problems, such as lingering unemployment and the perceived pollution of American identity.¹⁰⁷ However, Mexicans were exempt from the 1924 Act due to their classification as Caucasian until the 1930's. "In 1930, the United States Census for the first and only time included a 'Mexican' category on the race variable; this classification was not fully rejected until 1939."¹⁰⁸ In materials prepared for the December 1928 meeting of the (Joint) Census Advisory Committee, are the first official steps toward a separate racial category. The document stated, "Mexicans were to be classified separately from the white population because of the feeling that they were not strictly white."¹⁰⁹ The category of "Mexican" does not appear on the 1940s census establishing their official identification as non-white.

Reflecting the desire of many Anglos in the United States to maintain a white nation, policymakers forced immigrants from Northern Europe, Asian, and México to endure an

¹⁰⁵----- "1924 Immigration Act" http://library.uwb.edu/guides/USimmigration/1924_immigration_act.html (Access October 3, 2010). None quota immigrants included wives and unmarried children (under 18 years of age) of United States citizens, residents of the Western hemisphere, religious or academic professionals, and "bonafide students" under 15 years of age. Those not in any of these categories were referred to as a "quota immigrant."

¹⁰⁶ Ngai, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Balderrama and Rodriguez, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Brian Gratton and Emily Klancher Merchant, "*La Raza*: Mexicans in the United States Census" https://neukom.dartmouth.edu/docs/16_gratton_la_raza_merchant.pdf (Accessed January 4, 2018), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 6-7.

Americanization process. In an experimental program in 1917, the Los Angeles school board established Americanization classes which were funded by the State Commission of Immigration and Housing, to teach Mexican women English, sewing, food preservation and preparation, as well as, hygiene.¹¹⁰ By "reforming" the Mexican woman, a lasting cultural change would occur in future generations. "Educators, reformers, and businessmen agreed that assimilation through Americanization was the solution of the Mexican problem."¹¹¹ The program, however, did not promote social mobility through education. Instead, it set out to teach Mexican and Mexican-American children their "roles" as domestic workers and field laborers. Nor did the program provide training for citizenship, instead focusing on how to maintain the inequality of Mexican as the other. Mexicans adopted and infused the Americanization process into their existing culture creating a hybrid American culture that is neither completely American nor Mexican. The Americanizing process of "desMexicanización" was the creation of a "Mexican or Mexican-American culture as immigrants and their children picked, borrowed, maintained, and created a hybrid culture" that did not fully reject its Mexican roots or embrace American culture completely.¹¹² Unfortunately, the repatriation of the 1930s symbolizes America's rejection of Mexicans assimilation attempts.

Throughout the early twentieth century, approximately 685,000 legal Mexican immigrants between 1900 and 1930 resided in the United States. Prior to 1910 however, "unauthorized entry of Mexicans... was of little concern to American authorities."¹¹³ According

¹¹⁰ Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles From the Great Migration to the Great Depression*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed May 19, 2017), 139.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹¹² Vicky L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. (Oxford University Press 1998), xvi.; Monroy, 201.

¹¹³ Venson C. Davis, *Blood on the Border: Criminal Behavior and Illegal Immigration Along the Southern U.S. Border* (New York: Vantage Press, 1993), 26.

to historian George Sanchez, “The laxity with which American authorities patrolled the border crossing in 1910 was not due to an absence of immigration statutes in the books as restrictions focused on those believed to become a public charge. Instead, civil servants working at the border concentrated their efforts on the surreptitious entry of the Chinese and patrolled against criminal activity.”¹¹⁴ Ironically, because of the lax inspection system along the border prior to the Immigration Act of 1924 and the creation of the United States Border Patrol, “the [Immigration Service] reported with some alarm that 1.4 million immigrants- 20 percent of those who had entered the country before 1921- might already be living illegally in the United States... these immigrants had lawfully entered the country, but because it had no record of their admission, it considered them illegal.”¹¹⁵ Consequently, the “number of illegal entries created a new emphasis on control of the nation’s contiguous land borders, which emphasis had not existed before.”¹¹⁶ The United States- Mexican border became the focus of the American politics, quickly becoming a guarded symbol of American prosperity.

The Great Depression of 1929 changed México’s and the United States government’s position towards immigration. The repatriation of the 1930s targeted hundreds of Mexicans who entered the United States legally. The economic crisis curtailed labor migration to the United States as well as exacerbated pre-existing, anti-immigration ideology in American society. Secretary of Labor, William N. Doak, in 1931 announced a plan to repatriate all Mexican immigrants by opening jobs to American workers that were occupied by Mexicans.

Table 2.1: The Repatriation of Mexicans from 1929-1933 ¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Sanchez, 53.

¹¹⁵ Ngai, 61.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹¹⁷ The National Archive and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. Record Group 59, 8II.III, México Reports/59, 80, 99, 122, 141, 142.

Year	Repatriated
1929	79,419
1930	70,127
1931	138,519
1932	77,453
1933	33,574
Total	399,092

The American-born children made up sixty percent of repatriated individuals; they did not have a connection to México, making them foreigners in both countries.

The low wages that Mexicans were willing to accept during the Great Depression, caused Anglos to blame them for the increasing levels of unemployment and economic hardship they faced.¹¹⁸ The low wages created animosity from Anglo workers towards Mexicans. Americans believed that the repatriation and deportation of Mexicans would make jobs available for Native born Americans, and thereby end the depression.¹¹⁹ The Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.) officially expelled a small number of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans under formal I.N.S. directed removal proceedings.¹²⁰ The INS did increase its deportation efforts during the 1930s, and on several occasions, the agency co-operated with local governments who sought to remove Mexicans from their jurisdictions. For example, in Los Angeles County, INS sent federal immigration agents to conduct raids and hold removal hearings. “In three high profile raids in 1931, the agency arrested 389 deportable aliens, 269 of whom were Mexican.”¹²¹ A more important result of those raids, however, was that the *threat* of increased federal deportations caused many to return to México. “The majority returned to

¹¹⁸ Balderama and Rodríguez, 2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁰ ---“INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations” *the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services*. March 3, 2014. <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history/historians-mailbox/ins-records-1930s-mexican-repatriations> (Accessed January 4, 2018).

¹²¹ Ibid.

México by their own decision or officially voluntary – though often coercive – repatriation programs directed by state and local governments and charitable aid agencies.”¹²² Consequently, the United States repatriated and deported nearly half a million Mexicans and their children regardless of citizenship.¹²³

The repatriation of 1929 demonstrated that Mexicans in the United States were not only men but complete families who consisted of a Mexican-born wife and Mexican-American children. From July 1930 to June 1931 the Mexican government with the aid of the consulates and donors aided in the return of 60,207 men and 31,765 women from California and Texas, predominately.¹²⁴ As time went by, the temporary nature of the Mexican population in the United States became more and more of a myth. Men who had immigrated once settled and began to relocate their families to the United States. The very presence of family, however, transformed a transient male-only group into a permanent and stable population consisting of both men and women with American roots. The Mexican laborers were not only men but women, too. Among the ‘problematic’ Mexicans were Mexican women, at least in El Paso, they comprised a good part of the domestic labor force.¹²⁵ Many women worked as domestics, cooks, seamstresses and in canneries, accepting low wages. Mexican women were perceived as reducing American women’s opportunities to work during the depression. Mexican women did cross the border in smaller numbers than men, but repatriation demonstrated their presence in the United States was unexpectedly large.

¹²² “INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations”; Yolanda Chávez Leyva, “Mexican Hands, Hard-Working: Mexicana Workers During the Depression” at *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies*, Vol. 5 (1995) Juan R. García, editor (Tucson: The University of Arizona: Mexican American Studies and Research Center, 1995), 63.

¹²³ Chávez Leyva, “Mexican Hands, Hard Working,” 63.

¹²⁴ Moisés González Navarro, “Población y Sociedad en México (1900-1970).” México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales. II vols. ,1974. (Estudios, No. 42),538-539.

¹²⁵ Chávez Leyva, 64.

Local and federal agencies associated with repatriation and deportation assumed that deporting Mexican families would save money by curtailing public assistance payments. Police, border patrol, and government officials did not care about citizenship or years lived in the United States. In order to target the entire Mexican family Immigration Services refocused their efforts in California whose population had a large number of Mexican/Mexican Americans and the state had a border facilitating deportation. Raids were a full-scale paramilitary operation involving local police, county sheriffs, and federal officials to assure maximum success.¹²⁶ Authorities only cared if they were Mexican or a shade of brown. People of Mexican descent were coerced, intimidated, and manipulated in raids, door- to- door announcements, and by federal aid programs. The Spanish language press on both sides of the border voiced and highlighted the treatment that the Mexicans were undergoing.¹²⁷

Many families turned to consular groups, such as the *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul* in the United States. These groups began aiding many Mexicans in protecting their civil rights and assisting in repatriation efforts.¹²⁸ In various cases women with American born children found themselves repatriated back to México, which forced the migration of their American children as well. In a study conducted, it was found the repatriation of 1,200 undocumented individuals cost \$90,000, yet their 1,478 estimated dependents left behind would cost \$147,000 a year in federal aid programs.¹²⁹ Consequently, Immigration Naturalization Services set out to target the entire family through door to door raids, instead of public events. Additionally, by repatriating the entire family the United States believed that the undocumented individual would be less likely to return.

¹²⁶ Balderrama and Rodríguez, 71-72.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁸ Deláno, 76.

¹²⁹ Balderrama and Rodríguez, 78.

In 1929, México proposed a bilateral agreement in dealing with the repatriation and management of Mexicans. Mexican authorities facilitated migrants' returns and promoted political and economic measures to stimulate and create jobs for returning immigrants. The Mexican government also enacted a series of programs and concessions including suspending import duties, reduced transportation costs, and guaranteed loans, to facilitate the repatriation of Mexican Nationals and their American children.¹³⁰ Consequently, communal centers received returning Mexicans. The railways established at the border, set up special fees, donations and free passes for the returnees. At the border, different local organizations set up food kitchens, hostels and conducted collections as well as other activities in order to assist hundreds of repatriated individuals who arrived.

The efforts of the Mexican government failed as one million repatriated people returned. The economic instability and limited opportunities caused many repatriated individuals to become a burden in the United States and México. The repatriation campaigns were criticized on both sides of the border because they mainly concentrated on Mexican agricultural workers and their families. In response to the return of Mexican nationals, Mexican-Americans, and their children, in 1936, the General Population Act stipulated incorporation to the national development of the country.¹³¹ The law set to decrease infant mortality, promoted repatriated people to labor in agriculture, and the geographical distribution of people for development opportunities. Yet, the push for agriculture and new development did not render enough for repatriated families to survive, instead of becoming burdens and competition to their Mexican counterpart.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹³¹ De la Mora, *Proceso sociopsicológico de la emigración*, 27-30.

Many people returning to México found they were strangers to their family members and a financial burden to the nation. Many Mexican -Americans found neither country accepted them; they were Mexicans in the United States and Americans in México. México's economy was not prepared for the large influx of Mexicans or Mexican-Americans who had no connection to México and were perceived as outsiders. Consequently, many of the beneficiaries of the repatriation program returned to the United States in search of economic opportunities soon after their arrival in México, regardless of American sentiment.¹³²

American xenophobia created this image of Mexicans as cheap replacement labor, responsible for the economic downturn of the time.¹³³ As Americans became anti-Mexican so did the American immigration policy. Most notably there was a shift in the border patrol's objective to imprison, deport, and force relocation of Mexican migrants. In many instances, Mexican consulates were not notified by American officials of arrest or hearings until after the fact. The Ministry program helped nearly 50,000 workers who returned to México, but the conditions in rural areas had not improved, and government support was limited. The large influx of Mexicans entering México was now competing with Mexicans for jobs. This aid rhetoric in México quickly changed perceiving these repatriated individuals as sell-outs and Americans.

The I.N.S. enforcement of policy favored economic gain over naturalization, permitting the temporary immigration of laborers while turning a blind eye to their status.¹³⁴ The I.N.S. in the 1930s switched their direction to push voluntary removal and aid in deportation as immigrants were no longer labor aid.¹³⁵ After nearly eight decades of tumultuous conflict and

¹³² Deláno, 7.

¹³³ Robert J. Lipshultz, "American Attitudes Toward Mexican Immigration, 1924-1952" Ph.D. diss., (The University of Chicago, 1962), 45.

¹³⁴ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 2010), i.

¹³⁵ "INS Records for 1930s Mexican Repatriations."

exchange, the binational relationship between the United States can be defined as complex and sometimes contradictory, bringing in immigrants as cheap labor and returning them as soon as they no longer were useful. In times of economic growth, the United States government and various industrial sectors promoted Mexican immigration without regard for the Mexican government's interest. Conversely, in times of economic crisis and instability, the United States government wanted to remove and return all immigrants. Unfortunately, México's vulnerability to manage the migration flow or defend its people's rights in the United States made it vulnerable to American economic needs. Following this pattern, with the onset of World War II, México signed an agreement to enter a bi-national arrangement of supplying workers in 1942 (Bracero Program). The Mexican government considered it in its economic and political interest due to the country's economic depression.

CREATING ANTI-MEXICAN XENOPHOBIA

The United States immigration policies were a byproduct of racist beliefs and the ebb and flow of capitalist demand. Between 1776 and 1881, individuals could move across the United States-México border with relative ease, encountering a few customs houses and ports of entry.¹³⁶ In contrast to the present-day regime of border maintenance and anti-immigrant sentiment prior to the 1870s, immigration policy promoted the recruitment of foreign migration. The United States had an open immigration policy that favored ethnic groups classified as productive and easily assimilated immigrants (Northern European) rather than poor and unable to integrate migrants (Asians and Eastern Europeans) who would become a burden on society. Undocumented laborers fulfilled an economic need through their low wages, which was a direct

¹³⁶ Roger Daniels, *Asian America Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: Seattle University of Washington Press, 1988), 10.

result of their illegal status. The Mexican Revolution's and World War I created the need to protect and reduce the entrance of foreign nationals to the United States. The use of quotas allowed United States officials to become gatekeepers, picking and choosing the "right immigrant." The United States policies created the conditions for illegal immigration to exist by attempting to maintain a "white nation." Consequently, Immigration Acts and the Immigration Naturalization Service engendered xenophobia while the border patrol saw themselves as protectors of American culture.

Immigration restrictions began as a labor movement in which the American workforce and their organizations highlighted the threat immigrants had on the American worker and culture.¹³⁷ Immigrants migrated as contract labor with the intention of returning to their homeland.¹³⁸ In response to migration of contract laborers, labor unions and political leaders supported exclusionary policies to combat reduction in wages and undermining of laborer rights. Contract labor became a replacement labor force during strikes, amplifying animosity between migrants and 'native' Americans. Immigrant labor threatened wages, opportunities, and rights of natives bringing forth a rise of xenophobia and exclusion to preserve 'white' America from immigrants.

The Mexican government encouraged emigration in order to industrialize the country. Latin America was an alternative location with economic opportunities. Mexican officials viewed Chinese labor as essential for the modernization of the country. Asian laborers were modern and cheap labor in México's economy reducing the number of native workers hired in shipping and railroad industries, increasing the number of Mexicans immigrating to the United

¹³⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹³⁸ Luciano Mangiafico, *Contemporary American Immigrants: Pattern of Filipino, Korean, and Chinese Settlement in the United States* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), xviii.

States. An agreement between the United States and México proved difficult due to the relationship between the countries and the different immigration goals each one had. The United States attempted to control immigrants' at the ports of entry in México instead of attempting to have México adopt exclusion laws. México did not grant them jurisdiction but allowed Asians entrance. The rise in Asian migration into México and their usage of the Mexican citizenship loophole in American immigration law contributed to Nativist sentiment in the United States towards Mexicans. Nativism fueled the creation of the Bureau of Immigration in 1891 and the establishment of the Mounted Inspectors (Chinese Inspectors), whose purpose was to stop the illegal crossing of anyone with Asian features. Immigrants faced racial hostility from Mexican nationals, but they were deemed necessary for the development of México's economy. Regardless of Mexican sentiment towards immigrants, the open border with México had furthered the American animosity towards México by Americans.

The Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1899 between the United States and México facilitated Mexican contract labor into the United States by permitting Mexican workers to enter the United States so economic production could continue.¹³⁹ The treaty increased the number of Asian laborers in México, who proceeded to use loopholes to enter the United States as Mexican citizens. Consequently, in response to the large influx of immigrants, the United States passed the Immigration Act of 1917, imposing literacy tests and a head tax on Mexican labor, partially as a response to Chinese attempts to enter the U.S. The increase in border agents and centers along the border decreased illegal immigration, but never fully closed it. The Immigration Act of 1924 set quotas for immigrants, addressed the loopholes in the Immigration Act of 1917 and marked the beginning of modern immigration restrictions. "From 1882-1924 Asian immigration

¹³⁹ Erika Lee, "Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S Borders with Canada and México, 1882-1924" *Journal of American History*, (June 2002), 79.

and exclusion along the United States -México borders had transformed the immigration policy, the borderlands and border enforcement,” not only for one specific group but for every immigrant attempting to cross the southern border.¹⁴⁰

Two distinct ideologies regarding immigration law in the United States is seen during the Great Depression and World War II, in each decade an unwanted immigrant is created. The Great Depression curtailed immigration to the United States as immigrants became blamed for the economic instability of the United States. The Great Depression exacerbated pre-existing tension between ethnic groups as Anglos viewed their financial hardship as a direct result of the low wages Asians were willing to accept. The economic instability of the Depression enabled the United States to continue influencing immigration laws in the Americas and increasing xenophobia. The economic downfall curbed employment opportunities everywhere. As the United States entered World War II immigration laws targeted Japanese immigration, moving away from Chinese xenophobia while opening its border for Mexican labors.

American experiments in enforcing the exclusion laws, including an expanding and increasingly discriminatory array of strategies to address persistent illegal immigration and its burgeoning complications, evolved into the institutional foundations of border enforcement and quota system the world practices today. The transnational movement of immigrant labor into the United States and México became a setting wherein racial identity and culture marked the distinction between wanted and unwanted migration. Migration in the nineteenth and twentieth century contained four central and connected ideas: networks, legislation, ethnic identity, and labor. The control of immigration embodied and symbolized ‘gate keeping,’ the closing of unwanted ‘evil,’ immigration and cheap labor. An examination of the interactions and policy

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 84.

changes which caused migration into the United States and México provides a background and lessons applicable to a contemporary world in which various ethnic groups live harmoniously and sometimes contentiously. The implementation of border control and racial intolerance during the late nineteenth and twentieth century is similar to, yet different from the twenty-first century.

The racialization of political discourse and immigration policy has been central to defining national identity, culture, and citizenship. As Asian immigration intolerance and numbers increased, Mexicans became the ‘other.’ Chinese labor emigration sparked mass migration to the New World in 1806 in order to replace slaves, initiating the “Chinese coolie trade.”¹⁴¹ Prior to the 1870s, immigration policy promoted the recruitment of foreign migration. Government sponsored emigration in China made companies an enterprise that recruited and shipped labor abroad for profit.¹⁴² Asians emigrated as contract labor with the intention of returning to their homeland. Contracted Chinese labor migrated to California during the gold rush of 1849 seeking the opportunity to mine and strike gold. American miners blamed the Chinese for reducing wages, so in 1862 Anti-Coolie organizations were constructed in San Francisco, California. The decrease in mineral wealth caused California to shift its economy to agricultural production. In the 1860s to 1870s Asians held unskilled or semi-skilled labor, working along with other migrant ethnic groups.

In response to migration of contract laborers, labor unions and political leaders supported exclusionary policies to combat reduction in wages and undermining of laborer rights. In the United States, the Chinese worked on the construction of the transcontinental Central Pacific Railroad. Contract labor became a replacement labor force during strikes, amplifying animosity

¹⁴¹ Daniels, 10.

¹⁴² Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 47.

between migrants and "native" Americans. For instance, the Knights of St. Crispin imported Chinese workers as strikebreakers into Calvin T. Sampson's shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts in 1870, making them a more significant labor problem to unions and local workers.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Japanese in California worked for a cheaper rate than Chinese, reducing wages drastically in the 1890s. As Chinese and Japanese labor dominated Asian migration before 1882, their labor threatened wages, opportunities, and rights of natives bringing forth a rise of xenophobia and exclusion to preserve "white" America.

Anti- Asian "immigration restriction initially was a movement supported by workers and their organizations."¹⁴⁴ The American Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, that suspended Asian immigration for ten years, focused mainly on laborers. In response, immigrants began arriving from Canada, Cuba, Hawaii, México, and other countries in the Americas to gain entrance into the United States in order to utilize loopholes in the law. Asians were classified "aliens ineligible for citizenship," from 1882 until 1965 by immigration laws.¹⁴⁵ As the first ten years of exclusion came to an end, legislation tightened and focused on addressing loopholes. The "likely to become a public charge clause" was added to the United States Exclusion Act in 1891, barring anyone who would become a public nuisance, thereby effectively eliminating those who could utilize cracks in legislation. The Geary Act of 1892 in the United States extended exclusion for ten years, placed the burden of proof on immigrants to prove their legal presence, eliminated the entrance of laborers, prostitutes, and removed all their legal rights. As historian Erika Lee found, racial categorization and sentiments that once plagued Asians are now verbatim to those of Anglos towards Mexicans.

¹⁴³ Daniels, 41.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 67.

This examination of Mexican migration shows the different goals, policies, and relationships between governments that lead to the formation of distinct border policies and immigration legislation. The racialization of political discourse and immigration policy has been central to defining national identity, culture, and citizenship. In short, the purpose of this chapter was to formulate an understanding of the relationship between the United States and México through the lenses of labor, capital, and migration. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Congress has enacted a series of laws regulating immigration and naturalization that reveal the efforts of the United States to modify its ethnic population through border enforcement. Mexican migration to the United States was influenced by the transnational trickle effect, in which immigrants return with dollars and American goods advancing their economic status, with stories of jobs inspiring the next generation to labor in the United States.

Mexican migration history to the United States is an intricate web connecting groups and countries, simultaneously changing and affecting one another. The relatively open borders and use of contract labor facilitated migration during the nineteenth and early twentieth century into the United States. At the domestic level, Mexican immigration policies were determined by the need to consolidate the state and guarantee political and economic stability. The political and economic situation in México could be characterized by unemployment, social tensions, and political division. Political opposition and problems of unemployment worsened because of Díaz's project of modernization. However, the attempt to modernize México by connecting the South to the North unintentionally sparked the movement of people to the northern border and into the United States. México did not create permanent opportunities for its population to gain social mobility through economic opportunity. Instead, its lack of prospects encouraged a transnational labor force.

México's response to immigration control and the protection of nationals abroad has been active through consulate aid. Mexican migration policy has consisted of defending migrants' rights by establishing direct links to aid groups and communities, as well as assisting migrants' returning to their homeland. México was concerned that intervention in United States politics could affect their binational relationship. Thus, México's policies were significantly influenced by their foreign policy with the United States. The Mexican government worried that opposition to American policies could negatively affect the binational relationship by causing the United States to interfere in Mexican affairs. Consequently, to keep the United States out of its affairs, México reluctantly agreed to American immigration policies, limiting its consul's role to traditional protection and documentation activities.

The border policy between the United States and México has been adapted and negotiated through the decades. Immigration is dependent on the economic stability on both sides of the border. The border regions have become more integrated into national politics, policy, economy, and demographics giving rise to public awareness of ethnic migration. The border is deemed the 'line of defense,' maintaining the national identity of each respected country. Borders are transformed rather than transcended. Prohibiting cross-border flows are perceived as threatening the autonomy, social culture, and national identity of the country. Policing of the border is the symbol of authority, autonomy, and power. The escalation of territorial surveillance along the border contributes to the understanding of borders, transnational collaboration, and border crossing regulation.

Mexicans had become the 'other' due to their increased presence and prominence in the United States and their perceived threat to the cultural identity of many Americans. The northward migration of people from México has been a constant element in México since the

Spanish conquest. But in the twentieth century, the United States and México utilized northward migration as a strategy for economic and national development. The expansion of industrialization and economic opportunities in the United States caused many to migrate in search of work. These deeply rooted trends, which were cause and consequence of shifts in immigration policy, serve as the backdrop for the Bracero Program. A clear example of the interconnectedness of the U.S. and Mexican nations, the program revealed the dependency of the US on Mexican labor, and the dependency of México on the advanced economy of the United States.

Chapter 2: The Bracero Program: Foreign Policy and Opportunity



Illustration: 3.1: Jose Luis Briseño' Hernández Bracero visa.

The United States was attacked by the empire of Japan on December 7, 1941, thereby sparking the official entry of the United States into World War II. When México joined the Allied Forces against tyranny and oppression around the world, it also entered into an agreement with the United States to supply workers to the farms and factories. The United States and México initiated the Bracero Program in 1942 until 1964. The 22-year program took Mexicans into the United States to work on dams, railways, roadways, assembly plants, mines and help to developed America's agricultural lands. "Braceros helped to feed and nourish the Allied Forces during the War and the Reconstruction that followed, lifting many nations from rubble and raising the standard of living for millions around the world."¹⁴⁶

-Bracero Memorial Highway plaque

¹⁴⁶ Juan D. Martinez, "Bracero Memorial highway," in Bracero History Archive, Item #3220, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3220> (accessed May 22, 2017). The plaque is located on the 16 mile portion of the historic Juan Bautista De Anza National Trail, the famous El Camino Real and the California's Golden State Highway 10.

Following the shifts in policy associated with the bi-national economy that fueled immigration since the late nineteenth century, the Bracero Program institutionalized Mexican labor flows in the United States for two decades during and after World War II. Although the Program contained weaknesses that characterized previous immigration policy—it discriminated on the basis of race, medicalized workers as vectors of disease, and failed to protect workers from the abuses of employers—the Bracero Program nonetheless contained the inherent recognition by American policy makers that the large-scale agriculture underwriting economic production in the United States was fundamentally reliant upon Mexican workers. On the level of international diplomacy and domestic agricultural policy, the Program affirmed that each country economically needed one another.¹⁴⁷ Wartime agricultural production required the flexible and inexpensive pool of labor provided by America's neighbor to the south, and México hoped for the wages and skills afforded to those same workers as they toiled in fields from Texas to California. After the War ended, the relationship provided too enticing to terminate, and the Bracero Program remained as a lynchpin of Mexican modernization and the booming American economy until the 1960s.

As much as the Program benefitted the American agricultural sector, it was an opportunity for the rural community of México to be able to sustain its families. México utilized the program to keep its population employed while the United States benefited from paying low wages while seeing high productivity in its agricultural sector. Mexicans viewed the United States as place of opportunity with realistic wages, despite the racism and climate of hostility towards them. President Manuel Ávila Camacho viewed the Bracero Program as a rehabilitation

¹⁴⁷ Alexandra Délano, *México and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies and Emigration since 1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89-90.

of rural México, modernizing Mexican society through American customs while advancing the agricultural sector through new farming techniques and skills men would learn.¹⁴⁸

As noted in the previous chapter, the history of Mexican labor is a struggle in which economic, social, and political realities of various policies and eras have affected the acceptance or oppression of ethnic laborers in the United States. In an attempt to illuminate these various facets of a complex relationship, scholars have centered their examinations of Mexican labor and migration on the oppression and inequalities of power due to race, class, and sex.¹⁴⁹ Considering the scope of the Program, the historical context in which it is embedded, and the scholarly fields that have been analyzed, the purpose and impact of the Bracero Program is hotly debated. Erasmo Gamboa finds, for instance, that the need for workers in the United States was due to the perceived wartime labor shortage in the agriculture industry. Because of these shortages, the Bracero Program was national in scope and tailored to meet local labor market demands.¹⁵⁰

Following another line of inquiry, Juan Gómez-Quiñonez argues that Mexican labor was

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴⁹ Erasmo Gamboa, *Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Vicky L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: New México University Press, 1987); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1993); Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working Class and Social History* (New York: New York University Press, 1976); Juan Gómez-Quiñonez, *Mexican American Labor 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1994); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005); Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 2010); Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Sylvia Chant, *Women and Survival in Mexican Cities: Perspectives on Gender, Labor Markets and Low-Income Households* (Manchester University Press, 1991); Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in México City: Public Discourse and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (The University of Arizona Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ Erasmo Gamboa, *Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), xix.

important to the economic and agricultural development in the United States. “The Bracero Program... gave the United States government the ability to regulate Mexican immigration and use cheap labor” in order to address the wartime labor shortage, but also because large scale agribusiness had demanded exemptions for Mexican labor decades before the inception of the Program.¹⁵¹ Yet, according to Camille Guerin-Gonzales, the American Dream “shaped immigration communities and returned seasonal labor migration of Mexican farm workers who sought out economic opportunity and security as workers” in the United States.¹⁵² Unlike Gamboa, who views the Bracero Program as a political issue, Gilbert Gonzalez explains the Mexican migration caused by “the Bracero Program is not a classic supply-and-demand or ‘push-pull’ migration because it is impacted by U.S imperialism upon the demography and social organization of the Mexican nation.”¹⁵³ The economic expansion of the United States into México and the experiences of workers in America in prior years reinforced the cyclical migration of workers that had occurred throughout previous years. However, Gonzalez, like Gamboa and Guerin-Gonzalez, finds that the end of the Bracero Program in 1964 made cheap labor not as readily available; aiding unionization because it decreased the availability of strikebreakers, strengthening unions and labor organizations.

As Braceros’ status changed from Mexican worker, temporary laborer, illegal immigrant, or “job thief,” depending on their legal status and location, they were determined to be agents of their own lives, shaping their own identities as providers for their families. This proved difficult when they grappled with two nations whose policies were frequently at odds with each other.

¹⁵¹ Juan Gómez-Quíñonez, *Mexican American Labor 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1994), xii.

¹⁵² Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁵³ Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 4.

Moreover, these policies shifted over time and in reaction to changing political demands, policy regimes, economic conditions, and reactions of the public. First, Braceros were contracted as war aid during World War II, giving them legal rights in the United States. As guest workers, they received their visas from the Department of Labor. This official status promised Braceros a modern (equal to American laborers) identity in the eyes of employers in regard to treatment and pay. By promoting the Bracero Program, the Mexican government hoped to create a skilled pool of workers who could help modernize México's stagnant rural economy when they finished their contracts in the United States.

The modernization of Mexicans to its population signified equality to its American counterpart, in which their wages would allow them to purchase and farm their own land. Modernity was defined as land ownership and learning new farming skill sets that would allow them to be self-sufficient. Yet, according to Mireya Loza the Mexican government saw the program as modernizing the Mexican indigenous "primitive" population. "In the decade prior to the program, the Mexican state had invested in programs to modernize indigenous and rural peasantry that focused on education, irrigation, rural outreach, and village health programs."¹⁵⁴ The indigenous populations participation in the program would allow the Mestizaje process to take place abroad without the implementation of costly programs.

This modernization project had two distinct facets. The first was the introduction of Braceros to new technology, making them skilled laborers. The second is their legal labor status, making them equal to American labor. According to the Mexican government, Braceros would learn new skills that would benefit México's agriculture growth. Yet achieving modernity (equality) for Mexicans proved more difficult and challenging than expected. The process of

¹⁵⁴ Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Kindle Locations 301-302). The University of North Carolina Press. Kindle Edition.

modernity raised complicated questions for Americans about what was or was not modern and who deserved that status. Braceros, regardless of their legal labor status, maintained their identities as immigrant labor, subjected to limited labor rights. Their inferiority permitted mistreatment by farmers and lower wages than their American counterpart. Their modernity came from new skills, technological, and scientific advances the men learned in the United States. As Deborah Cohen concludes, Braceros were not seen as a modern workforce because their Mexican nationality maintained them unequal to an Anglo worker. Modernity is connected to a nation's whiteness; therefore, Mexicans in the United States could not shed nationality's inferiority.¹⁵⁵ Cohen's concept of modernity by becoming skilled labor is similar to Guerin-Gonzalez's economic idea of the American Dream. For instance, in both concepts Mexicans are seeking to elevate themselves from their status, to an American idea of success and upward mobility. Modernity, like the American Dream, became a sort of border, but one more difficult to cross than a territorial marker because it was linked to race.¹⁵⁶

By conceptualizing and investigating the Bracero Programs as a transnational labor experience, this chapter historicizes international policy and United States economic demands through the prism of the experiences of the men participating in the Program. Through a mixture of government documents and oral histories, the chapter traces Mexican men's temporary contract labor experiences in México and the United States. In doing so, it enriches the historical examination of immigrant laborers who, despite being overlooked by policy makers themselves, shed light on labor flows, migration networks and family ties across the international boundary. It utilizes multiple conceptual approaches, paradigms and theories to elaborate upon the complex

¹⁵⁵ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and México* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4-5.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

and various factors involved in migration policies grounded in domestic politics and spanning an array of international diplomatic considerations.¹⁵⁷ This multi-faceted approach is necessary to understand the process through which interests are determined, in this case México's foreign policy discourse with regard to migration in the United States.

THE INCEPTION

From the beginning of World War II in 1939, México remained neutral, yet it cooperated with the United States and the Allied forces. Many domestic political and social groups opposed México's participation on any level arguing it placed México's sovereignty at risk, making it vulnerable to acts of war and retaliation by Axis Powers.¹⁵⁸ Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho believed by giving the United States support through commercial and military agreements, México would be able to develop its industrialization program specifically in war aid industries such as shipbuilding, rubber production, and agriculture. The United States entrance into the War gave México an unprecedented capacity to negotiate with the United States because, as white male workers went to War, numerous sectors of the economy lacked laborers. Moreover, the increased demands of wartime production on the United States economy strained the capacity of the agricultural sector. Consequently, altering the perception of the American people by highlighting the importance of Mexican labor to the Allied cause quickly became a matter of national security.

On the day of the laborer, May 10, 1942, a message from President Manuel Ávila Camacho to "Los obreros de México" was published, in which he praised their hard work and fraternity. Ávila Camacho's memorandum pointed out that the progress of the Republic was due

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 84.

to the Mexican worker, who labored with dignity. He declared that the Mexican worker provided the necessary assistance to maintain and continue the democratic life of its countrymen. As the patriarchs of their families, they were providing their labor to ensure the freedom of their countrymen in the time of war. President Ávila Camacho continued his theme of solidarity by proclaiming that the United States and México were connected by politics and trade. He pointed out that the ambitions that were affecting the continent pushed for a coordinated economic defense and military security. He concluded by stating that the partnership with the United States was not only for material goods but the country's territory, rights, culture, and laws which had been threatened by the actions of those who sought to destroy democracy.¹⁵⁹

On the 28th of May 1942, President Manuel Ávila Camacho asked for an Executive Declaration of War against Germany, marking México's official entry into the war. In the article, "México responde dignamente al ultraje nazifascista," the Mexican people were informed that the president sought a declaration to defend the honor of the *patria* (country). The president explained that the Nazi's torpedoed the "Potrero del Llano" off the Atlantic without care of México's neutrality, the flag, or of those on board, which 22 of the 35-man crew survived. As soon as México was made aware of the tragic death of the patriotic men and safety of the survivors, a letter of protest was transmitted demanding for compensation for the loss and damage suffered. México provided Germany, Japan, and Italy one week from Thursday, May 14 to respond or it would adopt proper measures to reclaim its nations' honor. There was no response from the three countries. President Ávila Camacho continued by pointing out that the non-response was followed by the torpedo attack on the "Faja de Oro" on the night of May 28.

¹⁵⁹Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) Archivo Particular: Jaime Torres Bodet "Secretaría de Educación Pública, Primer Periodo. Discursos." (1942-1946) Volume 78 Clasificación: 2.1.6.5. NOTICIAS de México, "Mensaje del Presidente a los Obreros de México." May 10, 1942.

He explained that from the 35 crew members 26 men were rescued, one died from his injuries and six continued missing. Consequently, México had exhausted all its diplomatic courses making the declaration of war necessary.¹⁶⁰

On June 1942, México declared war on the Axis and began meeting with American officials to discuss military cooperation.¹⁶¹ Part of the United States demands included an agreement to hire Mexican workers in order to maintain agricultural production. Agricultural employers pressured American legislatures to push for Mexican labor contracts in order to avoid paying American workers higher wages or acknowledge labor union demands.¹⁶² Before the war, as was evident in the 1910s and 1920s exceptions to immigration laws, American employers had been able to hire Mexican workers without federal formal agreements. However, the fact that the war was an international crisis, and due to the diplomatic overtones associated with the need to import workers, the United States agreed to formally and officially establish a bilateral program with México to guarantee a steady supply of workers targeting key sectors of the economy.¹⁶³

Initially, the Mexican government hesitated sending laborers to the United States because an increase in immigration could compromise the development of México's industrial sector and impact the prices of local products. But most importantly, México wanted to avoid a possibility of repeating the 1929 repatriation which caused economic and political instability. So "in 1942, a commission named by President Ávila Camacho set out to study whether México should accept negotiating the Bracero Agreement with the United States. The commission argued that Mexican agriculture would benefit from the techniques acquired as Braceros and that the economy would

¹⁶⁰ S.R.E. Archivo Particular: Jaime Torres Bodet "Secretaría de Educación Pública, Primer Periodo. Discursos." (1942-1946) Volume 78 Clasificación: 2.1.6.5. NOTICIAS de México, "México Responde Dignamente al Ultraje Nazifascista." June 19, 1942.

¹⁶¹ Délano, 85.

¹⁶² Ibid., 85.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 83-85.

grow due to their salaries.”¹⁶⁴ The rationale that Braceros would return with skills in the more advanced American economy and thereby modernize the Mexican economy, was a powerful justification that convinced many politicians and government officials. Moreover, the promise of higher wages and remittances sent back home to families while Braceros worked in the United States offered an additional incentive in support for the Program.

Yet, many argued that the program would produce more dependency on the United States economy and returning Braceros would expect better wages, working conditions, and affect the prices of Mexican products.¹⁶⁵ Despite national opposition from political parties, leftist and conservative groups, labor unions, and most importantly the public desire to move away from United States hegemony and reestablish Mexican sovereignty; the Mexican government decided it was in its interest to establish a labor program that would fulfill the two aforementioned goals while simultaneously capitalizing on a long history of migration to the United States.¹⁶⁶ A key attractive feature of the agreement included the increase in leverage over the United States in issues totally unrelated to the labor program itself. Consequently, the Mexican government negotiated a solution to payments of American oil companies affected by the 1938 expropriation, the renegotiation of México’s foreign debt, and the resolution of longstanding water disputes along the border. If that was not enough, México used its brief diplomatic advantage to bring the United States to the negotiating table for reconsideration of several economic development treaties.¹⁶⁷

As noted previously, President Ávila Camacho viewed the Bracero Program as an opportunity to modernize rural México. He emphasized that México’s plan for rehabilitation was

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 84.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 86.

necessary to lift rural communities from poverty by giving agricultural laborers in the countryside salaries that enabled them to modernize farming techniques. The ratification of the Bracero Program came at a fortuitous time and enabled Ávila Camacho to build upon his goal of improving wages for rural workers. Although the Bracero Program exported citizens to the United States, it nonetheless served the purposes of the nation. Drawing upon masculine gender roles and merging them with economic progress and nationalism, Mexican men's manhood was solidified in their status as a Bracero, as one who could serve as a symbol of "loyalty to country and progress."¹⁶⁸ In addition, on the most practical level, Bracero earnings, training, and remittances would enable them to purchase land and harvest it in order to provide for their family, thus reducing poverty across the countryside.

Mexican government officials believed it was in the best interest of the United States to recruit experienced agricultural laborers who had families in the countryside. In theory, Braceros would be productive in the fields of the United States and then return to their family in México. Considering rural life was based on the agricultural cycle, Braceros would miss one full cycle while in the United States but return to México the following year with new agricultural skills. Additionally, while they earned wages in the United States they would send remittances back home to their families, which in turn would spur México's economy. Fortunately for México, the program brought work to Mexican men during an economic depression. Therefore, program officials traveled and met with Mexican rural town and pueblo municipal officials and requested that they recruit men already raising families of their own.

The Bracero Program sought to modernize México's countryside and impart to laborers new skills, but it was inherently and distinctly a gendered project. It obviously targeted men as

¹⁶⁸ Government Correspondence. Record Group 22, Series 12, Folder 6, Archivo San Martin de Hidalgo, Jalisco, México.

laborers, but women and the families that the fathers and husbands left behind were drastically impacted. Although Mexican women enjoyed legal, social, and political rights such as divorce (1917), labor rights (1917) and suffrage (1953) that women in other countries could not claim, México was nonetheless a patriarchal society. With the departure of men during the Bracero Program, patriarchal Mexican society saw considerable changes with the emergence of women as temporary heads of households. Mexican officials believed married men were more likely to accept their employment in the United States as a temporary period and return promptly back to their family, the temporary necessity of the Program justified the new and unconventional role of women at home. Comparable to the shift in gender roles in the United States, when men went to War and women moved into industrial defense jobs, the new roles of Mexican women as the financial and administrative head of the household was a temporary expedient that promised long term benefits to the nation. Moreover, Mexican officials could justify the altered gender roles as reinforcing patriarchy because women were maintaining the home expressly for men until they returned. Lastly, through the increased wages they earned and through the remittances they sent home, the Bracero Program provided the means for men to fulfill their breadwinner role, even from a distance.¹⁶⁹

In negotiating the Bracero Program, the Mexican government reflected upon the long and painful history of labor exploitation and anti-immigrant sentiment that marked relationships between the two nations. The repatriation of Mexican nationals and deportation of numerous Mexican Americans was fresh in the minds of many officials, as were the myriad stories of discrimination, low pay, and racism in the United States. And despite opposition and critiques of United States mistreatment, México decided it was convenient to establish the agreement as it

¹⁶⁹ Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, And Political Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina Press, 2016), 15.

would allow them to control the migration of its citizens. In an effort to protect its citizens in the United States, diplomats demanded special guarantees for Mexican laborers: nondiscrimination clauses in labor contracts, equal treatment in hiring practices, humane and safe working conditions, and salaries equivalent to those received by American workers. “The Mexican government also linked the Bracero negotiation with pending issues in the bilateral agenda, such as payment to the United States oil companies affected by the 1938 expropriation, the renegotiation of its national debt, and the solution of water disputes along the border, as well as support for economic development.”¹⁷⁰ México’s leverage over the United States permitted them to negotiate beyond the program.

In the negotiation of the Bracero Program, the Mexican government demanded the establishment of a bilateral commission to supervise the hiring of workers, and it requested the direct participation of the United States government in the management of the program out of the valid concern that labor contractors and agricultural employers would violate terms of their agreements.¹⁷¹ The processing centers would be located along the border, while México would have health screening processing centers in México City prior to men traveling to the border. Most importantly, all travel from the processing centers to the farmland of the United States would be paid for by the grower. “United States delegates have agreed that there is a great need for Mexican Braceros and México agreed that it has a surplus labor available. A contract is contingent if a consensus can be reached on wages and working conditions.”¹⁷² The two countries settled on a final draft of the agreement. The Emergency Mexican Farm Labor Program

¹⁷⁰ Délano, 86.

¹⁷¹ México objected to Braceros working in states such as Texas where Mexicans would face discrimination, consequently, Texas will not receive Braceros until 1947 under Public Law 45.

¹⁷² Barry Bishop, “U.S., Mexican Officials Confer On Importing Of Farm Labor” Dallas Morning News, November 23, 1947. http://phw01.newsbank.com.ezhost.utrgv.edu:2048/cache/ean/fullsize/p1_010262016_2257_51495_62.pdf (Accessed June 5, 2017).

also known as the Bracero Program for the first time provided Mexican nationals (working under the program) official protection in accordance with their contract. The key points of the agreement were:

1. Mexican men were to have a written contract with the farmer and it was to be protected by both the United States and Mexican government.
2. Mexican workers were not to be used to displace domestic workers. Furthermore, they were only to be used in agriculture.
3. Health inspections would be conducted to ensure the Mexican nationals meet all health requirements.
4. All transportation and living expenses from the place of origin to destination, and return, as well as expenses incurred were to be paid by the farmer.
5. Wages paid to the workers must be the same as others are paid for similar work in that destination; but in no case, shall it be less than 30 cents per hour.
6. Housing conditions, sanitary conditions, and medical services enjoyed by workers under this agreement shall be the same as for other agriculture workers.
7. Workers shall enjoy the same guarantees enjoyed by other agriculture workers in regard to occupational diseases and accidents.¹⁷³

“The guarantee of transportation, food, housing, and repatriation that is stipulated and established in article 29 of the *Ley Federal del Trabajo*, which are the minimal requirements in collective bargaining.”¹⁷⁴ Also, México’s 1931 Federal Law for Labor protected Braceros by placing the program under review by both countries.¹⁷⁵ México stipulated that its laborers should receive salaries equivalent to those of American workers. The inclusion of these stipulations was considered a diplomatic victory for México.

The Bracero Agreement was ratified through diplomatic notes on August 4, 1942; and on September 29, the first 500 Mexican emigrants arrived in California. Men who chose to become

¹⁷³ John Chala Elac, *The Employment of Mexican Workers in U.S. Agriculture, 1900-1960: A Binational Economic Analysis* (Los Angeles: R and E Research Associates 1972), 41-42.

¹⁷⁴ Guillermo Martínez, “Los Braceros. Experiencias que se deben aprovecharse” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, Vol. 10, No. 2 May-Aug 1948. Pp. 177-195 (Accessed 3/2/2009), 180.

¹⁷⁵ Patricia Morales, *Indocumentados mexicanos*. (México City: Grijaldo, 1989), 150-151.

Braceros began by gaining approval from local government officials. Many Braceros recall working for free in the fields of Mexican officials or paying a substantial fee to gain permission and receive candidacy.¹⁷⁶ On August 16, 1954, Narciso Quintana wrote to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines that three hundred hopeful Braceros, are being exploited by the local government. Quintana explained that each man has paid \$2.00 to get on a local list, \$2.00 for a certificate and \$6 to \$50 for a Bracero number. Quintana wrote, “we ask that you end this exploitation, most men are working their first months as Braceros to pay back loans that were taken out to pay for the fees.”¹⁷⁷ These loans have interest, for example \$80.00 loan repayment is \$140.00. The letter makes clear that ninety five percent of Braceros had loans and were facing fees for every step of the process.¹⁷⁸ The Office of the Presidency stated that the fees being charged would be investigated. However, local officials continued to charge aspiring braceros many fees.

“In the next phase men received a *permiso* which was an official identification card verifying his military service and clean criminal record.”¹⁷⁹ The identification granted candidacy, but it did not guarantee a contract or selection for the program. Furthermore, once the pueblo, *municipio*, or state quota was filled, no more identification cards were given out. Those who gained permission and received the identification card were responsible for arranging their own transportation to the health inspection center in México City. David Yáñez remembered how they would walk ten miles with a duffel bag to the bus which took them to the train station. The train would leave them at the doorstep of the health inspection center in México City.¹⁸⁰ In

¹⁷⁶ David Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009); Natividad Yáñez, *La Noria*.

¹⁷⁷ Archivo General de la Nación (A.G.N.) Record Group Adolfo Ruiz Cortines/ Series 106369/Caja 0885 / Folder 546.6/209-546.313.

¹⁷⁸ A.G.N. Record Group Adolfo Ruiz Cortines/ Series 106369/Caja 0885 / Folder 546.6/209-546.313.

¹⁷⁹ Gonzalez, 59.

¹⁸⁰ David Yáñez, *La Noria*.

México City, men arrived to the soccer stadium, where the health inspections took place with their identification cards and permission letters at hand. Men received health checks and underwent a physical examination process, twenty percent of the men who underwent health checks were rejected eliminating their chance of receiving a bracero visa.¹⁸¹ Those who passed traveled to the secondary inspection sites along the United States-Mexican border for the final phase of selection in hopes of a contract.

Men headed to the processing centers/hiring centers along the border established by the United States that men refer to as *el centro*. Men endured days and even months waiting for their numbers to be called over the loud speaker. Jose Hernandez mentions that many men waited months to receive their Bracero visa once they arrived to the border processing center. At the processing centers at the border, men would even pay to sleep on the floor in the surrounding area in case their number was called. While men waited, they purchased food from the women working in near the center.¹⁸² Unfortunately, some men did not have enough money to sustain themselves for the long period of time they were at the processing center. Jose Hernandez witnessed individuals eating banana peels and newspapers. Alfredo Ramirez did not eat for three days surviving by drinking water.¹⁸³ The sacrifice of waiting at the processing center was well worth it as men heard their number called. Men rushed to the processing center to undergo the final phase of the process.

Even though Mexican men endured medical inspections in México before they reached the border, they again faced inspections at several sites across the northern interior of México

¹⁸¹ Gonzalez, 59.

¹⁸² Dir. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness* Prod. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez. Films Media Group, 2010. 58 mins, 11:20-12:43.

¹⁸³ *Harvest of Loneliness*, 12:44.

and at the border before being contracted.¹⁸⁴ The purpose of processing centers was to reduce cost for employers but also to conduct health examinations. The United States Department of Labor in collaboration with the United States Department of Health, had doctors examine Braceros prior to their hiring to reduce employers' cost in health care by rejecting men who were unhealthy to work.¹⁸⁵ Between seven and ten percent of men were rejected.¹⁸⁶ The procedures conducted by Labor Department Officials in the processing center are recounted by La Noria Bracero David Yanez, "once our list was called they'd send us in groups into a room as naked as we came into the world, then men would come in masks, with tanks on their backs, and they'd fumigate us, from top to bottom. Supposedly we were flea-ridden, germ-ridden."¹⁸⁷ Fumigation was supposed to prevent diseases from entering the United States. After men were fumigated and hosed down, they underwent medical inspection to demonstrate that their health and physical abilities met the requirements set by the contract. Health and fitness exams were done in groups. American doctors took men into a room, where they were stripped of their clothing once again and demanded that they perform activities to show full function of their arms and legs. Furthermore, doctors under contract with the United States government provided men a prostate examination without proving knowledge of its purpose. Vaccinations were also administered to ensure that diseases did not spread, yet men were not informed of its purpose or effects.¹⁸⁸ Ramiro Briseño recalls receiving vaccinations, but never being told or informed of their purpose. Men also had x-rays of their lungs to prevent the spread of tuberculosis and ensure heart and

¹⁸⁴ González, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States*, 23.

¹⁸⁵ González, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States*, 73-76.

¹⁸⁶ *Idid.*, 59.

¹⁸⁷ David Yañez, interviewed by Mayra L. Ávila on the Bracero Program, La Noria, Jalisco, April 2, 2009.

¹⁸⁸ González, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States*, 76.; Verónica Córtez, "Severiano G. Villarreal," in Bracero History Archive, Item #301, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/301> (accessed January 17, 2018).

lung problems would not arise.¹⁸⁹ Unfortunately, men had little to no knowledge of treatments, vaccinations, or medications given to them. The lack of information to Mexican nationals regarding health inspections and treatments caused many men to feel humiliated and ashamed.

As men passed their health check and received permission from the United States Department of Labor, growers performed their own inspection of Bracero men. According to Bracero Juan P. Navarez contractors picked laborers by the conditions of the men's hands.¹⁹⁰ Calluses were a sign of hard manual labor which the Bracero endured and participated in daily; the more calluses a man had the more desirable he was. Growers selected a group of men, advised them of the work and wages, if men agreed they were sent to fill out their contracts.

Mexican men were guaranteed their contracts in Spanish, but many ranchers did not speak or read Spanish, and this led to negotiations through hand signals. Navarez remembers using hand signs to communicate wages, location, and the type of work.¹⁹¹ As men signed their contracts they were to receive a minimum of thirty cents an hour (which many did not), thirty-five kilos (77 pounds) of personal items, and uncertainty as many did not know where they were going or what awaited them. Once they signed the contracts, Braceros were loaded into buses and trucks by farmers/contractors who took them to work in the American fields. With high expectations, men became a part of the American work force.¹⁹²

Finalizing the contract and heading to the fields opened the door for a range of problems and challenges that undercut the spirit and the letter of the agreement between the United States and México. First, the clear breach of the Bracero contract in the hiring centers in regard to pay

¹⁸⁹ Ramiro Briseño, interviewed by Mayra L. Ávila on the Bracero Program, La Noria, Jalisco, April 4, 2009.

¹⁹⁰ Juan P. Navarez, interviewed by Mayra L. Ávila on the Bracero Program, La Noria, Jalisco, April 2, 2009.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.; David Yañez, interviewed by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria*.

and language, were direct violations of section II, III, V, VII, and IX of Article 123 of the Mexican constitution that protects laborers. Yet, many Braceros were not concerned with pay or Spanish contracts but the length of their employment. A standard contract stipulated that Braceros could work in the United States for the time specified by their employer legally, before being required to return to México. Braceros attempted to renew their contracts in order to avoid waiting at the processing centers located at the border until their number was called again for employment. A Bracero was not able to remain longer than stated in his contract in the United States, legally forcing his return and wait for employment. Consequently, many renewed their contract with their current employer if possible. Those whose seasonal employment ended were sent back to the processing center to await employment once again. Many men viewed returning and waiting at the processing center as lengthy and costly, causing many to look for work in the United States illegally.

From the onset, the Bracero Program was fraught with corruption, mismanagement and fraud at the federal and local levels on both sides of the border. Additionally, a series of inefficient institutional and bureaucratic checks and balances led to poor oversight by both the United States and Mexican government. Within weeks of the arrival of the first Braceros, problems emerged. One of the first disputes related to the Bracero Program was the location of hiring centers for Mexican workers. México insisted on establishing them throughout México away from the border in order to ensure a fair hiring process and the protection of workers' rights. Consequently, for "the first three years of the program México City's soccer stadium served as the initial processing center with various sights opening across the interior of México."¹⁹³ The initial processing centers and cities were not prepared for the large influx of

¹⁹³ González, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United State*, 59.

men arriving daily from their villages. Men at these initial processing centers faced discrimination by police, scams, and had minimal resources while they waited. At these initial processing centers men waited in long lines for days to gain permission to travel to the centers at the border.¹⁹⁴ Twenty percent of these men were turned away due to medical conditions and age.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, many men bypassed the initial assessment and began to travel directly to the border towns resulting in informal hiring practices outside the Bracero contracts and increased the number of undocumented workers. Many men opted to being hired outside of the program as the procedure at the border centers could take days and weeks, causing poor and desperate men to seek work in any form available to them.

The second problem was México's opposition to allowing Mexican workers in Texas due to the longstanding history of violence and racial discrimination against ethnic Mexicans. The *Dallas Morning News* reported that the "Texas remain[ed] probably the only state on México's 'bracero' blacklisted since Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas [would] get thousand for the current crop season."¹⁹⁶ México even went so far as to demand the exclusion of the state of Texas from the Bracero Program itself, until 1947. Despite language in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo offering Mexicans citizenship in the United States, if they remained north of the new international boundary, many Mexicans in Texas historically faced brutal forms of mistreatment. Although racial and national tensions dated back to the nineteenth century, some of the most blatant cases of anti-Mexican behavior occurred in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, as Texas Rangers killed hundreds of not thousands of ethnic Mexicans in South Texas.¹⁹⁷ In fact,

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 59 & 63.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 59 & 63.

¹⁹⁶ Barry Bishop, "Paper Work Under Way On Braceros for U.S." *Dallas Morning News*, September 26, 1948. http://phw02.newsbank.com.ezhost.utrgv.edu:2048/cache/ean/fullsize/pl_010262016_2154_04425_39.pdf

¹⁹⁷ Benjamin Heber Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

the creation of the League of United Latin American Citizens in Corpus Christi during the mid-1920s was a direct reaction to this violence, albeit a moderate reaction that hoped-for protection from American institutions. In the wake of the Great Depression, the repatriation and deportation campaigns in Texas served as a mask for continued oppression and criminalization of Mexicans.

Despite this recent history of anti-Mexicanism in Texas, México was unable to prevent men from entering Texas as workers, and it could not stop independent farmers and ranchers from creating their own hiring process beyond the scope of the official Bracero Program. Despite the refusal of contract workers in Texas to the charge of discrimination against Mexicans many cross the Rio Grande illegally every month to seek work.¹⁹⁸ Thus, Mexican men entered Texas despite prohibitions against doing so and in spite of the historical violence directed at their brethren who had been there for generations. In 1943, México renewed the program but maintained the Texas ban. Consequently, the American Farm Bureau Federation tailored a bill (Public Law 45) eliminating the thirty-cent minimum wage, working condition provisions, and the protection. Public Law 45 would give “the commissioner of immigration authority to lift the statutory limitations on the entry of farm labor from countries; when he deemed it essential to the war effort, providing farmers an ‘open border,’ such as had existed during World War I.”¹⁹⁹ On May 11, 1943, the commission of immigration issued cards permitting Mexican nationals to enter for one year. Public Law 45 did not only ignore an international agreement, it established labor networks that provided Texas an unlimited flow of undocumented workers.²⁰⁰ The mounting volume of unlawful migration caused México and the United States to negotiate unlawful Mexican workers to receive a Bracero contracts.

¹⁹⁸ Bishop, “Paper Work Under Way On Braceros for U.S.”

¹⁹⁹ Otey M. Scruggs, “Texas and the Bracero Program, 1924-1947” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Aug., 1963), 252.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

The massive demand for labor in all sectors of the agricultural economy, the unpredictable levels of cooperation among states and agribusiness, and the attitudes of Anglo Americans towards Mexicans made it nearly impossible to protect Braceros from manipulation, discrimination, and poor treatment. Conversely, the demand for workers enticed some Braceros to break their own contracts, working different states, or stay in the United States beyond their agreed upon term of employment. The constant arrival of new Braceros in the United States placed pressure on existing Braceros who contemplated complaining about contract violations, because they feared that their employers would fire them and send them back to México. In short, Braceros were commodities to growers, and according to Henry Anderson, who served on the Advisory Board of Citizens for Farm Labor “they were rentals, and if he gets damaged, you don’t care. Braceros had one single purpose: to work.”²⁰¹ Any man who did not keep pace or questioned authority was sent to another farm or to the processing center at the border. Braceros already in the United States were constantly reminded about the threat of replacement as buses arrived daily from the processing center with thirty to forty men ready to work in case someone left, was sick, or caught the ire of an employer.

Braceros “are viewed as commodities, as objects, as chattels... the average bracero holder probably has less respect for his chattels than the average slave-holder had for a hundred years ago... You rent a bracero for six weeks or six months, and if he gets damaged, you don’t care. You’ll get a healthier one.”²⁰²

Men had no value; they were expendable and there was always someone willing to take over their job. Over 200,000 men entered the United States under the program in the first year, with

²⁰¹ Lori Flores, “A Town Full of Dead Mexicans: Salinas Valley Bracero Tragedy of 1963, the End of the Bracero Program, and the Evaluation of California’s Chicano Movement” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No.2 (Summer 2013), pp. 124-143, 124.; Henry Anderson, “Blood on the Lettuce,” 18 September 1963, transcript of radio broadcast, 2, folder 3, box 11, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University.

²⁰² Henry Anderson, “Blood on the Lettuce,” September 18, 1963, transcript of radio broadcast, 2, folder 3, box 11, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University.

participation increasing to an estimated half a million.²⁰³ The ability to be dismissed at any time without notice was the biggest fear of Mexican workers. Many Braceros resisted complaining or bringing negative attention to himself in order not to lose his job. In the assessment by the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores Muro Asúnsolo, it was found that there was an excessive amount of men willing to work in any location regardless of conditions. Their willingness to work made them easily dispensable. He notes that many growers asked for more men to ensure they would have enough workers which leads to the decrease of wages. Muro Asúnsolo dismisses the large number of Braceros as a miscalculation, an error on the farmer.

The Mexican press received numerous accounts of the terrible conditions Mexican men were experiencing.²⁰⁴ Mexican newspapers exposed the mismanagement of government agencies that were over-seeing the hiring and working conditions of Braceros. The Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores was accused by the press as viewing Bracero labor as a foreign problem instead of addressing their wages, living and working conditions.²⁰⁵ Consequently, President Manuel Ávila Camacho instructed the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores to commission a group with the sole purpose to “oversee and negotiate in his name the violation of the Bracero agreement.”²⁰⁶ Within weeks of the orders the secretary consul in Chicago declared that there was a small number of complaints regarding contract violations, instead there were isolated cases of “lack of comprehension” adding that being a Bracero was “una aventura fácil... sencillísima.”²⁰⁷ The Mexican press criticized the commissions’ findings, claiming that the

²⁰³ James F. Creagan, “Public Law 78: A Tangle of Domestic and International Relations” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* (541-556), 542.

²⁰⁴ Jaime Vélez Storey, “Los braceros y el Fondo de Ahorro Campesino” edited by Maria Eugenia Anguiano Téllez and Miguel J. Hernández Madrid in *Migración Internacional e Identidades Cambiantes* (El Colegio de Michoacán, 2002), 23.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 23.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 25.

inspectors spent more time enjoying themselves than monitoring work and housing conditions. One of the inspector's economist Guillermo Martínez Domínguez claimed that there were not enough inspectors (only 12) to represent, aid, and inspect every farm in the United States.²⁰⁸

During contract negotiations that took place on April 29, 1943 the Mexican government sought to negotiate and address the various concerns of Braceros. The outcome of the meeting was the text, in regard to salary which was to include pay by weight or hourly wage of 46 cents an hour (eventually it is later raised to 57 cents an hour).²⁰⁹ The negotiations did not directly address living conditions and mistreatment instead it was declared that men had tenure to remain in the fields they were currently working in after their contracts ended, if labor was still needed. The ability to renew their contract in the same farmland was meant to protect displacement of men and their relocation to less desirable locations. But in reality, it facilitated growers' ability to hire Braceros, reduced transportation cost for farmers by keeping the men they already had and extended the time men were away from their families.

The Mexican government minimized the mistreatment laborers faced and instead glorified Braceros as wartime aid. The Mexican government sent out a press release of a letter written on August 16, 1944 in which North Dakota's Governor John Moses welcomed three to four thousand Braceros who would work in the small grain harvest. Moses praises President Ávila Camacho as a "war president aiding in the Allies fight for democracy and morality. Moses credits Braceros as courageously carrying their share of the war burden by providing their labor to pick and work the fields that will feed and clothe the Allied forces. Through the Bracero, México was standing "shoulder to shoulder fighting for the right to live as free men, in a free

²⁰⁸Ibid., 23.

²⁰⁹ Creagan, 546.

world.”²¹⁰ Braceros were made part of the wartime propaganda. They were portrayed as war labor instead of mistreated and disposable workers, allowing México to continue the program as a democracy building and modernization project.

SHIFTING THE POWER OF NEGOTIATION

As the number of Braceros grew, the United States and Mexican population became more aware of the implications and consequences of the Bracero Program. In the United States labor unions demonstrated against the importation of immigrant labor, especially, after the end of the war when the hiring of foreign labor could no longer be justified. Yet, growers held enough power to maintain the program going in order to increase their revenue by paying low wages to Mexican workers. While in México the program became a political and economic necessity because it released the pressure of unemployment and aided in the economic depression. The government expected México’s industrialization would create jobs, reducing the need for emigration by creating a more equal distribution of income.²¹¹ In both countries the program had distinct effects on the local and national level.

México benefited from the program as remittances was the second largest source of money, the termination of the program would be a substantial shock to the Mexican economy.²¹² Consequently, men continued to undergo the Bracero process in hopes of working in the United States regardless of the mistreatment reported, instead they focused on the financial gain possible. Mexican men understood that the need for labor was directly connected with the war and its end could signify the termination of the Bracero, yet “in the years immediately after the

²¹⁰ SRE. Seccion de Archivo General Clasification III/553(72:73), Tipografica IV-756-13

²¹¹ Délano, 90.

²¹² Creagan, 546.

war the recruitment and employment of Mexican labor soared.”²¹³ The influx of Braceros along with the return of American men created this competition for jobs as Bracero wages were one third of those of American men.²¹⁴ American men sought jobs in the fields, but the low wages Mexicans accepted created animosity. The end of World War II shifted the powers of negotiation in 1946, as the need for Mexican workers decreased, causing México to reduce its demands leaving its men vulnerable.

Despite the corruption and violation of Mexican workers’ rights in the United States, and the American government’s lack of administration, México requested renewal of the program. On December 31, 1947, the United States Congress passed Public Law 40 to terminate the program after a six-month extension México requested. México wanted to prepare for the repatriation of Braceros that had been working in the United States since 1942. Yet, the repatriation was slow as growers claimed American workers did not want agricultural jobs because of the low pay and conditions making Braceros necessary. Employers and Agricultural interest groups convinced Congress to renegotiate and continue the program in 1948. The program continued if México agreed that it returned the authority for farm labor recruitment and placement to the United States Department of Agriculture. Under Public Law 40, the United States would no longer subsidize the transportation, housing, meals, health and other costs of the program. For the farmer to cover transportation back to the processing center men would have to wait 15 days without working at the farms at their own expense. If the men decided to leave prior to the 15 days, all expenses would have to be covered by the Bracero.²¹⁵ The issue of

²¹³ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Alien and the Making of Modern America*. (Princeton University Press, 2004), 148.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²¹⁵ National Archives and Records Administration (NACP), Record Group 211, Entry 196, Box 2, Records of the War Manpower Commission (B-D) at College Park, Maryland.

transportation not being addressed demonstrates México's dependency on the program, causing them to “favor simple extensions of the agreement” instead of negotiating reimbursement or faster passage to processing centers.²¹⁶ The new hiring rules for migrant workers reflected the change in the international context and the shift of power. Now the hiring of Mexican labor would be managed directly by employers and not by the government, and employers would be charged for all transportation cost to and from México. The contracts no longer specified a minimum wage or system to investigate or solve disputes. The new changes to the program created more corruption and abuse, making México's dependency on the United States extremely evident. By not addressing the issues in the program México could avoid conflicts and maintain a good bilateral relationship.

Without “willing” government oversight, little changed in American farms for Braceros. In previous years, the War Manpower Commission never addressed racial discrimination or housing conditions, therefore they remained and were seen as acceptable. Housing, sanitation, food, and medical concerns were addressed at a minimal level, as they were to be addressed and corrected by the grower. Florencio Magallanes Parada recalls that when he worked in Pecos, Texas “food service was terrible and sometimes there was not enough food for all the Braceros, but they had to pay for the food regardless of whether they ate or not.”²¹⁷ Braceros were guaranteed basic living needs, yet their contract stated they would not be charged for room and board however, modifications authorized deduction in their salary for food, hospitalization, housing, and a ten percent for savings. As Braceros paid for their housing and food farmers met

²¹⁶ Creagan, 547.

²¹⁷ Myrna Parra-Mantilla. "Florencio Magallanes Parada," in Bracero History Archive, Item #10, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/10> (accessed September 30, 2008).

the minimum requirements set by the War Manpower Commission regarding restrooms, running water, and housing.²¹⁸

México's vulnerability in negotiating with the United States regarding the Bracero Program had high costs for Mexican emigrants, especially in terms of protecting their rights. Ward R. Roybal, a California Democrat, visited Bracero camps and found that the "living conditions and health care of the Braceros 'leave much to be desired'.... He found great variations in health and living conditions from camp to camp. He said he felt the regulations were not being fully enforced by the Labor Department."²¹⁹ The Mexican governments' priority was the continuity in emigration flow and cooperation with the United States; regardless of the lack of compliance from the United States to the rules of the program. México only publicized that undocumented men were able to become Braceros which granted them a renewable six-month contract without penalty. They did not mention or address any living or working conditions.²²⁰ Throughout the program, Braceros were seen by the American public as cheap labor replacing American men in the farm lands of America. The programs extensions were "blasted by a California Labor Federation leader Thomas L. Pitts, as 'a great triumph of the power of corporate farm interests over simple human decency.' The renewal 'represents a grossly callous and disgraceful disregard of the severely impoverished lives of hundreds of thousands of American migrant farmworkers.'"²²¹ An American farm worker's unemployment

²¹⁸ Creagan, 546.

²¹⁹ *Desert Sun*. "Fight over Braceros Lining Up." (1934-1978) January 10, 1963. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DS19630110.2.23&srpos=1&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-Fight+Over+Braceros+Lining+Up-----1>. (Accessed January 24, 2018).

²²⁰ *El Informador*. "Quedó Firmado El Día De Ayer." February 22, 1948. <http://www.hndm.unam.mx/consulta/resultados/visualizar/558a35aa7d1ed64f16bb2fbb?resultado=8&tipo=pagina&intpagina=1&palabras=bracero>. (Accessed May 23, 2017).

²²¹ *Desert Sun*. "Labor Leader Hits Braceros." (1934-1978) November 4, 1963, Number 79. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DS19631104.2.10&srpos=1&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-Labor+Leader+Hits+Braceros-----1>. (Accessed January 24, 2018).

was directly associated with the use of Mexican workers. Roybal, stated, “I do not think the bracero program should be continued until such time as domestic field workers are fully employed...From the United States viewpoint, he said, the program leads to increased pressure on lowering of wages for American migrant’ workers.”²²² To many Americans the United States had enough men out of work and willing to work the fields making Mexicans intruders, starving the American family. Many Americans believed that the program benefitted only the large farms and agricultural corporations with its cheap and expendable source of labor.

IN RESPONSE TO CHANGES

After World War II, México negotiated yearly extensions of the program and prepared for possible termination. The Korean War (1950-1953) created leverage for México to negotiate favorable conditions for Braceros, as the United States economy shifted again, making Mexican labor and resources necessary for military productivity. Mexican President Miguel Alemán Valdés negotiated the United States governments’ direct involvement in the administration of the Bracero Program. In February 1951 in an exchange of notes, México stated its desire that a United States governmental agency carry out the contracting of Mexicans to prevent disagreements between employers and Braceros and to insure compliance with the international agreements. Consequently, the United States passed Public Law 78 in 1951, guaranteeing the fulfillment of contracts and protection of Mexican workers. Public Law was in effect until the termination of the program in December of 1964.

Yet, like previous years once the war ended so did México’s negotiation power. On July 14, 1951, Mexican President Miguel Alemán wrote to a single page letter to United States President Harry S. Truman stating that he has approved the continuation of the program and had

²²² Ibid.

signed it into law. He explained that México will continue to aid in the contract hiring process in order to guarantee that eligible workers receive the salaries and transportation that are stated in their contract. Alemán continued by stating that he was confident that the United States government would renew the importation of Mexican contract workers. He finalized his letter by stating that the difficulties that caused the United States government to terminate the present agreement can be negotiated.²²³ President Truman's three-page response to President Alemán on July 27, 1951, contained a distinct tone of hesitation. Truman began by explaining the changes and the economy of the United States and the increase in undocumented immigration. Truman made clear that the friendship between the two countries was indispensable before he continued his discussion on immigration. Approximately two whole pages focused on the problem that plagued both countries, and specifically the United States: undocumented immigration. Truman goes on by pointing out the detrimental effects the crossing of undocumented agricultural workers has on both countries' economies, an issue that the United States Congress was discussing. Truman reiterated that México must take steps to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants entering the United States, as it has negative affect on both countries economy and the overall success of the program throughout the years. Furthermore, Truman makes clear that he supports the new agreement for contracted agricultural workers, but that it may only be extended for six months. The six months was to provide México enough time to prepare for its men's return to their homeland and American growers to replace them with native workers. President Truman concludes his letter by stating that both the United States and México would benefit from the termination of undocumented immigration as they are reducing the numbers of men working with contract security, securities identical to those of American

²²³ A.G.N. Record Group Miguel Alemán Valdés/ Series 104915/ Box 0945/ Folder 671.14501.

workers.²²⁴ Each presidents' letter pointed out its countries focus during the negotiation of the renewal of the program. Alemán was prepared to renew the program without hesitation, while the United States pointed out the issue of immigration, the need for termination, and its importance to both economies.

In 1953, the United States pressured México into eliminating certain labor guarantees such as wages and transportation and to reopen the hiring center in Monterrey. México resisted these changes causing the United States to pass Public Law 309 in March 1954, opening the border to undocumented workers. Public Law 309 outlined the need for the program and enabled the Secretary of Labor "to perform the function of protecting and placing migrant workers from México as their services were required. The President found that the program had existed for a long time which gave the Attorney General authority to admit Mexican workers under whatever conditions he alone would establish."²²⁵ Public Law 309 promoted undocumented men to cross into the United States as workers (without becoming Braceros), forcing México to agree on the set conditions. The increase in illegal crossing caused by Public Law 309 brought about Operation Wetback in 1954 to deport undocumented workers portraying it as a way to regulate legal migration and the Bracero Program.

Operation Wetback began in June of 1954 with a campaign involving immigration officers and Border Patrol agents and the full mobilization of equipment to protect the border from undocumented immigrants. A mobile force searched for undocumented immigrants in Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco, and these individuals were arrested and transported to the interior of México through bus or ship.²²⁶ The Immigration and Naturalization Services (I.N.S.)

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Daniel Martínez, "The Impact of The Bracero Programs On A Southern California Mexican- American Community: A Field Study Of Cucamonga, California" Thesis. The Claremont Graduate School, 26-27.

²²⁶ Ngai, 155-156.

reported a 100 percent increase in new contracts and retuning Braceros during Operation Wetback.²²⁷ Border states advocated a non-restrictive policy for Mexicans, in which culminated in a proposal to legalize “wetbacks” by giving them Bracero contracts changing their legal status.²²⁸ Subsequently, illegal workers were transported to Bracero processing centers in order to avoid full repatriation as well, as minimally disturb agricultural productivity. Joseph M. Swing the commissioner general of the I.N.S. sought to aggressively detain undocumented people living in the United States while making Braceros those found working in farms as undocumented migrant labor. Operation Wetback apprehended 3,000 undocumented individuals daily, many returning to México while others becoming Braceros.²²⁹ The Mexican government was overwhelmed with the repatriation of Mexican men. Consequently, México was forced to reduce its pressure over the program and its oversight of Braceros.

México’s emigration policies were determined by the state’s economic, political, and foreign policy interest which varied and transformed at the domestic, transnational, and international level. The Bracero Program is a clear example of the uneven but necessary relationship between the United States and México. As México was unable to control its migration flow, the United States could not close its border. Both countries needed each other’s resources for economic prosperity. The dependence of México on the United States limited opposition to policies and legislation to avoid American intervention in México. México’s political and economic stability had deteriorated at the end of the 1960s, as its foreign debt increased and so did its dependency in American markets. More importantly, the Mexican government did not want to become involved in lobbying for its interest in United States politics

²²⁷ Ibid., 156.

²²⁸ Yolanda de la Mora, *Proceso sociopsicológico de la emigración legal a los Estados Unidos* (México D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1983), 31.

²²⁹ Ngai, 154 and 156.

because they could be considered a form of foreign intervention. Consequently, this period is also known as a “no policy era” on the part of México. This is reflected in México’s response to United States immigration policies.

THE RESHAPING OF IMMIGRATION AND LABOR

The termination of the program in 1964 brought to the forefront the need to abolish the national origins quota system, replacing it with a preference system that focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with citizens or United States residents in order to continue providing Mexican labor to farmers. The Bracero Program’s ability to make Mexican labor accessible hindered the rise of labor unions, that faced opposition from corporations and employers. As the unions gained strength after the end of the program, labor organizations integrated Mexican workers into their fold. Unions divided laborers by classifying them as Mexican-American and Mexican immigrants in order to determine the needs and rights of each group under the law. Immigrant laborers organized in smaller numbers because of their migrant status, making them vulnerable to farmers and management mistreatment because of lack of representation.²³⁰

Mexican nationals successfully organized under the United Farm Workers (UFW), Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), and Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in order to gain labor rights as workers regardless of their migrant status after the Immigration Act of 1965. The UFW, FLOC, and CIW, together with student organizations and churches, organized boycotts and strikes in order to raise awareness about labor exploitation and to demand human and immigrant rights throughout the 1960s. The civil and labor rights movements called for

²³⁰Ronald Mize and Alicia S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Tonawanda: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 48.

regularized status of undocumented immigrants as workers in order to extend labor and human rights to them. Farm Worker leaders such as Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta began to unite the Hispanic agricultural worker community in California with their idea of “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.”²³¹ The Labor unions argued that “Farm workers are not agricultural implements -- they are not beasts of burden to be used and discarded.”²³² The Farm Labor Movement began to bring focus on the Chicano worker. The importance of wages and conditions for Mexican-American laborers. Grassroots organizations and labor unions’ slogans aided in “bringing undocumented people out of the shadow of the law,” calling for the recognition of their humanity and rights regardless of their legal status.

From 1955 to 1964 the problems regarding housing, transportation, and wages continued yet they were not addressed and no fundamental changes to the program occurred during renegotiations due to Public Law 309 due to Operation Wetback. As Joseph M. Swing’s program during Operation Wetback to apprehend and legalize enabled men to become Braceros and maintain agribusiness unaffected by the mass deportations taking place at the time.²³³ It also provided Bracero visas to undocumented immigrants recruited by farmers at the border, causing many to overpass the processing centers.²³⁴ This border recruitment by farmers “encouraged undocumented immigration, even as it rechanneled it” into the Bracero Program.²³⁵ The mass deportations weakened México’s negotiation power as it became obvious that México needed to

²³¹ Cesar Chavez, “The Commonwealth Club of San Francisco” San Francisco, California, November 9, 1984, 3. http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/ModelCurriculum/teachers/Lessons/resources/documents/Commonwealth_Club_SanFrancisco_11-9-84.pdf (accessed March 1, 2017)

²³² Ibid., 3.

²³³ Ngai, 154-156.

²³⁴ Ibid., 157.

²³⁵ Ibid., 157.

maintain the programs existence. The accessibility of immigrant labor curtailed agricultural labor rights in the United States. Labor unions began to gain national attention and ethnic groups began to push for equality and opportunity. In 1963, John F. Kennedy rejected the renewal of the Bracero Program. The program remained in the United States until 1964, slowly reducing its numbers in order to enable México to prepare to receive its returning labor force and to minimally interrupt American agricultural sector. The end of the program was believed to reduce immigration labor and increase labor opportunities for Americans. The cancellation of the Bracero Program and the insufficient number of visas to meet supply and demand of workers, resulted in an increase of undocumented workers.²³⁶

In 1965 the United States Immigration and Naturalization Act marked the beginning of a new era for the immigration of Mexicans to the United States. This immigration reform imposed a limit of annual income for immigrants from South America, Central America, Caribbean, México and Canada; only 120,000 people per year could go legally to the United States. However, this reform contained an exception: spouses, unmarried children and parents of United States citizens could legally emigrate without restriction in terms of number.²³⁷ However, what is indistinguishable is the amount of Mexican families who legalized their residency due to family members who were United States citizens. Shortly after having fully implemented this immigration reform in 1968, México experienced a series of economic crises that, presumably, caused the illegal immigration of entire families towards the United States. This illegal immigration that continued after the end of the Bracero Program increased in 1976 due to the devaluation of the Mexican peso and escalated even more starting 1980, with external debt and

²³⁶ Délano, 98.; Ngai, 157.

²³⁷ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Mexican immigration to the United States 1900-1999: A unit of study for grades 7-12* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, 2002), 20.

the decline in the value of oil.²³⁸ Undocumented immigration continued and even escalated years after the end of the Bracero Program, as many saw the United States a place of opportunity.

As México's dependency on American economics grew, it became obvious that México and the United States foreign policy could not be separated from one another. In terms of immigration the Mexican government maintained the status quo by supplying the United States a labor force, yet not changing its economic policy to promote economic security for its people. It was not until effects of the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 were felt that México had to become a participant in American immigration policy and not just a spectator. President José López Portillo sought to establish consulate aid and ensure migrant rights, as IRCA created a new demand for consular protection, the creation of national institutions for migration management, and aid programs for Mexicans in the United States.²³⁹ According to Global Studies scholar Alexandra Délano "there was more academic interest in emigration in México and numerous research projects and conferences were launched academically and government funded."²⁴⁰ The main objective of IRCA was the regularization of undocumented migrants who had arrived before 1982, a special program for agriculture workers, and made it illegal to hire undocumented workers. IRCA imposed sanctions against employers who knowingly hired undocumented laborers.²⁴¹ Additionally, the Border Patrol and I.N.S. funding was increased. México along with other countries feared massive deportations due to IRCA, however the United States did not have the resources or capability of a mass deportation. Consequently, the United States-México border became militarized as the number of Border

²³⁸ Ibid., 20.

²³⁹ Délano, 119, 125, 128-129.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 115-116.

²⁴¹ Ngai, 266.

Patrol doubled, the erection of fences, and an increase of technological surveillance making illegal entry difficult and dangerous, but it did not end undocumented immigration.²⁴²

THE LEGACY

The Bracero Program was not just cheap labor for the United States interests but in fact symbolized manhood, modernity opportunity for Mexican men. As men returned to México, they reinforced their manhood as they paid back loans, bought land and livestock, and aided their families, reinforcing their roles as providers. México believed the program would bring capital and agricultural knowledge, modernizing Mexican agriculture. American opposition in the 1960s instigated the termination of the program in 1964, the rise of illegal immigration, and created the H-2A visa in order to provide cheap labor on a smaller scale. The H-2A program allows United States employers who meet specific regulatory requirements to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary agricultural jobs. Generally, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services may grant H-2A classification for up to the period authorized on the temporary labor certification and can be extended in increments of up to one year. The maximum period of stay in H-2A classification is three years, after the three years the individual must leave the United States and wait three months to reapply. The H-2A is like the Bracero Program at a smaller scale as it employs less than 100,000 workers. “During the first three months of 2017, the Department of Labor approved applications to fill 69,272 farm jobs with workers on H-2A visas. That is up from 50,887 positions approved during same period a year ago, an increase of 36 percent.”²⁴³ To hire H-2A workers the labor must be temporary or seasonal nature, the employer must “demonstrate that there are not enough U.S. workers who are able, willing,

²⁴² Ibid., 266.

²⁴³ Dan Charles, “Government Confirms A Surge in Foreign Guest Workers on U.S. Farms” Npr. Published May 18, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/05/18/528948143/government-confirms-a-surge-in-foreign-guest-workers-on-u-s-farms> (Accessed January 22, 2018).

qualified, and available to do the temporary work. [Lastly,] show that employing H-2A workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers.”²⁴⁴ The H-2A is meant to reduce undocumented agriculture immigration by focusing on hiring single men and women, even though the H-2A has an extra application for families, yet no other family member is allowed to work in the United States, reducing economic opportunities of a dual income and permanent migration. The H-2A also guarantees housing, medical, and transportation, similar guarantees found in the Bracero Program agreement.

The Bracero Program was an attempt to modernize Mexican laborers into skilled labor. Mexican government officials believed Braceros would return from their temporary work assignments in the United States with the skills and capital, needed to economically advance México’s agriculture sector. Remittances represented about three percent of México’s Gross Domestic Product as it was the main source of income for millions of families in México.²⁴⁵ Immigrants’ economic contributions through remittances is one of the positive aspects of emigration but also a clear indication of the family connections maintained on both sides of the border. Temporary workers have established lasting migration networks in the United States and in México allowing for social and familial ties to exist and flourish regardless of the border.

²⁴⁴U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, “H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers” <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/h-2a-temporary-agricultural-workers>. (Accessed January 22, 2018).

²⁴⁵ Délano, 41.

Chapter 3: The Human Dimension of Policy

*Wade into the river, through the rippling shallow waters
Steal across the thirsty border, bracero
Come bring your hungry body to the
golden fields of plenty
From a peso to a penny, bracero*

*Oh, welcome to California
Come labor for your mother, for your
father and your brother
For your sisters and your lover, bracero
Come pick the fruits of yellow, break the
flowers from the berries, purple grapes
will fill your bellies, bracero*

*And the sun will bite your body, as the
dust will draw you thirsty
While your muscles beg for mercy,
bracero, In the shade of your sombrero,
drop your sweat upon the soil,
Like the fruit your youth can spoil, bracero*

*When the weary night embraces, sleep in
shacks that could be cages
They will take it from your wages, bracero,
Come sing about tomorrow with a jingle of the dollars
And forget your crooked collar, bracero*

*And the local men are lazy, and they make too much of trouble
Besides we'd have to pay them double, bracero
Ah, but if you feel you're fallin', if you find the pace is killing
There are others who are willing, bracero*

*Oh, welcome to California
Where the friendly farmers will take care of you.²⁴⁶*



Illustration 4.1: Jose Luis Briseño with
Braceros in California

²⁴⁶ Phil Ochs, *Bracero* (New York: Elektra, 1989).
Photographs are in author's possession. Briseño Family Collection.

The Mexican Consulate is an official branch of the Mexican government that operates offices in the United States and other countries. Its duties are focused on helping Mexican citizens living or traveling in the United States who need assistance when dealing with American laws and its legal system.²⁴⁷ Consuls provide legal representation, ensure the well-being of individuals in custody, and most importantly, provide information of their rights and obligations under labor, civil, and criminal law.²⁴⁸ The role of the consulate during the program varied by location. Erasmo Gamboa finds that consuls in the Southwest ceased to work on behalf of the Mexican community.²⁴⁹ According to Ernesto Galarza, Mexican consuls only pleaded Braceros cases in “exceptional” circumstances in California.²⁵⁰ In the Northwest, on the other hand, the Mexican consul was a significant advocate for Braceros, especially as they were the dominant labor group in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.²⁵¹ Gamboa notes that consul Ignacio Pesqueria who was stationed in Portland from 1947 to 1948 may have been reassigned to New Orleans because of his quick action to speak and advocate for Braceros.²⁵² When consuls attempted to aid Braceros they were reassigned permitting the mistreatment of Mexican men to continue. During the Bracero Program, the consulates and Mexican government representatives shamed Braceros into silence and failed to protect them as Mexican nationals. When men complained about their living conditions, wages and long, painful working hours to the consulate, the officials reminded them that the situation was worse in México.

²⁴⁷ La Cooperativa Campesina de California, “Mexican Consulate Services.” <http://www.lacooperativa.org/mexican-consulate-services/> (Accessed May 31, 2017).

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Erasmo Gamboa, *Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 77.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 77.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 77.

²⁵² Ibid., 77.

Discrimination began with the Mexican consulates, who expressed to the Mexican worker, “¿De qué se queja...? In México, men wear *huaraches* and eat chile with a tortilla, while in the United States they wear Arrow shirts and eat eggs with ham.”²⁵³ The Federación de Trabajadores de México’s member, Enrique A. Lorenzo, explained that men should be proud of the *huaraches* and not be shamed into submissions because their conditions were improved by an Arrow shirt. Lorenzo sought action from the Mexican government beyond the consulate that had shamed men for their mistreatment into silence as if eggs and ham are equivalent or better than rightful pay, plumbing, and a bed. Lorenzo made it clear that the Mexican consulate and farmers believed that Braceros were in better conditions in the worse camps in the United States, than their homes in México. As a Mexican representative Lorenzo should have shamed the American farmer for the conditions, they had Braceros living in instead of excusing them. The only solution to the substandard living conditions men faced in the United States would have been México's willingness to remove men until conditions improved. Unfortunately, México's inability to legally fine companies or withdraw men from farms that directly, violated the Bracero contract guarantees of livable conditions.

This chapter examines the actions and reactions of Mexican consuls and various government officials to the reported and documented mistreatment of Braceros throughout the United States. By focusing on the limited efforts of the Mexican government to aid its citizens in the fields and protect them from exploitation, abuse, and even death, this chapter demonstrates how Mexican officials permitted and ignored their countrymen’s mistreatment. The guarantees provided to men by their contracts were not implemented in every aspect of the Bracero experience, and consequently, the non-action by México permitted the virtual enslavement of

²⁵³ Archivo General de la Nación (A.G.N.), Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106368/ Box 0884 (546.6/120) Folder 2. Huaraches and leather sandals.

Mexican men through the Bracero Program. This chapter analyzes how the conditions Bracero's experienced were not only the responsibility of American farmers but Mexican officials who blamed the Bracero and failed to act in their citizens' aid.

Men were shamed for complaining, and in doing so, they were labeled as ungrateful and trouble makers. The Archivo General de la Nación, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, and National Archive and Records Administration provide evidence from the informants and legal documents gathered by consulates that labeled the Bracero working and living situation *inmejorables* (unsurpassable).²⁵⁴ These legal documents gathered by the Mexican consulate and representatives did not mention the measures that were taken to address their grievances, except to remove the individual from the field.²⁵⁵ Braceros, such as Plutarco Sibaja Rango and Félix López Ramírez who sought aid from the Mexican consul for their individual grievances go without resolution, as the only solution was their removal.²⁵⁶ Ernesto Galarza found that Braceros rarely spoke about their grievances in front of a farmer or a manager. Braceros, according to Galarza, understood that they only had two options, which were “shut up or go back.”²⁵⁷ The Mexican worker was the victim of exploitation and racial discrimination “no sooner had the men arrived...that the farmers began to disregard their contracts,” explained Erasmo Gamboa.²⁵⁸ Their struggle fell on deaf ears as the Mexican consulates were aware of their mistreatments yet failed to do anything.²⁵⁹ The Mexican consulates excused and removed men from the camps, blaming the individual instead of the grower. Consequently, Braceros

²⁵⁴ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106368/ Box 0884 (546.6/120) Folder 2.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106367/ Box 0883 (546.6/48).; A.G.N., Manuel Ávila Camacho / Series 103284/ Box 0678 (541/1256).

²⁵⁷ Gamboa, 74.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 74.

²⁵⁹ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106368/ Box 0884 (546.6/120) Folder 2.

believed safety was expected and guaranteed, yet México's foreign policy and consulate action sought to appease the United States and continue the program.

Despite the refusal of the Mexican consulate to protect its citizens in the Program, the racial and social discrimination was covered the Mexican newspapers. New York correspondent Sidney Wise in an editorial titled “Mexican War Workers in the United States,” confirmed the racial injustices faced by Braceros across America. Wise continued by acknowledging that the living conditions men resided in were deplorable and the medical attention was non-existent.²⁶⁰ Vicente Sánchez Gaito, the legal advisor for the Mexican embassy in Washington, responded to the press allegations. Sánchez Gaito explained that the mistreatment that Mexican newspapers claimed were faced by men who entered the United States without visas, and therefore not protected by the diplomatic authorities and consulate representatives that the Bracero contract granted.²⁶¹ By isolating mistreatment as only occurring to the undocumented workers and not Braceros, the Mexican government sought to blame those who did not enter under the program and therefore chose to enter without the protection the bi-national agreement granted.

Vicente Sánchez Gaito, as a representative of México, distinguished between legal and illegal and the distinct treatment each one was permitted by the Mexican government. Labeling the men legal and illegal was easier than assuming responsibility for the Bracero process and the decision for many to forgo it.

The process is filled with *mordidads*.²⁶² A *mordida* to allow him to make a line to get permission. Then another *mordida* at the window of that line to get a card. Then another *mordida*. Then five pesos to pass him in his health exam and ten to sign his paper work. Then twenty pesos to get his name in the list.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Jaime Vélez Storey, “Los braceros y el Fondo de Ahorro Campesino” edited by Maria Eugenia Anguiano Téllez and Miguel J. Hernández Madrid in *Migración Internacional e Identidades Cambiantes* (El Colegio de Michoacán, 2002), 28.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 28.

²⁶² Mordida(s) means bribes or pay off.

²⁶³ Ibid., 30-31.

It was very expensive to become a Bracero. Consequently, men decided to cross without Bracero visas. Additionally, many men who entered as Braceros remained in the United States after their contracts were completed. Braceros remained working with expired visas to save money and time by avoiding the processing centers. Therefore, a Bracero could become undocumented and vice-versa at any point in the program, yet his accommodations would not change until he changed locations. Most importantly, undocumented workers and Braceros were working alongside one another and living together; they had the same accommodations. Also, to the American public, the Mexican worker was illegal regardless of his Bracero status. American society did not see Braceros but undocumented Mexican workers. Their status as immigrant laborers displacing American workers made them vulnerable to exploitation regardless of legal status.

THE MALE EXPERIENCE IN THE CAMPS

As men arrived at their new homes, they found themselves over-crowded and in poor conditions. Ranchers and employers viewed the housing as proper and as abiding by the contracts because they provided somewhere for the men to sleep.²⁶⁴ Living conditions for Braceros consisted of barracks, shacks, tents, and apartments. As men arrived at their new homes, the conditions of living depended on the rancher and the location. Most barracks had no indoor plumbing, stoves, or flooring. An outhouse was normally located outside the barracks would be shared and contain the only faucet that produced clean running water. Elías García Venzor recalls his barracks in Pecos, Texas, had 200 to 300 men and no shower; the men used a tank which they filled with water and left out in the sun so that the water would warm, and they

²⁶⁴ Leonard Nadel, "An elderly bracero sits on his bed in a tent in a camp near Stockton, California.," in Bracero History Archive, Item #1955, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1955> (accessed January 24, 2017).

would be able to take a shower.²⁶⁵ Apartments, shacks, and tents consisted of one or two rooms with no insulation and at times no windows. Six to ten single men would occupy one room in the shacks, tents, and apartments. Juan P. Navarez recalls that he, “did not get a mattress; they got blankets and slept on Army cots.”²⁶⁶ Fortunately, there were exceptions. In some cases, men were given a clean individual room with a shared common room. Unfortunately, Braceros found themselves living in undesirable housing in nearly every camp across the United States. Braceros adapted to the conditions at each location or were sent back to processing centers if they complained.

The mistreatment of men was most visible to the Bracero himself in his pay, which made them cheap labor and incited disdain for them by American workers.²⁶⁷ Mexican workers that labored for U.W. Walker Star Route informed President Miguel Alemán Valdéz that American growers wanted to pay Braceros \$1.75 to \$1.50 instead of \$2.50 to \$3.00 per pound of cotton that American workers were paid. The telegram ended by stating that the growers told them to return to México if they did not want to work for the low wages.²⁶⁸ American workers from the U.W. Walker Star Route also wrote to the Mexican president asking him to recall all Braceros as their presence had reduced wages and only their removal would restore them.²⁶⁹ The blame was placed on Braceros and not the farmers who decided to manipulate wages affecting Mexican and Anglo workers.

The U.W. Walker Star Route was driving piece rates down by falsifying Bracero work hours. Men were paid for the pound or the box of the crop being harvested. For example, a

²⁶⁵ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Elías García Venzor," in Bracero History Archive, Item #8, <http://Braceroarchive.org/items/show/8> (accessed October 3, 2008).

²⁶⁶ Juan Navarez, interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria*.

²⁶⁷ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortínez /Series 106383/ Box 0899 / Folder 548.1/609-548.1/716.

²⁶⁸ A.G.N., Miguel Alemán Valdés/ Series 104914/ Box 0594/ Folder 546.6/1-32.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

Bracero working piece rate at 22 cents a carton of lettuce might have picked 60 cartons in six hours. This would be \$13.20 for six hours of work or \$2.20 an hour. If the grower falsified his records and said the Bracero earned the \$13.20 in ten hours, this would reduce the hourly rate to \$1.32 an hour, reducing farm wages by .88 cents.²⁷⁰ This permitted farmers to offer \$1.35 an hour as equivalent to piece pay. Many farmers were opposed to piece pay as the Braceros had the ability to make more money. The more a man picked, the more money he made. The Braceros had an incentive to move quickly, yet growers still pushed them to move faster. “They would put us to work, and they would not let us stop.”²⁷¹ As Isidoro Ramírez explained,

The ladder for starters was sixteen to twenty feet, and it was only leaned against the tree. The floor was weak, and the ladders would sink, so I had to begin from the bottom and work my way up. When the bag was filled with what we picked we had rushed down and empty the bag into the box and run to start everything over again. Tomatoes were the worst because you were bent over, and it killed your back. By the end of the day, you were dragging your body on the floor. They paid 20 cents a box.²⁷²

The count of boxes and pounds were recorded by the farmer. Men trusted that farmers kept accurate counts and that their pay would reflect their back-breaking work. Most important, men did not stop working until the day was over. They did not work an eight-hour day but up to sixteen hours.

The practice of falsifying payroll was common throughout the program. KNXT, Channel 2 on March 8, 1963, newscaster Maury Green reported that R.T. Englund Company lettuce farm in Imperial Valley was accused by Mrs. Elizabeth Logenbohn, the company’s payroll clerk of falsifying payroll records. Mrs. Logenbohn also accused other growers of doing the same. The

²⁷⁰ National Archive and Records Administration (N.A.R.A.), Box 4, Record Group 174: General Records of the Department of Labor, 1907-2001. Series: Records Relating to the Mexican Labor (“Bracero”) Program, 1950-1964. File Unit R.T. Englund Co. (El Centro) Elizabeth A. Longebohn charges. Item: Transcribed news story “U.S. Charges Falsifying of Bracero Pay Books” from Los Angeles Times., December 7, 1962.

²⁷¹ David Yañez, *La Noria on The Bracero Program*

²⁷² Steve Velásquez, “Isidoro Ramírez,” in Bracero History Archive, Item #142, <http://Braceroarchive.org/items/show/142> (accessed October 3, 2008).

companies “aim was to establish a false piecework hourly rate, so that future wages of Braceros would be held down.”²⁷³ Mrs. Longenbohn believed that this type of record manipulation saved California farmers about five million dollars a month on labor costs. Mr. Hayes, the lawyer for the R.T. Englund Company, reassured that Mrs. Longenbohn claims were false and that the companies she accused had not had any complaints regarding pay by Braceros.²⁷⁴ In a grievance to the president, Plutarco Sibaja Rango pointed out that California farmers nullified his and fellow Braceros contracts telling them they would work picking whatever they needed, at the set pay he wished to pay.²⁷⁵ When men complained about their pay, they were told their wage was correct and threatened with being sent back to the processing centers. Farmers and Mexican consulates reminded the Braceros that their mediocre weekly wage in the United States was better than their monthly salary in México.²⁷⁶ Consequently, most men did not want to speak out due to fear in the general belief that it would be pointless. Instead, they would transfer out once their contract ended. When men continued to complain, they were labeled problem Braceros and removed without penalties on the farmer.

The manipulation of wages Longenbohn reported did not only affect Braceros in their pocket books but how American men viewed them. Braceros status as unskilled labor created a downward compression of agriculture wages across the United States. American men were competing with the low wages Braceros had to accept. José L. Parra explained,

Those born in the other nation did not like Mexicans to work in their lands at all because we took their jobs. They no longer were able to get jobs, and there were some problems

²⁷³ N.A.R.A., Box 4, Record Group 174: General Records of the Department of Labor, 1907-2001. Series: Records Relating to the Mexican Labor (“Bracero”) Program, 1950-1964. File Unit R.T. Englund Co. (El Centro) Elizabeth A. Longenbohn charges. Item: Letter from Atara Mont, Emergency Committee to Avoid Farm Workers Inc., to Kenneth Robertson, Solicitor, U.S. Department of Labor. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/296732> (Accessed June 1, 2017).

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106367/ Box 0883 (546.6/48).

²⁷⁶ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/609-548.1/716).

for that reason. We would fight with so and so because we came to take their jobs. They no longer got jobs, and we worked in their land while they did not. We worked the land because we charged a little and they could not charge the same amount because they would not get hired for the high wages they wanted.²⁷⁷

To Anglos, the ‘white man’ was far superior to a Mexican in every respect, especially hard labor. Confrontations between Mexicans and American agricultural workers were unavoidable as Braceros were seen as intruders. Glenn E. Brockway, Regional Director of the Labor Department’s Bureau of Employment Security, in the *Los Angeles Times* was quoted as saying “that the employment of Mexican Nationals has resulted in the unemployment of domestic farm workers.”²⁷⁸ Consequently, men blamed their unemployment and low wages on Braceros. In many cases, the American worker would be fired, creating, even more disdain between the workers. Librado Briceño Domínguez, while working in Salinas, California, was involved in a physical altercation with the foreman regarding working conditions, which lead to his transfer.²⁷⁹ José Rubio Martinez was repatriated and physically assaulted by his employer “because the manager did not like him.” He was so badly hurt that he was in the Hospital Civil "Libertad" due to his injuries.²⁸⁰ The American men that participated in the altercations were kept due to rank, skill level, or nationality. The Bracero, regardless of situation, for the most part, would either be transferred or sent back to the processing center; this was left to the discretion of the farmer. Arguments occurred not only for living and working conditions but the Anglo mentality that

²⁷⁷ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "José L. Parra," in Bracero History Archive, Item #19, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/19> (accessed May 30, 2017).

²⁷⁸ N.A.R.A., Box 4, Record Group 174: General Records of the Department of Labor, 1907-2001. Series: Records Relating to the Mexican Labor (“Bracero”) Program, 1950-1964. File Unit R.T. Englund Co. (El Centro) Elizabeth A. Longeborn charges. Item: Transcribed news story “U.S. Charges Falsifying of Bracero Pay Books” from Los Angeles Times., December 7, 1962. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/296732> (Accessed June 1, 2017).

²⁷⁹ Mireya Loza, "Librado Briceño Domínguez," in Bracero History Archive, Item #680, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/680> (accessed October 28, 2016).

²⁸⁰ Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) Archivo Particular: Jaime Torres Bodet “Recortes de Periódico, UNESCO” (1949) Volume 301 Clasificación: 5.3.6.

"[Braceros] can't do white man's work." They were just hired because they were cheap and exploitable.²⁸¹

Americans blamed the Mexican's lack of skills for accidents and deaths that occurred in the fields. According to Anglo farmers, Braceros' lack of training in modern farming skills had deadly consequences for many in the fields. Anglo workers blamed accidents and deaths on the cheap Mexican labor, labeling them as a hazard instead of improving their working conditions. There was an array of accidents caused by human error and lax safety regulations. In May of 1958, in the California's Imperial Valley, Bracero, Vidal López Silva as a favor was driving a tractor through a melon field. López Silva was decapitated by a crop dusting plane that flew too low.²⁸² The pilot's miscalculation in height due to the tractor and farmers lack of scheduling and information to his workers caused the death of Vidal López Silva, not his (López Silva) skills. "According to the National Safety Council, "tractor accidents are the leading cause of injury and death among farmer workers."²⁸³ To many Anglo men, Braceros' lack of skills and safety made accidents a daily occurrence which placed them in danger, not just Braceros.

Mistreatment and altercations were not contained solely to the work fields but in public places throughout the United States. In many cities and towns across the United States where restaurants, grocery stores, recreation centers, dance halls, and billiards, to name a few, did not permit Mexican nationals. Signs on the front door would say "No dogs, No Mexicans allowed."²⁸⁴ Juan Loza recalls trying to purchase a cup of coffee from a diner:

²⁸¹ Victor S. Clark, *Mexican Labor in The United States*. (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 511.

²⁸² Grisel Murillo, "Higinio López Silva," in Bracero History Archive, Item #397, <http://braceroarchive.org/es/items/show/397> (accessed January 25, 2017); Higinio López Silva family was notified. The body was kept in the mortuary for fifteen days until his father arrived in California. López Silva's brother was buried in California.

²⁸³--- Farm Injury Resource Center. <http://farminjuryresource.com/farming-equipment-accidents/tractor-accidents/> (Accessed May 30, 2017).

²⁸⁴ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/609-548.1/716).

She tells me, 'I am telling you that I can't sell you a coffee.' And I thought that she was joking. So, I showed her a dollar, and I told her, 'Excuse me, I thought I had American money and that American money could buy whatever I wanted in the United States, but I see that my dollar is different.' At the moment that I said that the security guard came—he was really a very big güero because I didn't even reach his shoulder. He had . . . I remember it as if it was today. He was dressed like a cowboy, and he had boots with iron spurs, and he told me: 'Come with me, please' [said in English]. I still don't forget that word. I never will forget it. So, he took me out to the middle of the street, and he tells me, 'You want to buy coffee? You have to walk three blocks over here and two blocks over there. They will sell you coffee there, but you'll get something other than coffee if you keep bothering us.'²⁸⁵

Such examples of racism and discrimination were relatively normal experiences for Braceros working in the United States. The negative labeling of Mexican's as unskilled job thieves (because of the low wages they accepted) by the American media created and exasperated xenophobia and hatred towards Braceros beyond the farm. Reverend John G. Simmons explained that there was a surplus of 150,000 American farm workers in California and that there was no need for Braceros. He explains that there is no "shred of evidence that large [farm] operations could not afford to pay Americans real wages."²⁸⁶ Newspapers published messages like the one of Reverend Simmons regularly demonstrating how countless American men were unemployed due to the cheap Bracero. The discrimination men faced in the public sphere was permitted by segregation law.

Men wrote to the Mexican president asking for help in facilitating their return home because of mistreatment and abuse. Félix López Ramírez who was working in Kerney, Nebraska in October of 1945 asked the President Manuel Ávila Camacho for guarantees as they returned to México because many had been robbed while others were killed while traveling through the

²⁸⁵ Mireya Loza, "Juan Loza," in Bracero History Archive, Item #175, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/175> (accessed January 26, 2017).

²⁸⁶ ---"NEED OF BRACEROS IN WEST DISPUTED." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), June 16, 1963. <http://ezhost.utrgv.edu:2048/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezhost.utrgv.edu/docview/116436868?accountid=7119>. (Accessed January 18, 2018).

United States.²⁸⁷ Ramírez was one of many Braceros who wrote and asked the president for aid throughout the program. President Ávila Camacho mounted investigations after the media created enough attention to stimulate some action. The multiple investigations and joint committees rendered no change or action from México's representatives. Being mistreated, robbed or denied service was a setback to Mexican men, but not defeat.²⁸⁸

In their headlines and “Comentarios,” the Mexican press regularly would have accounts by men and concerns from family members. The charges of mistreatment that filled the newspapers in México caused President Manuel Ávila Camacho to send the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores Pedro Muro Asúnsolo to observe and assess the living and work conditions of Braceros. Muro Asúnsolo’s, traveled throughout the United States in 1945 for eight months. His report was part of a counter-offensive publication from the Mexican government to minimize and undermine the Mexican press exposes of Bracero mistreatment.²⁸⁹ He traveled to Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Oregon, Utah, and Washington which provided him a candid view of the different accommodations provided to men throughout the United States. Muro Asúnsolo’s assessment of the camps found that there were three types of labor camps: The *muy bueno*, which had electricity, offices, dormitories, kitchen table, kitchen, and proper sanitation such as bathrooms and showers with hot running water, including laundry room and a recreation room. Most notably, English classes were provided. Next was the *buenos* in which he described Shannon Sullivan’s apricot farm in California whose priority was cleanliness. Instead of focusing on the lack of accommodations, Muro Asúnsolo described the fried chicken with guacamole he enjoyed with a tortilla and coffee. He emphasized the delicious

²⁸⁷ A.G.N., Manuel Ávila Camacho / Series 103284/ Box 0678 (541/1256).

²⁸⁸ Mario Jimenez Sinfuentes, *Of Forest and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 18.

²⁸⁹ Vélez Storey, 27-28.

food the men were enjoying. He failed to point out the sleeping conditions, instead, focused on the cleanliness as if Braceros can do without beds and sanitation as long as there was a clean floor and an outhouse or better yet, avocado in the chicken tacos.

Lastly, the *feos* he found in Marshall, Michigan, Braceros lived in small shacks without running water, kitchens, bathrooms and wood pieces as beds. The men cooked their meals on an outdoor fire.²⁹⁰ Elías Hernández Guzmán and Florencio Magallanes Parada recall working in Pecos, Texas where they lived alongside 200-300 Braceros in a single barrack. Hernández Guzmán explains that they had no showers, so men would fill metal tanks and left them outside for the sun to heat.²⁹¹ Magallanes Parada described the food service as terrible, pointing out that they paid for their food even when it ran out.²⁹² Hernández Guzmán does not recollect having any medical services, the men cured themselves. Braceros did not speak out regarding their living conditions do to fear of being sent back to the processing centers.

Meal service was distinct in each location as some farmers opted to sell meals while others allowed men to cook their food. This depended on accommodations. Farmers that opted to provide meals to Braceros had their food automatically deducted from their pay, regardless of their eating or not. In many cases, men were solely working for their meals after sending remittances.²⁹³ Juventino Hernández of Mexicali, Baja California, on April 28, 1948, asked the president for aid in returning to Guadalajara because, like many other Braceros, he was dying of hunger.²⁹⁴ Starvation was a reality for Braceros. Many Braceros experienced waiting in line, the

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁹¹ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Elías García Venzor," in Bracero History Archive, Item #8, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/8> (accessed March 14, 2018); Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Florencio Magallanes Parada," in Bracero History Archive, Item #10, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/10> (accessed March 14, 2018).

²⁹² Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Florencio Magallanes Parada," in Bracero History Archive, Item #10, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/10> (accessed March 14, 2018).

²⁹³ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/609-548.1/716).

²⁹⁴ A.G.N., Manuel Ávila Camacho / Series 106377/ Box 0793 (546.6/1-2).

food was running out, and still it was deducted from their pay.²⁹⁵ Norberto Mata Baylón, in Olton, Texas, went out in the street and knocked on people's doors begging for food for three days because his boss had not come to their living quarters to feed or pay them.²⁹⁶ Mata Baylón did not receive a response from the Mexican government or aid. He finished his contract and was able to transfer to a new location. The lack of consideration by the farmer exacerbated the situation of the men who were placed in camps that did not have a kitchen for Bracero use, leaving them solely to the mercy of the farmer.

Muro Asúnsolo minimized the conditions by calling it *feo* instead of unsanitary and unlivable. Braceros described their living conditions as "living like animals. The food they had was not for people."²⁹⁷ What Braceros called unlivable for animals, Muro Asúnsolo ignored. He failed to propose changes or remove Braceros from the *feo* locations regardless of their living conditions and meal preparation/availability. The vivid and yet striking account of the *feo* living conditions provided by Muro Asúnsolo and the various oral histories of men, solidified that the conditions in the *feo* camps were not isolated or even a few but widely found and experienced by men. In Muro Asúnsolo's report, he did not address the distinct living conditions or meal preparation of men or removed men from what he called the *feo* camps. Since, the inception of the program, the treatment of men and their accommodations had been ignored by the president, and the Mexican government permitted their continuation and sanctioned the mistreatment of Braceros.

²⁹⁵ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Florencio Magallanes Parada," in Bracero History Archive, Item #10, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/10> (accessed January 24, 2017).

²⁹⁶ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Norberto Mata Baylón," in Bracero History Archive, Item #25, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/25> (accessed January 24, 2017).

²⁹⁷ Dir. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness* Prod. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez. Films Media Group, 2010. 58 mins, 38:42.

Instead of solutions or international discourse regarding men's treatment and accommodations, he concluded by expressing his "trip left him with a magnificent impression of the men and their hard work, and the elevated life they live."²⁹⁸ Muro Asúnsolo's final words praised Braceros' hard work and solidified the conditions Braceros lived in met Mexican government standards. The unsanitary living conditions and the systematic mistreatment of the men was permitted because the Mexican national government believed that the program was modernizing its work force which, when it returned, would transform the rural workforce and improve the national economy. By ignoring the malpractice of American farmers, México permitted the abuse of Braceros, not undocumented workers as Sánchez Gaito claimed. In short, the Mexican national government turned a blind eye to the exploitation of its citizens while it simultaneously perpetuated the myth that the program modernized its workforce.

The failure of Muro Asúnsolo and the Mexican government to act on what was found on the camp tour is evident from Mexican Consul Angel Cano's investigation in 1951. Cano spearheaded an investigation by a joint United States-México committee. It reported the primitive living and working conditions on the 800-acre W.T. Jamisons plantation in Tennessee. The 50 farm laborers who filed grievances quit their cotton-picking jobs and boarded a bus to return to their homes.²⁹⁹ An unmentioned number of Braceros nonetheless remained at Mr. Jamison's plantation to complete their contract instead of returning to México. Mr. Jamison's plantation had hired an excessive number of workers allowing them to continue their farming with the men that stayed. A practice, as Muro Asúnsolo included in his report, explained was a common practice, and a miscount from the part of the grower. Neither Muro Asúnsolo nor Cano found issues in the

²⁹⁸ Vélez Storey, 27.

²⁹⁹ *New York Times*. "Mexican Laborers Send Home by U.S." (1923-Current File), Nov 25, 1951. <https://search-proquest-com.ezhost.utrgv.edu/docview/112105699?pq-origsite=summon>. (Accessed April 10, 2017).

excessive number of men at the camp were used to intimidate workers to not complain by having more workers than needed. Cano found that Braceros who remained at the plantation understood that returning to the processing centers, would only hurt their ability to receive a new contract. Additionally, to the American public, the press labeled the 50 who returned to México as problematic and possibly illegal workers. The American press headline read, "MEXICAN LABORERS SENT HOME BY U.S." dubbing United States as addressing the concerns of those men by sending them back and hiring men that wanted to work. Again, the news reports blamed them men and characterized them as problematic, ungrateful or difficult. Consequently, the conditions that the Braceros reported were unfixed as they were deemed livable. By blaming those who left as trouble and emphasizing that other Braceros chose to remain the housing conditions protested were not seen as an issue.³⁰⁰

The international contract led men to believe their safety and needs would be met by the growers that employed them, but Braceros had to defend themselves by breaking their contracts and filing complaints. The Mexican government continuously ignored and overlooked the conditions found by Muro Asúnsolo who focused on the Bracero's skill, large population and Sánchez Gaito's excused mistreatment because of legal status. Muro Asúnsolo and Sánchez Gaito, compliance conveyed the message that the Mexican government sanctioned the abuse. Muro Asúnsolo did not advocate for basic sanitation such as bathrooms and running water. As a government official with firsthand accounts of the *feo* camps, he failed to act, permitting growers to continue the mistreatment. Both Muro Asúnsolo and Sánchez Gaito, as representatives of México, could have removed workers, demanded better conditions, and protected their

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

countrymen as guaranteed in their contracts. Instead, both men failed the Mexican workers and were responsible for the continued mistreatment of men throughout the program.

Consuls throughout the United States turned a blind eye to farmers who abused Braceros. The grievances of Braceros were interpreted as a problematic worker instead of a labor issue. Bracero Plutarco Simbaja Rango in a letter to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines noted that the Bracero would not receive any aid from Mexican consulates because they had all been bought by American farmers. According to Plutarco, Frank Guil (manager) had informed him that his grievances were not going to be answered as he had given a *mordida* of \$300 to Consul Romero years ago. He explained that he was met in the United States with mistreatment and humiliation. He points out that he called the Vice Consul Ernesto A. Romero about the wages, mistreatment, and humiliation men faced in the hands of American farmers. Consul Romero informed Plutarco there was nothing he could do about his grievances, that Guil no longer wanted him working there and would have him removed. To prove that he was not being problematic, but that other Braceros were experiencing contracts nullification and wage reduction as well, Plutarco began to collect signatures. Plutarco's grievance filled with signatures did not warrant consul investigation nor attention instead Consul Romero instructed him to throw away his paper,

Mr. Simbaja, you do not have what it takes to be a Bracero regardless of the visa that grants you the title. You are not a Bracero, for the reason you protest; you are not used to being a Bracero, because those who are Braceros, eat what they give them, whether it be nothing but water and bread and they do not protest.”³⁰¹

Plutarco was sent back to México because he spoke out about his pay and was labeled a troubled employee.³⁰² Consul Romero in his instructions demonstrates that he does not work to protect the Mexican national but the interest of those who pay him *mordidas*.

³⁰¹ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106367/ Box 0883 (546.6/48).

³⁰² Ibid.

The countless letters and petitions Plutarco began caused him to get the attention of the Mexican government. President Cortines on February 3, 1954, granted an investigation to Plutarco's allegations which was conducted by Pablo Campos Ortic, a lawyer who instructed Consul Luis García Larrañaga, to take all necessary measures to fix the irregularity.³⁰³ His use of the word irregularity signified the idea that Plutarco's case was isolated yet countless of Braceros found themselves in a similar situation. The outcome of the official investigation is unknown, yet one can only assume nothing changed as Braceros continued to be mistreated. The case of Plutarco clearly demonstrates that consulates did not work for the Mexican man, but for the American farmer.

Plutarco was not an organizer nor a rogue Bracero but a family man attempting to aid his family. Sibaja Rango became a Bracero due to his situation at home. A family member's sickness had taken a toll on the economic situation of the family and they could not work, causing him to become a Bracero. "We work with the hope to cover the medical expense incurred, yet we find ourselves going further and further into debt because of events in life."³⁰⁴ Becoming a Bracero was a solution for Plutarco's family financial needs not an attempt to create change within the program.

To fix the mistreatment of Mexican men, Mrs. Adela S. Vento from Edinburg, Texas explained to President Cortines that a solution must be found that protects workers and benefits the Mexican economy, rather than simply enriching Anglo farmers.³⁰⁵ In her plea to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez to aid his countrymen, Vento explains that 'espaldas mojadas' (she refers to Braceros this way) are being enslaved by the American farmer. She emphasized that the

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez /Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/706).

United States had great politicians and corporations which will only send a committee to investigate, but she worried that the slavery would continue because no one would punish the farmers. Most notable is Vento's mention is that there was no law in the United States that fines or jails people or employers who abuse or humiliate Mexican men. But what Vento was also not aware of was that the committees investigating were also comprised of Mexican representatives who decided to focus on eggs and ham or the Arrow shirt that modernized the men and uplifted them from the chile and tortilla they were so accustomed. The program was beneficial to the national governments of both countries, but they continued to ignore the needs of the men toiling in the fields and enduring abuse.

THE FIGHT BACK

Men who exhausted themselves attempting to get Consulate help utilized the American legal system for aid. Ezequiel Arismendi, a Bracero working for Desert Growers, Inc. and the Continental Casualty Co. in Brawley, California, filed six complaints in the Brawley Justice Court charging the two companies with defrauding Mexican Braceros of proper medical services. Arismendi accused Mrs. Elvira Ruiz, an employee of Pan American Underwriters health insurance agents for Continental, for practicing medicine without a license. Mrs. Ruiz was practicing medicine on 600 Braceros. Arismendi was one of many laborers being treated with pills and injections without being given a physical examination. Because of Mrs. Ruiz lack of medical knowledge, Arismendi was hospitalized for six weeks with a chronic ailment that could have been prevented with proper medical attention.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/706).

On July 9, 1958, Doctor Benj L. Yellen wrote to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez informing him of Arismendi's case and mistreatment by the growers and Mexican consulate.³⁰⁷ Dr. Yellen explains that he treated Arismendi when he "staggered into my office very sick and had to be sent to the hospital. His illness was long, and the Continental Casualty Co. of Chicago said they would not pay for the treatment of Arismendi even though it was a woman employee of theirs who caused Arismendi's severe illness."³⁰⁸ Braceros contracted by Desert Growers paid thirteen cents a day out of their weekly, twenty-five-dollar paycheck. The insurance policy permitted Braceros to seek medical aid from any doctor of their choosing. However, this practice was highly discouraged, and many men were made unaware of this option. In many cases, growers refused to give laborers the forms necessary to visit independent physicians, and in many cases, doctors were also denied payment by Pan American Underwriters Insurance. Men were told to see Pan American's doctor, who was only available for one hour a day at the camp. Because the doctor could not attend every Bracero within the hour, Mrs. Ruiz issued injections and then sent the men back to work. Dr. Yellen pointed out that many men died because of the lack of proper treatment.

Available and adequate health care was necessary to ensure the well-being of Braceros. Men many were unaware of any services at their camp or in the surrounding area and doctors rarely visited the camps (visits depended on camps). In the case of Rigoberto Garcia Perez who was in Tracy, California, with a crew from Guanajuato de Leon, Oaxaca, [recalled that]

One of those boys died. Something he ate at dinner in the camp wasn't any good. The kid got food poisoning, but what could we do? We were all worried because he'd died, and what happened to him could happen to any of us. They said they'd left soap on the plates,

³⁰⁷ Dr. Benj Yellen letter head spells his name Benj, however correspondence also refers to him as Ben and Benjamin

³⁰⁸ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/706).

or something had happened with the dinner because lots of others got diarrhea. I got diarrhea, too. But this boy died.³⁰⁹

Garcia Perez pointed out that the young man did not receive medical attention because Braceros did not know where the hospital was located.³¹⁰ The farmer or a doctor was not available to Rigoberto or his fellow Braceros that night. The various Braceros that were ill that night had to wait until morning to seek help from the farmer or await the doctor to visit the camp. Either way, they placed themselves in danger of being sent back to the processing centers.

Farmers hired a surplus of Braceros to replace those who were sent back to the processing centers, causing many not to report injuries or sicknesses. Many ignored colds or fever unless it would slow down production in the fields. Andrés Héctor Quezada Lara while working in Montgomery, Minnesota, injured his eye while picking corn.³¹¹ He was seen by the farmer's doctor and was put on bed rest for four days. Like Quezada, Norberto Mata Baylón recalled being so sick with a fever he almost fell off a tree while picking apples. The 'mayordomo' took Baylón to the hospital where he was admitted for three months.³¹² Quezada Lara and Mata Baylón explained about the feared of being sent back and hesitated to inform the manager of their injury/illness. Quezada and Baylón were fortunate to have farm owners and managers who placed their health as a priority and did not transfer them out. However, Ruben Ávila broke his leg when he fell off a ladder picking apples. He was not given any medical aid. Ranchers, for the most part, did not have medical service and many did not want to pay the

³⁰⁹ David Bacon, "Rigoberto Garcia Perez," *Immigrant*, <http://dbacon.igc.org/Imgrants/24BraceroStory.htm> (accessed January 24, 2017).

³¹⁰ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Norberto Mata Baylón," in Bracero History Archive, Item #25, <http://braceroarchive.org/es/items/show/25> (accessed January 24, 2017).

³¹¹ Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Andrés Héctor Quezada Lara," in Bracero History Archive, Item #4, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/4> (accessed January 24, 2017).

³¹² Myrna Parra-Mantilla, "Norberto Mata Baylón," in Bracero History Archive, Item #25, <http://braceroarchive.org/es/items/show/25> (accessed January 24, 2017).

immigrant laborers' medical expenses. Ávila was sent back to the processing center where his mother met him and took him back to Zacatecas for treatment. Ávila's foot did not heal properly, and he did not receive any compensation for his permanent condition.³¹³

Many Braceros like Ávila chose to return home on their own. Ranchers, for the most part, sent men back to México nullifying their contracts because their illness made them unable to work. Braceros would write asking for consulate aid in forcing farmers to uphold Bracero contracts regardless of illnesses with no response from the consulate. Men wanted the ability to recover from their illness and return to work, instead of being sent back to the processing centers.³¹⁴ The health care men received depended on the farmer and the accommodations they provided for their workers.

Arismendi sought to aid Braceros who were being denied proper health care, like Ruben Ávila. The countless recent deaths of Braceros that had occurred at the camp caused him to seek action. Arismendi did not mention the individuals he set out to represent in his lawsuit. His intention was to gain justice for those who had died and proper medical aid for those that remained laboring throughout the United States. Unable to pay for a lawyer, Arismendi inquired from residents how he could appear before a judge, and a committee was formed to help him. Assembled by Dr. Yellen, a committee of American citizens aided Arismendi in filing "the first lawsuit in local courts to bring justice for a Bracero."³¹⁵ Dr. Yellen formed the committee because the Mexican Consulate at Calexico did not aid Arismendi with legal aid, shelter or food while awaiting trial. The Mexican Consulate was also aware that the Border Patrol was attempting to catch him to send him back to México, with the sole purpose of causing him to

³¹³ Maria Rosalba Ávila, *La Noria on The Bracero Program*.

³¹⁴ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106384/ Box 900 (548.1/719).

³¹⁵ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/706).

miss his day in court. The trial judge turned Arismendi over to the Mexican Consulate, who was heard telling Arismendi, "You are never to speak or see Dr. Yellen again. Dr. Yellen gave you a medicine which has bewitched you, so you did all these wrong things."³¹⁶ As Arismendi walked out of the courthouse in the custody of the Mexican Consulate, the Border Patrol arrived and arrested him. "Mr. Arismendi states that he was tortured by being put in a narrow space where it was very hot... and feed bread and water for two days."³¹⁷

The Mexican Consulate went to the Border Patrol holding area to speak to another Bracero who was to testify on behalf of Arismendi, but he was intimidated and no longer wanted to testify. Instead, he returned to México. The Mexican Consulate retook custody of Arismendi and held him in isolation from the committee and legal aid. The Consulate attempted to force Arismendi to sign documents, successfully getting him to sign a blank paper which an apology and a statement of Arismendi's dropping of the case.³¹⁸ The Consulate did not seek to ensure Arismendi's well-being while in custody, but to silence him by submission and mistreatment. The letters from Dr. Yellen did not mention the outcome of Arismendi, only asking the Mexican president to investigate the actions of the Consulate.

Dr. Yellen made it clear that the Mexican Consulate, instead of aiding Arismendi, sought to remove and silence him. They attempted to obstruct justice by making him sign a blank paper that was meant to discredit him and label him as a liar instead of addressing the reality of the health care at the camp sites. Dr. Yellen questioned who the Mexican Consulate was supposed to protect, the Mexican worker or the American grower. The Consulate had the responsibility to

³¹⁶Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

provide Arismendi legal aid and inform him of his rights and obligations under the labor and civil laws.

A second letter from Dr. Yellen dated July 21, 1958, held a handwritten letter and newspaper clippings of the outcome of the trial. The *Brawley News* clipping from July 19, 1958, stated that Mrs. Elvira Ruiz and Dr. Yellen, both charged with practicing law without a license, were found innocent. Mrs. Ruiz's verdict was because she was working under the direction of a doctor which was permitted by law. Judge Marabel told Mrs. Ruiz's attorney, J.R. Whitelaw that he "he holds his clients morally responsible for the worst medical abuse I've ever heard of. [I would] not want to be a patient treated like this. I would advise you to tell these insurance companies to clean up this mess."³¹⁹

The case of Arismendi was not only unique because it was a Bracero bringing a lawsuit forward but because others involved were arrested and tried. Unfortunately, the outcome of Arismendi lawsuit or well-being is unknown and minimized in the newspaper describing the cases of Mrs. Ruiz and Dr. Yellen. Additionally, there was no correspondence on record from President Cortinez which only spoke to the continuous struggles Braceros would face without their government's help.

The conditions Arismendi was fighting against were not only taking place in Brawley, California, but throughout the Bracero camps in the United States. Dr. Irma West of the California Department of Public Health found a series of unexplained Braceros deaths were due to starvation and organic phosphate (insecticides) poisoning.³²⁰ She found men purposely missed meals to save money. She placed the blame on Braceros without investigating food services

³¹⁹A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106383/ Box 0899 (548.1/706).

³²⁰ Don Mitchell, *They Saved The Crops: Labor, Landscape, And The Struggle Over Industrial Farming In Bracero Era California* (Athens: University Of Georgia Press, 2012), 314.

and/or food preparation at the camp. It leaves this author to speculate that Braceros were unimportant, and their death did not warrant an investigation but an excuse of desperation and greed to save money.

Secondly, Dr. West found men were directly exposed to Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and insecticides in the fields as planes would dust the crop as men worked. Men were not given special clothing or face masks to protect themselves from pesticides. Many men reported pneumonia and breathing issues. However, his men did not connect their illnesses to crop dusting.³²¹ Most disturbing was that men worked the fields during crop dusting. Dr. West did not investigate the exposure or provide safety guidelines to growers to reduce the contact between the men and DDT.

Ezequiel Arismendi attempted to bring attention to the health care of Braceros. Braceros fear of being sent back forced many to work injured and sick which led to countless deaths. Men solicited intervention from the Consulate and Mexican president to aid them and reassure them that their illnesses would not cause them to be sent back to México.³²² Their countless letters and telegrams were not answered causing many to remain silent and those who chose to seek help faced the consequences as the farmer sought fit.

THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

When braceros failed to obtain aid from the Mexican Consulate, women sought aid from the president for their loved ones as mothers and wives. Ramona Avalos, Bertha Márquez, y *firmantes* from Ciudad Madero, Tamaulipas on August 7, 1945, asked the president for aid for their Bracero family members who had been wounded in a shooting at the Steel Company No.

³²¹ Ibid., 314.

³²² A.G.N. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines/ Series 106384/ Box 0900 (548.1/719)

101 c/o Burlington Depot. Cedar Creek, Nebraska, USA.³²³ Their plea for aid was answered by the Oficina Mayor de la Presidencia, specifically Licenciado Roberto Amorós and Licenciado Pablo Campos Ortiz, who sent notice on August 24 to the Mexican Consulate in Kansas City to investigate and undertake all necessary measures. On August 31, Licenciado Pablo Campos Ortiz sent notice to Ramona Avalos, Bertha Márquez, *y firmantes* that the Braceros she had written in behalf of had received adequate medical care from the Mexican Consulate and that their wounds were minor, allowing the men to return to work days later.³²⁴ The shooting was not investigated by the Mexican Consulate, just the well-being of the men. In the correspondence neither lawyer attempted to question the events that led to Braceros being victims of gunshots nor the lack of information between the police, growers, and the Mexican Consulate.

Consulates were responsible for informing Mexican families of the death or accidents a Bracero had suffered. The consulates did not always become involved when an accident or a loss of life occurred as many farmers did not report incidents. On August 9, 1943, the Los Angeles, California, Consulate General of México, Vicente Peralta Coronel wrote a letter to the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores notifying the Mexican government of a car accident involving five Braceros who worked for Sierra Madre Citrus Association from South Pasadena, California. The letter described that the accident occurred at 7:30 pm as Mr. Walter A. Hopkins the Vice President of First Trust and Savings Bank in Pasadena crashed with the company bus in which Tereso G. Prieto, José W. Sánchez, Ambroise Orozco, Candelario Pimental, Luis Hernandez, Fernando Gomez, and Julian Moreno (United States citizen) were traveling. The crash resulted in the death of Prieto and Julian. Through the evidence presented at trial, the Consulate General of

³²³ Translation signatories. Other woman had signed yet were not named in the notice by Licenciado Pablo Campos Ortiz.

³²⁴ A.G.N., Manuel Ávila Camacho /Series 106367/ Box 0883 (546/120).

México was informed that Hopkins was driving under the influence during the accident, a crime that he was found guilty of committing by a jury of his peers. The Consul Peralta Coronel requested that Hopkins be held responsible for the financial burden of the loss of life that it would have on the family and for the medical expenses to be covered for the injured in a civil trial.³²⁵

To aid in his civil suit, Consul Peralta Coronel on September 7, 1943, requested from Mr. Bruno Newman, a detailed report on the health of José W. Sánchez, Ambroise Orozco, Candelario Pimental, Luis Hernandez, and Fernando Gomez, all of whom were still hospitalized. Consul Peralta Coronel also contacted Loreta Caudillo de Prieto Viuda de Tereso Prieto on November 22, 1943, advising her to submit proof that she was Prieto's next of kin for her civil suit to continue. Caudillo de Prieto responded in days with the adequate documentation. The case was settled on November 26, 1943, in the amount of \$199.23 which was paid by the State Compensation Insurance Fund to Caudillo de Prieto for the loss of her husband.³²⁶ It is unknown if Tereso Prieto's body was returned to México and if the widow also received the \$1,000 life insurance Bracero were given by the binational agreement.

The number of Braceros who died laboring in the United States is unknown, yet some were reported because of the manner of their death and others went unnoticed by the media as they died in the camps. "Accidents took the life of countless Braceros: 16 in Phoenix, 12 in Soledad, California, 8 in New York, 28 in Chular, California."³²⁷ A lot of people died in the United States and neither the Mexican nor the American government worried about returning their bodies or contacting their families. Many women who lost their husbands or sons never

³²⁵ S.R.E. Archivo Particular: Seccion de Archivo General. Clasificación: IV/664.1 (73.27) Tipografica: IV-756-13.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ *Harvest of Loneliness*, 40:47

received anything, including their insurance compensation even though they died as contracted laborers.³²⁸ Men were not aware that the United States Department of Labor “provided workers with subsistence, emergency medical care, and burial expenses (not exceeding \$150 burial expenses in any one case)” as stated in Public Law 78.³²⁹

Many in México heard of various accidents through the radio. As the names of the dead were many, unknown women would have masses to honor the men who had lost their lives.³³⁰ To many women, their husbands could be among the dead, and prayed for their souls until they heard from them. Unfortunately, many women were left praying, realizing their husbands had died somewhere in the United States and their remains were buried away from their homeland and nowhere near where the family could visit. But many men were buried in unmarked graves and unregistered, such as in Fresno California where the headstone simply reads, DEPORTEES.³³¹ The inconsistent treatment of sick, dying, or dead Braceros left their families wondering about the location of their loved ones if they did in fact die in the fields.

On a morning in 1948, a plane chartered by United States Immigration Services carrying thirty-two people, including twenty-eight farm workers, left Oakland bound to the Mexican border. "It went down in a fireball over Los Gatos Canyon, near the oil fields of Coalinga."³³² Many of the passengers were Braceros who had finished their contracts. Everyone on the plane died. It was one of the worst aviation disasters of the era and was widely reported. But the farmworkers were buried without names in a mass grave in Fresno, California. Braceros became

³²⁸ Lidia Cano Cano, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 42:25.

³²⁹ 82nd Congress- S.984; Pun. L. 82-78 “1951 Public Law 78-Extension of Bracero Program” July 12, 1951. <http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/65%20stat%20119.pdf> (Accessed January 24, 2017).

³³⁰ *Harvest of Loneliness*, 41-42:23

³³¹ Diana Marcum, “‘Deportees’ Who Died In 1948 Plane Crash Finally Have Names” *Los Angeles Times* September 02, 2013. [Http://Articles.Latimes.Com/2013/Sep/02/Local/La-Me-Deportees-20130903](http://Articles.Latimes.Com/2013/Sep/02/Local/La-Me-Deportees-20130903). (Accessed April 19, 2015).

³³² Ibid.

forgotten, leaving their families unaware of their whereabouts or fate. The men were laid to rest in Holy Cross Cemetery in Fresno California with a headstone that said, DEPORTEES. In 2009, writer Tim Z. Hernandez began searching for their names and stories to inform the families but also to place names on their mass graves.³³³ As Hernandez began identifying the men, he called families to inform them of their loved ones resting place.³³⁴ Many were surprised and in shock. Hernandez had brought closure to the families of these men.

Consequently, on September 2, 2013, various people from across the United States and México honored the 28 Braceros by reading their names aloud and unveiling a new \$14,000 headstone raised by donations commemorating them. By naming each Bracero aloud and marking their grave with their names, these 28 Braceros could no longer be identified simply as “deportees,” but by their respected names. The honor the 28 men were given was not by either government but by people who saw the value in their sacrifice. More importantly, for many of the families of these Braceros, it was the first time they were told about their loved one’s death and whereabouts. Many Braceros saw themselves as a fraternity. Consequently, Braceros and their families gathered in support of not only those 28 men but for every man that migrated as a Bracero who did not return to his family.

The lack of consideration of the Mexican family was even more evident on the September 13, 1963, car accident in Salinas Valley, California. Braceros were working at the Earl Meyers Company working camp when a bus collided with a train at an unmarked railroad crossing. Before the engineer could bring the train to a stop, “fifty-six men lay scattered around

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

the tracks, some thrown three hundred feet beyond the point of impact."³³⁵ Only 12 of the dead were identified. The rest had to be identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). On September 22, the FBI identified all the dead, totaling the death toll to thirty-two, marking it as the deadliest Bracero accident to that date. Identifying the dead was important as the accident gained national attention forcing growers to honor each dead man with a name.

Salinas' growers and representatives took it upon themselves to handle all funeral arrangements for Bracero victims. "Funeral arrangements became a fiasco as the City of Salinas, and the Mexican Consulate clashed on possession of the bodies and their memorial. Salinas' representatives claimed the men as part of the community in a way they had never done before. Nameless before their deaths."³³⁶ These men were mourned by 9,000 people in the Palma High School gymnasium on September 25.³³⁷ The men were buried in the Salinas cemetery without the presence of their families or their permission. It is unknown if the families were informed of their death or claimed their loved one's body.

The elaborate memorial and burial illustrate how the local government created the public perception that they cared for the men. However, Antonio Gómez Zamora, one of the thirty-two men that lost his life in the accident, was unlike the other men. He was illegal, not working with a Bracero visa. The City of Salinas buried him alone away from the other 31 men and he was not honored at the memorial. His family was unaware and unable to reclaim his body. Zamora's death was a clear example that the City of Salinas sought to manipulate public opinion about the

³³⁵ Lori Flores, "A Town Full of Dead Mexicans: Salinas Valley Bracero Tragedy of 1963, the End of the Bracero Program, and the Evaluation evolution? Of California's Chicano Movement" *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No.2 (Summer 2013), pp. 124-143, 124.

³³⁶ Ibid., 124-125.

³³⁷ Ibid., 136-137.

program instead of honoring these workers or their families' wishes.³³⁸ Unfortunately, it was always believed that the program, government, or some agency would notify the family.

Men are buried throughout the United States without their families' knowledge in both marked and unmarked graves. But what is more disturbing is that "The United States Government classified farm workers as 'types of loads' along with metal, wood, and hay."³³⁹ Consequently, the California Department of Industrial Relations reported 2,754 injured and 125 farm workers" dead from 1952 to 1962. These numbers were distorted by Bracero's classification as loads.³⁴⁰

Each grower, city council, and immigration agency handled the death of a Bracero differently. Consequently, family notifications were unpredictable, and rarely was the body returned. Growers found it cheaper and more convenient to simply bury the body, rather than contact the Mexican Consulate and undergo an investigation. The lack of communication by the appropriate agency left families wondering if they had been abandoned, forgotten by their patriarch. Women perceived themselves as alone and betrayed by their loved ones. Rosa a woman from La Noria did not hear from her husband for years, she assumed he had died. He had abandoned Rosa and her daughters until he was too ill and needed her for care.³⁴¹ Bracero families were left with anger towards the men who they believe betrayed and abandoned them, instead of mourning their death and laying them to rest.

The treatment of the dead epitomizes both México's and the United States' abandonment of the protections and obligations they had promised through the bilateral agreement of the

³³⁸ Ibid., 137.

³³⁹ Ibid., 133.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 133.

³⁴¹ Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (June 27, 2014).

Bracero Program to the men and their families. In a telegraph dated October 26, 1943, Mise Molina explained that “when a worker dies in the United States the Mexican Consul is notified immediately for his instructions concerning disposal of the bodies. In nearly all cases he instructs that the bodies be buried in the United States.”³⁴² The term disposal is a clear indication that Braceros are viewed as objects and not people. Many Braceros are buried in makeshift cemeteries and in pauper’s graves. In El Paso, near the Police Training Academy, are old barracks that contain a cemetery filled with Braceros. “The United States currently does not have records or a database to locate migrants remains or graves.”³⁴³ Men believed that news of their death would reach their family. They prayed that their bodies would be returned. Consequently, many of their families believed they were abandoned because that was an easier reality to accept than death.

The United States does not have a database for missing or unidentified deceased migrants, while México has a limited system that relies on the United States to aid in case the family inquiries.³⁴⁴ Because of lack of cooperation and communication between both governments, local agencies, police, coroner, and non-profit databases, families are confronted with various difficulties in finding or recovering a loved one. Ranchers reported deaths to the Department of Labor to get a replacement worker. The Mexican Consulate was rarely notified. Consequently, many Braceros are buried in public graves or crypts mostly without an identity. The programs failed to have a protocol in place to inform and return to the family about the death. This was caused by both governments’ failures when drafting the program for economic

³⁴² National Archives and Records Administration (NACP), Record Group 211, Entry 196, Box 1-2, Records of the War Manpower Commission at College Park, Maryland.

³⁴³ Maria Jimenez, “Humanitarian Crisis: Migrant Deaths at the U.S. – México Border” <https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/immigrants/humanitariancrisisreport.pdf>, 48. (Accessed April 29, 2015), 48.

³⁴⁴ Jimenez, “Humanitarian Crisis: Migrant Deaths at the U.S. – México Border,” 48.

gains and the rights of the living, pay, housing, and transportation. Braceros assumed that growers would return them to their family causing an assumption that left many families questioning their loved one's whereabouts.

Women did not just accept their loved one's disappearance. Many women sought aid in locating them from the president, as the country's father. Emotions directly motivated the reaction of people. Their feeling of desperation led many to seek help from the country's patriarch. Many women advised the President of México about their desperation and needed to labor outside the home if their husbands were not located. Women and men felt they would get immediate results and aid from their country. Women hoped that the federal government would help them communicate with and locate loved ones. On October 19, 1945, Catalina H., widow of Carmona wrote a four-page handwritten letter to President Manuel Ávila Camacho stating:

Mister, once again I beg you in respect of my son Gorge Camona. With one order from you, he will be brought back I want him to see me.... Only God knows what he is suffering. Since he left, I have not heard from him. Maybe he is sick; I am sick I continue to beg.³⁴⁵

Catalina's son was the patriarch and provider for her and her daughter. Her ailing health was used to pressure the government to locate him because his sister was left with no one to care for her and his disappearance affected their ability to support themselves. It is unknown if Catalina's letter was ever answered by the Mexican government or what the outcome of her son was. Unfortunately, her letter is only one of many that every President of México since 1942 has received regarding their lost Braceros.

³⁴⁵ A.G.N., Manuel Ávila Camacho / Series 106377/ Box 0793 (546.6/120-1). Sr. Buelvo a rogar á Usd. Respecto á mi hijo Gorge Carmona. Lo traigan para [Mesico] dando Ud la orden. Desde que se fue no é vuelto á saber de el quien sabe este enfermo yo estoy enferma y quisiera (que) me viniera á verme...solo Dios (sabe) lo que sufre el pobresito. Esto está mal escrito...así lo vas a dejar o qué?

Braceros and their families were aware of the harsh conditions men would find working in the United States. The radio and newspapers informed the Mexican family of the mistreatment and accidents that occurred in the United States. Daily comentarios and exposes informed the public of the violations of the Bracero contract which México did not address. Carlos Marentes, Director Centro de Trabajadores Agricola Fronterizos stated

There were a lot of Braceros who got sick or injured while in the United States; nobody took care of them. Many returned to México incapacitated. They were unable to have a productive life, and they did not receive any compensation. Some Braceros died in the United States. Even though their contract did stipulate the loss of life. The life of a Bracero was worth \$1,000, and the family was entitled to the money and compensation. But the widows and families of Braceros never received any compensation. Many of them would fall and never get up.³⁴⁶

The stories of mistreatment made the program nerve-wracking for those awaiting their loved one's return. Families did not prepare for the injuries, disappearances, or deaths of their Braceros. Men and women, for the most part, did not talk about the possibility of death. Many men believed their wives and families would be notified by government officials.

Men left their families because prosperity obtained by laboring in the United States would bring them with plans of return. In the United States, death was a constant possibility. Men left with hope to return with dollars while women were left praying in anguish that their sacrifice was worth the pain. No one foresaw abandonment or death.

A HISTORY OF DECEPTION

The negative publicity and accounts of camps, altercations, and most importantly death whether it was realized or not was an attempt to help destroy the Bracero Program, according to farmers.³⁴⁷ A program that farm unions had opposed and the negative publicity only gave them

³⁴⁶ *Harvest of Loneliness*, 39:00-39:50.

³⁴⁷ N.A.R.A., Box 4, Record Group 174: General Records of the Department of Labor, 1907-2001. Series: Records Relating to the Mexican Labor ("Bracero") Program, 1950-1964. File Unit R.T. Englund Co. (El Centro) Elizabeth A. Longeborn charges.

power. Farmers claimed that destroying the Bracero Program would destroy the prosperity in their state's economy. For example, California's farmers produced three billion dollars' worth of goods each year because of California's \$10-billion economy. To maintain the American economy, imported labor was necessary and should be available regardless of minor incidents, "false" complaints, and accidents.³⁴⁸ The Bracero Program brought financial benefit to both the United States and México. Its continuation was the main objective for farmers and Mexican officials because of its economic benefit for each respected group. Consequently, Bracero rights were forsaken for the continuation of the program.

The binational agreement included workplace rights in theory but not in practice. As so many others have documented, the history of the Bracero Program is a history of deception: prevailing wages that went underpaid, guaranteed benefits that went unaccounted for, promised working conditions that went unfulfilled.³⁴⁹ The program was advertised as war aid, Braceros were agriculture soldiers feeding the worlds' armies, but they were casualties of greed and deception. Braceros were mistreated objects that dealt with daily injustices by the hands of the American farmer, according to Juan Noriega Méndez.³⁵⁰ México and its representatives had the responsibility to represent its citizens yet failed to do so. Instead they blamed their fellow countrymen, repatriated them, and abandoned countless in death throughout the United States. Men sacrificed their bodies and lives to earn dollars.

³⁴⁸Ibid.

³⁴⁹ 51 UCLA L. Rev. 1. www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic. (Accessed: June 20, 2017).

³⁵⁰ A.G.N., Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez / Series 106380/ Box 0986 (548.1/375).

Chapter 4: La Pena Negra: The Female Experience

*Anoche escuché a mi madre llorar,
llorar sin consuelo
cobijada con la noche,
del silencio y recuerdo
Mi padre se fue para el norte,
contratado de Bracero,
Jamás supimos de él,
jamás supimos ya más de él,
Dicen que allá murió de hambre
esperando regresar
sin dinero para el viaje
Sin fuerzas en su cuerpo le dijo a
su compañero
ya no puedo ni pararme,
Si muero llévale a mi hija
mi bendición y el mensaje...
tenía la gran esperanza de
regresar a la casa
y de cultivar la tierra.³⁵¹*



Illustration 5.1: Briseño Family portrait



Illustration 5.2: Three women outside their home
in La Noria

³⁵¹ Rosa Marta Zarate and Francisco Herrera, *Mi Padre Murió en el Norte* Genres: Regional México, Music, Latino Release: September 11, 2009, Round Whirled Records.

Both photographs are in author's possession. Briseño Family Collection and Yañez Family Collection.

Natividad Yañez wakes up at 5:00 a.m. and she quietly moves through the two-room home. She walks outside to the kitchen, a three-wall structure located a few feet from the main home, to begin a fire. As the fire begins she hurries to pick up the *masa* from a local vendor for the home-made tortillas she is about to make her family. As she walks past the plaza, she is greeted by *buenos días* from the many women of La Noria who begin their morning at the same time and with the same routine as Natividad. As she returns home, she puts the beans and water for coffee to boil.³⁵² She gets a small pot of water and begins to *tortiar*.³⁵³ As the tortillas inflate she moves them to a covered basket. Her young daughters run to the bathroom, an outhouse in the back of the property.

Natividad yells, “Get me some eggs.” Maria and Ramona begin to search the various chickens until they find eggs for breakfast. As Ruben Luna, Natividad’s husband awakens, he is aware that today is not like any other. He will not go work on his father's farm but make his way to México City for the first stage of the Bracero Program- possibly not seeing his family for six to twelve months if he is lucky enough to be contracted. But for Natividad, the change is not real yet as the morning is like every other, as Ruben is getting ready and the girls began their daily chores. As Natividad cooked breakfast, her daughters and Ruben enter the first room of the home and sat around a wood table. This family meal is different, Ruben and Natividad speak about savings, financial goals, debt, and who she will seek help from, his father in case of anything.

The church bells began to ring in a double roll announcing 8:00 a.m. prayer would begin in forty-five minutes. Natividad hurried to finish packing Ruben’s bag in which she placed burritos wrapped in a small cloth or *mantel* for his travel. The men were to meet at 7:45 a.m. in the plaza for their departure to Poncitlán to catch the train to México City. As Natividad, Ruben,

³⁵² Buenos días translates to good morning.

³⁵³ Tortiar translate to making making handmade tortillas.

and their two daughters began to walk to the plaza, they were met by various women in tears giving their blessing to their husband's and sons. Natividad gave Ruben her blessing, he climbed aboard the bus, and he and every man capable to work left the town, only leaving children, women, and the elderly in La Noria. Victoria Maria de Jesus Carillo, the wife of a Bracero, explained "many women [didn't] want them to leave. When they left, we were left to plead with God. If they don't come back where will they be? Who will see them? How are we to know what happens to them? Daily you would see us gathering at church asking God for their safe return."³⁵⁴ As the men began their long journey, the woman and their children began to enter the church where they prayed a rosary for their husband's, father's, and brother's and son's safe travel, success, and return. Women cried for their loneliness, uncertainty, and husband's return. Women were left pregnant, had children to care for, without their husband, and without money.³⁵⁵ As soon as the men left town, the lives of the women changed drastically.

During the moment of departure both men and women explained that they felt a weight was on their heart, causing many to live the worse days of their lives.³⁵⁶ Women in La Noria utilized the notion of "La Pena Negra", or the Black Pain, to describe their husband's sorrow and hardship in the United States and theirs in México. La Pena Negra is a reference to the sadness, loneliness, pain, fear, abandonment and uncertainty caused by the absence of their sons, fathers and husbands. Women acknowledged that both men and women underwent difficulties. Women understood the difficulty facing Braceros in a different country without a support network and under the pressure of earning and saving enough for a year's worth of expenses in México and the United States. Women resented abandonment but refused the temptation to forsake family

³⁵⁴ Dir. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness* Prod. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez. Films Media Group, 2010. 58 mins, 08:50-9:11

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 31:49

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 34:12 and 25:57

obligations in México. The incentives for Mexican men and women agreeing to the contract was worth enough to make enduring separation worth their while. The absence of the family patriarch caused Bracero wives and mothers to live what they described as “La Pena Negra,” the black pain.

Within Mexican society, the notion of “La Pena Negra” is more than an expression of individual emotion: it reflects a wide range of sentiments and meanings associated with interpersonal, social, cultural, and gendered relationships between men and women. Through interviews I conducted in La Noria, I bared witness to the role of emotion, memory, and the various reflections of women who experienced the absences of their husbands during the Bracero Program. Understanding the deep and complex meanings of “La Pena Negra” requires scholars to utilize theories and frameworks not typically integrated into historical research. The History of Emotions, for instance, is an interdisciplinary methodology that is found in expression, body language, art, writings, and tone.³⁵⁷ Emotions change not only with time, but with explanations and knowledge of intentions, therefore, emotions are based on what people know. Jan Plamper explains that the father of the History of Emotions, Lucien Febvre, finds the legitimacy of emotions to be already included in government papers, paintings, speeches, and writings. Theorist Gustave Le Bon viewed history as a “linear historical narrative” in which individuals utilized intellectual language instead of emotions to explain their ideas.³⁵⁸ Febvre points out that people unconsciously imposed their ideas and emotions in their work through word choice and

³⁵⁷ Jan Plamper, *History of Emotions: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Nico H. Frijia, *The Laws of Emotion*. (New York: Routledge, 2007); George W. Stocking, *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological* (1989); Nico H. Frijia, *Emotions and Actions*, in edited Antony S.R. Manstead, Nico Frijia, and Agneta Fischer, *Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Brunn, *Not on Speaking Terms: Clinical Strategies to Resolve Family and Friendship Cutoffs* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014); Keith Oatley, *Emotions: A Brief History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁵⁸ Jan Plamper, *History of Emotions: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 41-42.

tone.³⁵⁹ Sociologist Norbert Elias, like Fabvere, assumed feelings are subject to historical transformation. Nico H. Frijda furthers Fabvere and Elias thoughts by pointing out that emotions exist and humanity uses them to make decisions during each aspect of life.³⁶⁰ Current historians Gabrielle Spiegel and Lynn Hunt focus on linguistics and the body as a place where emotions are inscribed through behavioral routines.³⁶¹ As Plamper points out “emotions can be difficult to distinguish from one another and can manifest and can occur simultaneously, even opposing feelings can happen at the same time in an individual.”³⁶² Consequently, the recollection of a single event can cause tears, anger, and laughter in an individual. Memories of the time shaped the emotions women that I interviewed. The emotions they reveal are of their recollection of their entire experience.

In this chapter, emotions are central to the behavior and experience of women. Emotions are connected and can change due to an event or object, in this case, migration and communication. Consequently, this chapter historicizes feelings of joy, sadness, and fear expressed by the wives, daughters and mothers of Braceros. It is human nature to have emotions as they dictate our perspective and feelings of an event or person. ³⁶³ Through this chapter, I urge the reader to consider that emotions are impacted by personal experiences developing since birth and transforming through relationships and culture.³⁶⁴ By looking at the different experiences women endured, as they depended on their family or themselves to survive, this chapter provides a small glimpse of the lives women lived to the Bracero Program.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 40.

³⁶⁰ Nico H. Frijda *Emotions and Actions*, in edited Antony S.R. Manstead, Nico Frijda, and Agneta Fischer, *Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 158.

³⁶¹ Plamper, 297.

³⁶² Ibid., 41.

³⁶³ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xi.

³⁶⁴ Keith Oatley, *Emotions: A Brief History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), x.

Natividad Luna Yáñez and Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez provide two distinct experiences created not only by the program but by the specific relationships they had with their husband. Their husbands' conscious decision to be an active participant in their marriage during the period of separation created the distinct circumstances, Natividad and Rosa faced. Each woman was left with uncertainty, fearing the abandonment and death of their husbands in the United States. The uncertainty of their husband's lives and safety, but most importantly the aid they found with their husband and family made their *Pena Negra*, distinct but a daily reality for both women.

Natividad returned home after mass with red eyes from crying. Her daughters were too young (5 and 7-years-old) to fully understand what had happened, so they continued their chores, making the bed, sweeping, and mopping, and washing the dishes, among other things. As the night set, they began to heat up water for their baths. One by one Natividad bathed her daughters and herself in the outhouse. As they prepared to go to the plaza at 5:00 p.m. a nightly social ritual for the residents of La Noria. In La Plaza, young children played with each other, young girls visited with one another, at times exchanged a glance or a note with their boyfriend, and for women to talk and unwind. The night was filled with sadness as women worried and spoke about where their husbands may be and their plans for the week.

This night would be the first night without Ruben, so at 8:00 pm Natividad did not head home instead she went to her father-in-law's home to sleep under his protection.³⁶⁵ Even in his absence, Ruben set rules to maintain a *casa de honor* in which the families honor and women's virtue was held and protected.³⁶⁶ Ruben had arranged for Natividad to sleep at his father's home

³⁶⁵ Natividad Luna Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009).

³⁶⁶ Casa de honor translates to a house of honor.

so that she would not be alone at night, an agreement which Natividad was informed of, and practiced while Ruben was away. Ruben's father like many other older men that could not participate in the Bracero Program felt responsible for his female relatives, "especially during long-term family separation caused by the program."³⁶⁷ By doing this daily Natividad insured the legitimization of her family as her children's paternity would never be questioned and her actions would not shame Ruben or herself.³⁶⁸ The religious belief that sexual intercourse should only take place between a married man and a woman caused patriarchal society to ensure the sanctity of marriage, therefore, placing honor in virginity and fidelity. Mexican women were held to honor codes set by patriarchal values, making their virginity directly linked to the family honor. The conquest of women by men is directly linked to manhood, therefore the sexual intercourse of a woman through infidelity was the symbolic destruction of the family.³⁶⁹ This is interesting as Natividad's in-laws lived in the same plot of land just feet away from one another. Any man would have difficulty sneaking in, the lovers could be heard, and Natividad had two daughters who could have witnessed a strange man, making infidelity on Natividad's part difficult. Her presence in her in-law's home at night eliminated "all" possibilities as if lovers would only meet at night. Women were to maintain their virtues and honorable reputation, giving no one a reason to assume or speak against her. Therefore, regardless of the difficulty, Natividad with her two daughters slept in a twin-size bed nightly beside her in-laws. The protection of women's honor and virtue demonstrated a man's power deriving from women's actions.

³⁶⁷ Ana Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-México Border* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 181.

³⁶⁸ Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004), 27.

³⁶⁹ Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial México*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 7 and 12.

A husband's participation in the Bracero program altered nearly every aspect of the daily routine of the wife. They now in his absence had to be responsible for the home and provide for the children, while protecting their own honor through a series of significant alterations to their daily routines, such as living with their in-laws. Women with an extended family created a division of labor and aid to ensure the family's survival and safety. Natividad explained,

We all worked as a family. One person would take care of the kids; the rest would cook, clean, and work the farm. We switched houses every day, so we could help one another. One day a week we would go to the river and wash clothing, while the kids swam. That was the only way to do it, together or we weren't going to survive.³⁷⁰

Through a family network, chores and work were manageable and delegated to ensure the well-being of the entire family. By dividing chores among one another, they insured daily contact and supervision minimizing the chances of rumors. The family network aided in the separation, emotional, and financial difficulties as women became heads of households.

On a Monday morning, Natividad with her sisters, neighbors, and cousins would load their laundry on the horses and mules and with their children in hand they would go to the river to wash clothing. The women kneeled around the bank of the river in front of a large smooth rock while the children searched for a smooth stone for their mother to use to scrub out stains. With piles of clothing on their left and a bar of laundry soap woman began to wash. "Washing was an all-day thing, and when you came back, you had a new pile of dirty clothing. Work never ended," according to Natividad.³⁷¹ But this was the favorite day for the children as they got to swim for hours. Kids were to bathe themselves before getting out; this eliminated the need to heat water under fire for baths at home. As the kids had finished bathing and woman loaded up the horses and mules with baskets of clean wet clothing, they headed back to their homes, not to

³⁷⁰ Natividad Luna Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009).

³⁷¹ Ibid.

rest but to hang the wet clothing to dry in the afternoon sun. The next day was set aside for ironing. Rosalba and Ramona began sweeping the inside of the house, the other dusted, fixed the beds. The girls would even sweep the dirt outside a chore Natividad did daily. By Rosalba and Ramona cleaned the house Natividad began to iron. As the perfect creases were made on shirts and wrinkles were removed from skirts woman thought about all they needed to do.

Natividad still had to milk the two cows they owned before women stopped by to buy some. Natividad with her *compadre* would milk the cows. The milk was boiled and ready for dinner and customers. Ruben had a steady stream of customers that bought one to three liters of milk daily. Natividad was informed of how much each person paid and when they paid. Natividad had to make a ledger of how much each woman owed because the longer men were gone, the less money woman had to pay.

As dinner approached, Natividad, with her sister in laws, and cousins began to cook beans and *tortiar*. The women pulled their resources together to feed each other. Woman with their children would cut cactus, fruits, and vegetables growing in the countryside. This permitted them to have cheap meals and some variety in their diets Left over tortillas became *calientitas*, hard tortillas, which were always eaten with milk or cream.³⁷² The children always ate. First, women would have left overs, sometimes put more water in a pot to make more *caldo* (stew).³⁷³ “Cleaning was easy. Making food out of nothing was difficult.”³⁷⁴

Although the daily routines were hard without their husbands and fathers, women looked forward to the return of the men. In one of Ruben’s trip back to La Noria Natividad remembers him being so dirty from the trip to the point of not recognizing him. She explained that he was

³⁷² Calientes translates to hard tortillas.

³⁷³ Caldo translates to stew.

³⁷⁴ Maria Rosalba Ávila private conversation.

extremely dirty, and his shoes were falling apart. Natividad recognized him because of his blue eyes. In her interview, she began to smile as she remembered him bringing back two dolls for their daughters. “He remembered our girls.”³⁷⁵ His daughter, Rosalba, remembers dragging her doll everywhere, “It was a real doll not made out of cloth; it opened and closed its eyes.”³⁷⁶ Ruben also brought back a radio that was played so much it eventually caught on fire, a fact that almost everyone interviewed male or female mentioned. Natividad would take the radio to the plaza in the afternoons. She laughed and smiled as she remembered the radio playing at the plaza, while people danced around it. The gifts were a clear indication of his love and affection. Ana Rosas explains that “wives felt that men who made and kept promises about sending home remittances” and returned with goods thought of his family and aided in their uplift.³⁷⁷ The dolls were a symbol of his remembering his family in the United States, and the radio was a modern item that would entertain his wife while he was away. These gifts brought her joy and reassured Natividad that Ruben thought of his family.

Gifts from the United States were a clear sign that Braceros maintained their patriarchal connection with their family and a clear indication of his commitment to them. His absence was justified as he provided his family not only with material things, but money that allowed them to buy land and livestock. Natividad knew that his laboring as a Bracero was for her and their two daughters. As difficult as his absence was, she knew she was not left *desamparada*.³⁷⁸

Ramona, unlike Natividad, did not give her husband her blessing or a hug good bye when he first left their hometown for work in the United States. She dealt with her emotions differently

³⁷⁵ Natividad Luna Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009).

³⁷⁶ Maria Rosalba Ávila, private conversation.

³⁷⁷ Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu*, 104.

³⁷⁸ Desamparada translates to helpless.

and instead preferred to remain stoic in light of his impending departure. She did not cry for his absence as her husband departed without a word. She remembered him packing a bag and just walking out the door. She assumed he left as a Bracero, as he left alongside of other men who headed to the processing centers. But his lack of communication, remittances, and money in his rare returns home made her believe he was somewhere in México drinking. Rosa, who found herself alone abandoned by her alcoholic husband, had only her two daughters to depend on. Her situation differed from that of Natividad, and she had to confront a much different range of emotions and feelings.

Rosa's husband left her with premature twin baby boy and girl and two daughters, Esmeralda and Imelda, without a plan or instructions. As I spoke to Rosa about her experiences while her husband labored as a Bracero, she cried. She could not verbalize her memories without crying, weeping, and sobbing at times. She did not cry over his experience or his absence but the harsh reality of her situation. But as she remembered pain and suffering in an attempt to survive, her story is of strength and the evolution of the Mexican women.

For Rosa, her days were filled with work, which her daughters helped her with in every aspect. In the early morning, she would take the three cows they owned to graze. Laughing she explained, “I would chase the cows around as I rode a donkey. No one said anything to me about riding a donkey.”³⁷⁹ Once she arrived at the small corral in the mountains where her husband housed the cows during the day. She would milk the cows by herself twice a day. As Rosa rode the donkey back to her home, her daughters had begun cleaning the house. As the beds were made, breakfast was underway. Her oldest was making tortillas; they would have the usual red chili with a tortilla. As Rosa tied her twins in her *rebozo*, she continued to clean her home. She

³⁷⁹ Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (June 27, 2014).

was left to take care of her twins and the home by herself. Her daughters could only help her in the early mornings as they worked outside the home.³⁸⁰

Rosa consented to send her daughters to work. She encouraged her daughters to labor in the fields of México while she gathered food from the *cerro* to maintain the household. For the women of La Noria there was limited options for work such as domestic work, field laborer, or selling fruits or sowed items in the market of Poncitlán.³⁸¹ The highest wages were in the fields, consequently both of Rosas' daughters worked throwing manure for fertilization at a local farm. Rosas' eldest would also work picking in the fields alongside men and women. She would be paid a minimal wage. The money she earned as an *obrero* was welcomed in every store.³⁸² Her youngest daughters worked in a textile company. She explained that her daughters worked hard in the fields picking fruit and, in the factory, to be able to bring their earnings home to support one another. She was very proud of her daughters, that they knew hard work and were not afraid of it. Rosas' daughter's honor was not questioned by the people of La Noria because the girls returned home daily, and their labor was deemed necessary.³⁸³

Rosa's experience due to her husband was not an isolated event but can be found throughout México. Women with children did not to wait nor consult with their husband before deciding to migrate or work outside their home. Rosa did not have a man protecting her or her daughters nor did she care what people said or thought. Her concern was feeding her daughters and surviving. Rosa made it clear that peoples' ideas of her were not going to feed her or maintain her family, only hard work. Rosa's husband's absence is understood and known in La

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Cerro translates to hills.

³⁸² Obrero translates to female agriculture worker.

³⁸³ Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (June 27, 2014).

Noria, which permitted her daughters and her to work outside the home without repercussion. However, most importantly, to Rosa neither virtue nor gossip was important but her ability to financially survive and maneuver in the absence of her husband.³⁸⁴

In La Noria, gossip spread quickly and could hurt the individual and therefore the family's integrity. However, in the case of Rosa, the women of La Noria only spoke about her husband's decision to forsake his family. The people of La Noria did not frown upon Rosas' daughters working outside of the home, particularly in the fields. The community understood her situation and witnessed his abuse and lack of support. The acknowledgment of Rosa's husband's failure permitted her daughters and Rosa to maintain their virtue without critique. Rosa is unique because she disregarded customs and did not attempt to dodge them by making excuses for her husband or hiding his shortcomings as a provider. She also was not concerned about being seen in the town unaccompanied by her daughters or seeking domestic labor.³⁸⁵ As she cried she mentioned doubting his Bracero status but that other men reassured her he was laboring in the United States.

Rosa recalled her husband returning about every six months. His homecomings were without notice and for three months, "He would spend his days back drinking while the rest of us worked." Rosa's husband was aware that his daughters worked outside the home and his wife went out alone to pick fruits and vegetables. Rosa did not talk about her husband's reaction to her and their daughter's labor outside the home. Sobbing, Rosa mentioned her husband would use their money to return to the United States, leaving without notice and money every time.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

Rosa was left pregnant every time he disappeared; she had 16 children (multiple sets of twins and triplets). She mentioned her oldest son (one of the twins mentioned above) died of pneumonia as their wood roof began to leak during a storm. She explained how she tried to repair it and warm her son. But she could not afford a doctor or medicine.³⁸⁷ This prompted me to ask about money or gifts her husband would bring back; she began to tear up and said, "He brought us nothing."³⁸⁸ Rosa mentioned how children in the neighborhood would show her daughters the clothing and dolls their dad brought them back, yet her daughters Esmeralda and Imelda never received anything. Esmeralda and Imelda had to wear old clothing with patches and shoes that were falling apart. The money the girls earned had to be used for food.³⁸⁹

While other women talked about letters and gifts they received, her husband returned with no money. As other men brought money and sent remittances for women to pay off debt and purchase livestock, Rosa received nothing. Consequently, Rosa questioned if her husband ever left as a Bracero. She believed that he never went to the United States and that he was instead hiding in the local mountains around the village and just had someone delivering him beer. His drinking was more important than his family, she explained. Many in La Noria believed that Rosa's husband labored as a Bracero. However, they agreed that he spent his money drinking instead of sending it to his family. Many Braceros acknowledge that men drank and gambled their money instead of sending it to their family. They also mentioned how salesmen would set up outside the camps on pay day to sell Braceros items. Men did acknowledge that they would carelessly spend their money on themselves.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

Rosa's husband eventually stopped returning home. She never received any money, letter or word from him even after the program ended in 1964. She never divorced or remarried even though she could have claimed abandonment. She just assumed her husband left her and she would never see him again. In the early 2000s, her husband finally returned, but he had suffered a stroke while he was gone. Despite his mistreatment of her, he demanded she serve as his caregiver. Sobbing, she remembered his sitting in his wheelchair and hitting her with his cane as she walked by.³⁹¹ At times he would take off the metal leg piece of his wheel chair and throw it at her. She mentioned how she would tell him that she would not put it back on but then he would start complaining about leg pain and she reattached it to his chair.³⁹²

Abuse like this is common in many cultures, especially those that are extremely patriarchal. According to Steve J. Stern, women "are the long-suffering victims of patriarchal dominance by husbands and fathers."³⁹³ Her identity was to serve him and obey his authority. As Sylvia Arrom notes in her work on women in México City, the patriarchal society held that "the perfect wife knew her place...she recognized his superiority; thus, she never asked where he was going or where he went; neither did she attempt to discover his secrets or keep track of his money."³⁹⁴ As his wife, she saw it her duty to be his caregiver until he passed away. Rosa saw her obligation to her family as absolute, regardless of the circumstance.³⁹⁵

Natividad and Rosa have distinct emotions as they recall the program and their husbands. The emotions and facial expressions of Natividad and Rosa were evidence that their personal history with their husband had shaped the way they perceived the program. Natividad viewed the

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Stern, 6.

³⁹⁴ Sylvia M. Arrom, *The Women of México City, 1790-1857* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 2.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 2.

separation as necessary for the prosperity of the family. The radio and dolls were symbols of Ruben's expectation to return home to his love for his daughters and her. The time apart with minimal communication was excused as Ruben honored his role as the patriarch by providing for his family, giving Natividad a sense of security as he labored in the United States. Both women experienced love, sadness, and anger as core themes of anyone's life as they resonated throughout human life.³⁹⁶

Rosa, on the other hand, viewed the program as an opportunity for her husband to go to the United States under pretense without questions from the community or family. Her husband's absence created challenges for them, as they were left to provide for themselves in a society where women's role was defined as in the home.³⁹⁷ His absence did not just leave Rosa and her daughters financially in need but vulnerable to sexual advances and attacks. Rosa's tears were not of sadness but anger towards her husband's selfish decision.

Her husband was not the only one to blame for Rosa's feelings, but cultural customs and patriarchal society dictated that men were free of consequences and females were to display unquestionable forgiveness and loyalty.³⁹⁸ Patriarchal ideology permitted men to do as they pleased as the head of household, and unfortunately, the community did not get involved in questioning men and their actions.

³⁹⁶ Oatley, xi.

³⁹⁷ Deborah Levenson Estrada, *The Loneliness of Working-Class Feminism: Women in the "Male World" of Labor Unions, Guatemala City, the 1970s* edited by John D. French and Daniel James ed. *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 210.

³⁹⁸ Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern México*. (Duke: Duke University Press, 2006), 98; Heidi Tinsman, *Household Patroness: Wife Beating and Sexual Control in Rural Chile, 1964-1988*, in edited by John D. French and Daniel James. *The Gender Worlds of Latin America Women Workers: From Households and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 266.

The absence of a man had a detrimental effect on the quality of the family, yet local community networks enabled woman to sustain their children. Rosa, found support in the woman of La Noria, through friendship and at times food. Her husband's shortcomings and her daughters labor outside the home did not create alienation, as woman understood her decisions were purely an attempt to survive. The women of La Noria instead aided Rosa by providing fruit or vegetables they picked. Also, woman came together to cook and make meals with the rations each had, a clear indication woman worked as a group and not individuals to ensure their survival. Networks permitted woman to share their feelings of loneliness and despair. They were a form of unity in which each person understood the feelings and fears the other had.

FEMALE VULNERABILITY

The inability of women to have a family or community network of aid created harsher conditions making them vulnerable to gossip and sexual assault. As Modesta González Cortez kissed her husband good- bye, he reassured her that he would send remittances and write often. Modesta was left with young children to care for. Her children were too young to labor outside the home, making her their provider in his absence. Her husband left them with a small amount of savings, but they did not own land or cattle, just a two-room home and a mule they used for transportation.³⁹⁹

Modesta married beneath her social standing, according to her parents, causing her father to disown her. Traditionally, once a woman married, she became the property of her husband, and she was no longer to depend on her immediate family. She did not have a family network and in-laws from which to seek aid or protection, as Natividad did. Her husband's family was

³⁹⁹ Modesta González Cortez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 30, 2009).

poor and unable to help financially. They also did not have the space to house her and her eight children at night.⁴⁰⁰

Modesta, like Rosa, found herself without family aid, forced labor as a domestic and away from the confines of her own home. She worked as a domestic in other peoples' homes. Her duties would involve laundry, ironing, and cleaning. Her job as a domestic worker did not last as women became unable to pay the twenty pesos a week wage as their husbands also labored as Braceros. Because of the ubiquitous lack of employment and financial resources, she had to go to the mountains and pick fruit and vegetables that grew wild in the fields. Modesta found it difficult to feed her children, resorting to asking neighbors and relatives for food. Natividad would provide *calientitas* so the children could eat. Modesta's mother secretly gifted her a cow. The milk with the *calientitas* enabled her to feed her children. At times, she would trade milk for eggs. With tears, she explained that feeding her children was her only priority.⁴⁰¹

Modesta's daily routine involved heading to the field with her youngest son and cow to look for fruit. The community knew she would leave her other seven children home doing chores, with her twelve-year-old daughter in charge. Unfortunately, the regularity of her picking fruit in the fields left her vulnerable to physical attacks, especially because the community knew she had no male protection during her husband's absence. Modesta tearfully recalled, "I was with my three-year-old son in *el cerro* cutting cactus, and Juan (Briseño, the god-father of Modestas' son) was going to rape me at gun point. I was lucky that Roberto (a resident of La Noria) was riding along and stopped it before it happened."⁴⁰²

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

This incident went unreported by Roberto, to Modesta's husband or the authorities. The community was not made aware. Patriarchal ideology would see Modesta's actions as immodest and inviting male attention by going outside the house without being accompanied. However, Juan tried again. As she stated as she wiped her tears Modesta stated,

He tried getting into my house. I didn't have anyone to protect me. I kept hearing him trying to open my window, telling me to open it. I grabbed my kids and held them screaming for him to leave praying that Juan would finally leave. I never told my husband. He would have killed him and gone to jail, and then I would be alone even longer.⁴⁰³

Juan's second attempt reflected his need to dominate and assert power over Modesta by fear and coercion.⁴⁰⁴ Modesta was an easy target, alone with small children without a family network for aid. Juan was aware that society would place the burden of proof upon Modesta, while he made himself the victim of her lures. Mexican women were held to honor codes and patriarchal values that were infused into the culture.⁴⁰⁵ Consequently sex or sexual attacks tarnished the reputation of woman, as they were left with the burden to prove their honor and innocence. Whether it was society or fear, her silence kept her afraid and powerless, as her life was lived in constant vigilance of a man that she had to see regularly in her hometown.

Modesta never stated that she was raped, but her tears and padlocks left me with a feeling she was in distress. The implications of her attempted rape are visible to this present date. When I arrived for our scheduled interview, she asked who I was and to show proof of my family connection. I returned with my aunt Pilar Luna, Modesta's god-daughter. Consequently, she granted me permission to enter her home. Her metal eight-foot front gate contained a lock and padlock, with the keys hidden in her back yard. The home's front and back doors were double

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Alfredo Mirandé, *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 66.

⁴⁰⁵ Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial México*, 7-8.

doors which were locked with a chain lock as well. Visibly, Modesta's attack made her find safety through locks and high walls. Her seclusion to her home and only coming out for church are arguably a direct function of her experience with Juan.⁴⁰⁶

The attempted attacks were unknown to the people of La Noria until she mentioned them in her interview. Modesta's god-daughter, Pilar Luna is Juan's grand-daughter, which may be the reason for Modesta's silence about the two attacks when they occurred because they were compadres. Once we returned home my aunt Pilar told my grandmother Natividad of the "alleged" attacks, my grandmother said, "an old woman making up stories." My grandmother approached me later that day in private stating "I believe it" but she refused to elaborate⁴⁰⁷. The number of woman that were assaulted or attacked will never be known as society remained silent do to fear.

However, most importantly, Modesta did not want the rumors or the speculation that she seduced Juan to affect her marriage or her husband's honor.⁴⁰⁸ In this case, as in many others in a patriarchal society, women are blamed for nearly every negative outcome associated with their reactions to situations beyond their control. If Modesta had been raped, society would have blamed her for enticing Juan; had she stopped picking fruit and vegetables to avoid Juan and his overtures, she would have been blamed for her failure to feed her children. "Social-sexual codes of behavior required women to maintain their honor through fidelity during marriage. To violate these cultural norms brought shame to them and dishonor to the men in their homes and their families."⁴⁰⁹ Women claimed honor through sexual reputation. The absence of the male or an elder to provide protection caused women to experience sexual assault and uncertainty.

⁴⁰⁶ Modesta González Cortez, *La Noria*.

⁴⁰⁷ Private conversation with Pilar Briseño de Luna and Natividad Yañez on March 30, 2009.

⁴⁰⁸ Modesta González Cortez, *La Noria*.

⁴⁰⁹ Chavez-Garcia, 27.

Modesta's decision to not inform her husband in her countless letters to him is a clear demonstration that women picked and choose of what to inform their husbands. She censored herself for his well-being, she explained. Her letters to him were of love and the family, not of tragedy or fear, as his work as a Bracero needed her to show support, according to Modesta. As we spoke about her letters, Modesta walked me to a wooden chest, which she did not open but caressed and smiled at. Every letter her husband wrote was locked in that trunk. "He wrote regularly, and he truly loved her," mentioned Natividad.⁴¹⁰ Letters were the only form for Braceros and their family, to remind one another of their commitment to one another. The correspondence men and women sent to one another brought upon feelings of joy and relief as letters provided an update and words of love.

MAINTAINING FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Braceros preserved their connection through letters and gifts to show they thought about and remembered their family while they labored in the United States. José L. Orozco' described having his father at home as having a stranger. He explained that his father only stayed for a small period before returning to the United States as a Bracero.⁴¹¹ Orozco would sit with his siblings as his mother read the letters his father sent. "He would always ask about us and tell us about how he missed us and where he was at and his work."⁴¹² Orozco as a child did not comprehend that the letters that his father sent were to foster a relationship with his children and remain connected to his wife. Orozco's mother's actions of having the children present and reading the letters to them were to remind them and foster a father /child relationship regardless

⁴¹⁰ Natividad, *La Noria*.

⁴¹¹ Loza, Mireya, "José L. Orozco," in Bracero History Archive, Item #158, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/158> (accessed August 11, 2017).

⁴¹² Ibid.

of his absence. Letters maintained the family's unity by reminding one another that the distance did not cause them to forget them.

Letters were also used to show love, as they reminded family members that they remembered a special day or were just thinking of them. On March 16, 1959, Roberto Carrillo Johnson wrote his daughter a birthday letter. In his letter, he told his daughter that he wished with all his heart to be able to be there on her birthday. He gifted her ten dollars for her to purchase whatever she wanted.⁴¹³ Roberto's letter was an attempt to remain connected to his children, demonstrating through letters that he remembered their birthday and thought of them. Roberto wrote to his wife, Josie Carrillo, and their children regularly, always asking them how they were doing and reassuring them of his love for them. In a letter to Josie, Roberto told his wife that he wanted to see her so badly that she could not imagine.⁴¹⁴

Letters and packages were not only messages of love but contained remittances and gifts for the family. Families in México were left waiting to hear from their husband and father, their correspondence held the family together. Unfortunately, countless letters and packages were never delivered, causing many who were left waiting for mail to believe they were abandoned. In the case of Modesta, her husband wrote regularly but did not send her money. Modesta explained that he wrote every week but that the envelopes were opened before they arrived for her. She believed that the farm manager removed the money before it arrived for her. Men normally gave letters to their manager to take to the post office, but Modesta, the manager, or an employee of the farm, stole the money. Braceros and their families were not notified or informed before signing their contracts that their correspondence would be opened and inspected as part of

⁴¹³ Josie Carrillo Johnson, "Letter," in Bracero History Archive, Item #639, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/639> (accessed August 11, 2017).

⁴¹⁴ Josie Carrillo Johnson, "Letter," in Bracero History Archive, Item #641, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/641> (accessed August 12, 2017).

wartime national security. Many letters went undelivered without explanation or question, while others had their monetary content removed. This practice was unknown to Modesta, her husband, countless Braceros, and Mexican nationals.

The United States Government censored all land and air inbound and outbound mail to and from México during the Second World War. The July 11, 1942, guidelines set by Hugh H. Alford, Lieutenant Colonel Chief of the Postal Section, called for the 100% inspection of all mail regardless of size and individuals shipping or receiving the letter or package.⁴¹⁵ Lt. Alford also gave the order to all censor inspectors that mail received from México should not show “evidence of censorship attention.”⁴¹⁶ The United States did not publicize its letter censorship, as it was shielded under war time national security. Without publicizing or explaining, inspectors intercepted letters and packages from Mexican government officials and Mexican citizens.

The countless letters and packages that went undelivered become property of the Office of Censorship ledger.⁴¹⁷ The ledger gave an identification number, provided the information of the sender and receiver with a brief description of the letter’s content and articles in the package. In Postal Censor Tom Starbury’s ledger, Box 550 in route to México was flagged and destroyed as it contained various items deemed in violation of the censorship laws and threatened national security. Box 550 contained a doll, a tin tray, a knife, fork, spice set, six plates, a football, a deck of playing cards, as well as various baby’s, children’s (boy and girl) and women’s clothing.⁴¹⁸ According, to Starbury, the bloomers and wool jackets in Box 550 were labeled as a threat to

⁴¹⁵ National Archives and Records Administration at College Park (NACP), Record Group 216, Entry 20, Box 1312, Office of Censorship Postal Division; Chief Postal Censorship File Condemned Mail.

⁴¹⁶ NACP, Record Group 216, Entry 20, Box 1312, Office of Censorship Postal Division; Chief Postal Censorship File Condemned Mail.

⁴¹⁷ NACP, Record Group 216, Entry 20, Box 1310, Office of Censorship Postal Division; Chief Postal Censorship File Condemned Mail.

⁴¹⁸ NACP, Record Group 216, Entry 20, Box 1309, Office of Censorship Postal Division; Chief Postal Censorship File Condemned Mail (Miami-Nogales).

national security and along with all its contents. This a clear demonstration of the Department of Censorship's lack of oversight and bias of the postal censors who were responsible for examining the letters and packages. In his report, Starbury listed the items as propaganda material, therefore making Box 550 condemned mail which, was incinerated without notice to the sender or receiver. It became what many people believed as undelivered, lost, or miss-delivered mail.

The items in the Box 550 were articles found in every home in America in 1945 but were luxuries in rural México. A doll and football were a symbol of love for the children (as Maria Rosalba Ávila explained above), as their father thought about them and it was a gift solely for their enjoyment. Clothing, such as rain coats and three dresses, were extravagances and a splurge for rural Mexicans, but clear gifts that the sender viewed as beneficial and necessary for their family. The various items for the home demonstrated the senders thought of not just his family but the home. The burning of these items symbolized the destruction of the remittance and family connection men were attempting to maintain.

The undelivered mail created a rift in the family who may have thought their loved one had forsaken them by not returning or communicating with them during the program. German Santader's letters to his wife Estefania Santader went unanswered.⁴¹⁹ Her silence caused German to fear that his wife no longer thought about him and the distance had become too much. German wrote five letters to Estefania; none were answered. His letters asked her to use remittances and the money as a food vendor to immigrate into the United States undocumented. Estefania did not receive any of German's letters. The letters between German and Estefania contained information about coyotes and families that would aid her undocumented crossing. The

⁴¹⁹ Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu*, 85-86.

immigration of Estefania would not only be a violation of immigration laws but of the Bracero Program's male only terms. The letters between German and Estefania were censored and destroyed, creating distance and fear because neither heard from the other.

The rifts within families and lovers due to letter censorship and non-delivery, was highlighted in the 1957 Mexican film *Carta Ufemia*.⁴²⁰ In the film, Luterio leaves Ufemia to gain employment to raise enough funds to marry her. It is unclear throughout the film if Luterio is writing to her, and if her letters are reaching him. The film focuses on Ufemia's desperation and her constant visits to the town's post office. The townspeople begin to tease and gossip about her. She is viewed as desperate and clingy. She is informed that her behavior of constantly checking for mail is unlady-like by the town's priest. The town's priest explains to her that a "Mexican woman is patient, valiant, and independent," attributes she lacks."⁴²¹ The film demonstrates the importance of communication and the impact it has on those waiting for letters. It highlights that letters were the only way to foster a relationship with men laboring for the family. The film sets the blame on Luterio's decision not to write or certify his letters. The film briefly alludes to letter censorship but blames Luterio. *Carta Ufemia* concludes with Luterio and Ufemia engaged to different individuals as they each moved on assuming the other terminated their relationship. Letters were maintained and fostered relationships by reminding each receiving and sending their commitment to their significant others.

The blame for the lack of letters was placed on the Bracero by both the United States and Mexican governments.⁴²² Braceros constant moving from camps prevented letters from arriving

⁴²⁰ José Díaz Morales and Rafael A. Perez, *Carta Ufemia*. Directed by José Díaz Morales. México City: Argel Films, 1957.

⁴²¹ José Díaz Morales and Rafael A. Perez, *Carta Ufemia*. Directed by José Díaz Morales. México City: Argel Films, 1957.

⁴²² Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu*, 98.

for them, having them go undelivered. Braceros were also extremely busy working to have time to write, and women were told to wait patiently; they would eventually hear from their loved one. Letters were a connection between Bracero's and their families. Their response was not only answered questions or recounting their days apart but hope, love, and relief to have a sign of their loved one's commitment to their continued commitment regardless of the distance. The censorship of Mexican labor mail continued until the end of the Bracero Program on December 31, 1964.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS AND SURVIVAL

As men said goodbye, they promised to write and return as often as possible. Neither Braceros nor their wives understood that family connections, letters, and remittances would have such an impact on women's survival and state of being. Women adjusted their daily lives without their husbands, almost immediately after their departure. The ability of women to adjust was significant to her family's survival during the absence of her husband. The adjustment may be minimal as sleeping at an in-law's home or defiant of social standards as working outside the home. These changes permitted the survival of the family financially and emotionally. These changes could not be avoided as women were now the heads of the household which consisted of the management of the home financially.

Women were aware that they could not ask their husbands for advice in decision-making, but they had to make the decisions themselves because Bracero letters would take at least a month to be delivered. Many men would not write until they arrived at the first contracted farm. Natividad mentioned that she did not hear from Ruben for two months; she could not just write him because she had no address until he wrote that he was safe and was working. Natividad

pointed out that neither realized how important letters were until it was their only way of showing each other their commitment to one another.

The war time censorship's broad rules and regulations created a rift in the Mexican family. The destruction of mail was a symbolic destruction of the connection between the sender and receiver, as letters held their relationship together. Communication was directly connected to the experience women had during the program. The letters and gifts men sent were reminders to their family in México that they had not forgotten them, and that the separation has a purpose. The lack messages or interaction whether by returning home with money or gifts made women feel alone and abandoned, as if their husband had forgotten them. The exchange of letters was a necessity for the nurturing of a healthy relationship. Letters kept families connected by expressing their feelings and recounting their days; it was a manner to be a participant in one another's life still. They provided plans, providing hope that the separation had a positive future which both sender and receiver would benefit from.

Chapter 5: Mi Madre fue Padre y Todo

Mi madre fue padre y todo,

alimentó nuestra vida,

La vi vejecer sonriendo,

Trabajando decidida

Lavó ropa para los ricos,

Sembramos juntas la tierra,

Para salir adelante,

para salir adelante

De la maldita pobreza,

Ella nos cuenta orgullosa de mi padre,

y su lucha,

De su amor para nosotros,

su deseo mejorar.

Madresita en esta noche

*tu llanto me da la fuerza...*⁴²³



Illustration 6.1: Mother cooks for her children



Illustration 6.2: Mother poses with her two daughters

⁴²³ Rosa Marta Zarate and Francisco Herrera, *Mi Padre Murió en el Norte* Genres: Regional México, Music, Latino Release: September 11, 2009, Round Whirled Records.

Photographs are in author's possession. Briseño Family Collection.

In Mexican society, motherhood has been modeled by the Catholic Church, specifically by the Virgen de Guadalupe, who is virtuous, obedient and sacrifices herself for her children. Gender and Women's Studies historian Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney finds motherhood is the most important signifier of womanhood in Latin America, as it defines women's responsibility to the family.⁴²⁴ Mothers nurtured tradition and values but remained submissive and dependent on their male counterparts. The experiences of women in La Noria and throughout México presented in this chapter provides insight to the gradual changing of the social construction of womanhood caused by the Bracero Program. As the guardians of the family, women negotiated their concerns and presence in society as their husband's absence forced them to accept new roles. Through oral histories, letters, and divorce cases this chapter sets out to examine how Mexican women created a debate during the program of what the proper role for themselves should be outside of the home.

Feminist scholars during the 1970s claimed that women's history would generate new themes and questions as it reevaluated the roles of women in Latin American countries. John D. French and Daniel James sought "to integrate the nature of how people actually experienced their lives by focusing on how woman viewed themselves, how others saw them and how her role outside of the home impacted her."⁴²⁵ The chapter sets out to show that the history of the working class is not the history of workers only, but "of those affected and normally silence in the margins, women."⁴²⁶ As gender historians began to examine labor exchanges in Latin America the presence of women changed society and the family. The emphasis of gender history

⁴²⁴ Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile*. (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press), 2.

⁴²⁵ John D. French and Daniel James, *Sharing the Circle: Women's Factory Labor, Gender Ideology and Necessity* edited by John D. French and Daniel James ed. *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 5.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

on labor touches on the oppression and inequalities of power due to race, class, and sex.⁴²⁷

“Gender is a socio-cultural construct of female and male identity that shapes how individuals live and interpret the world around them. Gender affects and is affected by social, political, economic, and religious forces.”⁴²⁸ In México, employers’ hiring policies narrowly defined feminine qualifications and economic opportunities to restrain women to the domestic sphere and under the authority of a male superior.⁴²⁹ Men were to have authority, work outside the home, and support their family. Women were taught to cook and clean, serve as role models for their daughters, preparing them for their future as wives. Gender and the roles associated with each is learned and taught since birth.

Feminist scholarship traces the impact of labor on the patterns of social and gender relations in Latin America. Mexican and Mexican-American scholars had long theorized the impacts of patriarchy and gender constructions on the cultural, and political aspects of societies.⁴³⁰ In order to understand the effects of women’s labor on society, one must understand gender relations in each respective country. Historians generally agree that economic

⁴²⁷ Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men Women, and Historical Practice*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Louise Michele Newman, *White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 2000); Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Duke University Press, 2002); Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (Oxford University, Press, 1987).

⁴²⁸ Institute for Latino Studies University of Notre Dame “Women, Men, and the Changing Role of Gender in Immigration” Volume 3 Issue 3 Fall 2009.

⁴²⁹ Sylvia Chant, *Women and Survival in Mexican Cities: Perspectives on Gender, Labor Markets and Low-Income Households* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1991).

⁴³⁰ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez editors, *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Mary Kay Vaughan, “Women School Teachers in the Mexican Revolution: The Story of Reyna’s Braids” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 2 No. 1, (1990): 143-168; Matthew C. Gutman, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a man in México City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Sonia Hernández, *Working Woman into the Borderland*. (College Station: Texas A&M University). Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary México* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Jocelyn Olcott, Mary K. Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, eds. *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern México* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

modernization during the twentieth century resulted in the most significant changes to gender relations throughout Latin America.

MOTHERHOOD AND PATRIARCHY

The absence of men as they participated in the program transformed women's motherhood to a dual role as nurturer and as a provider. The virtue and honor of women were reconstructed by the transnational labor program that left woman as the head of the household. The multifaceted exploration of Latin American female honor centers on social roles caused by sexual differences and power within society from the colonial period to the twentieth century, clearly seen in México. "The honor of women from all classes was judged primarily on the basis of their sexual conduct."⁴³¹ Spanish Catholic codes of honor mediated social relationships and social worth based on personal virtue, into the twentieth century. Families protected daughters' virginity because it symbolized the status of the family and the respect it received from society, the church, and other important institutions. Virginity in México was not only a prerequisite of patriarchal social norms but was weaved into legislation and community life. Honor was protected by the law; virginity symbolized the purity of the country.

Patriarchy was also reconstructed by the practical realities and standard policies of the Bracero program. According to Mireya Loza "remittances reinforced structures of patriarchy and took on both material and symbolic roles within the family. Therefore, their remittances were read along the lines of fathering, fidelity, and proof of their strong moral character."⁴³² This transformed concept of patriarchy hindered women's presence outside the home during the program. The presence of women outside of the home became a sign of her husband's failure to

⁴³¹ Chambers, 169.

⁴³² Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought For Racial, Sexual, And Political Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina Press, 2016), Location 261-2612. Kindle Edition.

send money. Yet many women regardless of their husbands' remittances found the need to participate in the public sphere. Consequently, women transformed honor by utilizing family necessity and female networks to reassure that their presence in public were not questioned. Engaging in the public arena challenged the dominant beliefs that sharing space between men and women posed a moral danger for women. Family and female networks permitted women to avoid situations that might cause rumors of dishonor.

Braceros migration to the United States provided their wives in México to "gain much more autonomy and power, as they had to make important familial decisions independently."⁴³³ The extent of women's independence outside the home depended on the family network. By examining the lives of Bracero's wives and daughters, this chapter sets out to historicize women's empowerments as mothers, providers, and as temporary single parents by closely exploring the difficulties and changes that occurred in their lives and society during the program. The male absences made women self-reliant and providers for hundreds of the Braceros' sons and daughters. Women became mother and father, nurturer, and authority for the duration of the male absence.

The Bracero Program altered the traditional gender roles that clearly defined provider (men) and caretaker (women) and forced Mexican society to grapple with that fact. The Mexican government reminded women of the financial benefit the program would provide and that their husband remained the head of household even in his absence.⁴³⁴ Women's obedience to their husbands and ability to fulfill their gender role would enable men to return to their families to continue his role as the head of household without change or interruption from her management

⁴³³ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. (Los Angeles: University Of California Press, 1994), 7.

⁴³⁴ Ana Rosas, "Flexible families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2006), 190 and 221.

or organization of the home and farm. Women were expected to wait patiently for their husband (family patriarch) at home and not partake in street vending or involve-engage in internal migration in search of full-time unskilled employment.⁴³⁵ Male absences transformed the role of women in México, of one in which she participated in the public sphere as a consumer and laborer. This change was due to male absence and lack of regular remittances that made women responsible for the financial and physical stability of the family.

REMITTANCES

Braceros were encouraged by their family to labor in the United States, as the opportunities in México were poorly paid compared to the wages available in the United States. Mexicans opted to migrate due to the higher wages offered in the United States, and the positive impact they hoped remittances would have on community life and family survival. The amount men would send back varied; the opportunity to make higher wages in the United States encouraged men to participate in the program. Bracero's and their families created financial connections across the border, maintaining them linked through remittances. Remittance is the transfer of money by a foreign worker to their family in their home country. Remittances created an international patriarchal connection where men were still obligated to fulfill their roles and be responsible for the well-being of the family. Also, it made families feel an emotional bond in which the money symbolized the thoughts and love from the sender.

Work in the United States provided monetary aid to the poverty-stricken families they were leaving behind. Espifania Salgado, explains “we lived in a very poor, rural town. There wasn't money to buy food until he sent money, so we could eat.”⁴³⁶ Contextualizing the

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 220-221.

⁴³⁶ Dir. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness* Prod. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez. Films Media Group, 2010. 58 mins, Espifania Salgado, 7:21-7:30.

importance of the circulation of remittances is critical in understanding the impact the program had on the family. The Bracero Program and the families of the laborers created their social and transnational interactions, employment, and consumption patterns. Mexican immigrants and their families depended on each other's earnings, labor, and mobility to survive financially in Mexican and United States society. The Bracero Program intensified Mexican men's commitment to transnational family, as Braceros viewed their success in their ability to financially uplift their families.

The impact of financial assistance such as remittances on the family and relationships between generations has long been characteristic of immigrants' experiences. Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* accounts of an earlier wave of immigrants' relationship to the United States and their sending countries.⁴³⁷ Handlin argues that the Bracero Program's cyclical nature and costs required Mexican immigrants to remain connected to their respected rural towns and villages. The struggle to sustain themselves and their relatives in México was believed possible by the United States earning potential through the contract labor. Historians emphasize the importance of remittance from laborers to enable families to create and maintain a transnational family oriented social and economic network.

Women remained in México awaiting letters and remittances from their husband. The Bracero Program and the families of the laborers created their own social and transnational interactions, employment, and consumption patterns. Mexican immigrants and their families depended on each other's earnings, labor, and mobility to survive financially in Mexican society. The Bracero Program intensified Mexican immigrant men's commitment to transnational family, economic, and social networks that advance their families' progress. During the months and

⁴³⁷ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*. (Canada: Little Brown and Company, 1972).

years that Mexican men were laboring in the United States, women supported and maintained the family through remittances.

Investing their earnings and remittances to nurture family businesses, property, and trades in support of a gendered transition benefiting the town's economy entailed conforming to a local governmental vision of immigrant family life. Remittances were (and continue to be) an important source of México's foreign revenue. Men saved their money, sacrificing their own necessities, such as new shoes or food to save money to send back. Recipients put remittances toward consumption, including housing, food, and education, and toward investment in land, agriculture, and small business. Families' coordinated what they sought to accomplish with remittances by communicating debt, business opportunities and the purchase of property.

Unfortunately, Braceros faced various deductions from their pay, which were against their contract agreements, reducing their pay and remittances. According to the Bracero contract, all transportation and living expenses from the processing center to the farm and vice versa, were to be paid by the farmer. Also, the wages paid to Mexican workers could not be less than 30 cents per hour and had to be the same amount paid to Anglo laborers. Men also faced deductions for housing, in some cases men were charged for blankets. Furthermore, men had ten percent deducted from their pay which was to be safeguarded by the United States government in the Rural Saving Fund according to the Executive Agreement of 1942.⁴³⁸ Their wages had multiple deductions reducing the amount available for remittances.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ The Rural Savings Fund began to be distributed in 2005 by the Mexican government to those who could show proof of Bracero service. Additionally, Braceros and their families sued both governments and held demonstrations in order to initiate action from the United States and México.

⁴³⁹ Maya L. Ávila, Personal Archive *Bracero Contract*.

By 1944, it is estimated that Braceros had sent one million dollars (50 million pesos) in remittances to their loved ones.⁴⁴⁰ On October 18, 1944 an editorial in *Excélsior* announced that the country's negative commercial balance were being positively affected by the money sent by Braceros. Yet, the Mexican press and economist did not consider the debt the money was used to repay and the management of the money. Additionally, as the amount of 50 million pesos is deemed a large quantity of money, one must consider the number of Braceros that sent that money to their family. Unfortunately, there is no way to calculate how many Braceros worked in the United States each year as many continuously renewed contracts and/or returned to México. Let's assume that 100,000 men worked between 1942-1944 and each sent the same amount that would mean that every individual sent back \$3.33 (16.67 pesos) a year for three years (this if he worked the full year). The amount men sent back individually was not enough to sustain the family and pay debt. Many women had acquired large debts, which when they did receive remittances, they already owed it.⁴⁴¹ Regardless of the existence of remittances women were responsible for feeding, clothing, educating, and nurturing their children and elderly relatives. Nothing, changed for the women as the labor program maintained them in debt and suffering.

SURVIVING AT HOME

The Mexican government in the promotion of the program created the idea of the proper use of remittances as paying off debt, education, and the elevation of the family. The elevation of the family was through the purchase of livestock and agricultural land in which men would utilize their modern farming skills to feed their family and country once the program ended. According to the Mexican government the sole purpose of the program was to elevate the

⁴⁴⁰ Jaime Vélez Storey, "Los braceros y el Fondo de Ahorro Campesino" edited by Maria Eugenia Anguiano Téllez and Miguel J. Hernández Madrid in *Migración Internacional e Identidades Cambiantes* (El Colegio de Michoacán, 2002), 25.

⁴⁴¹ *Harvest of Loneliness*, 32:27

Mexican family, which required men to labor as Braceros and the family to manage the home and all remittances, “properly.” The “proper” use was food, medicine, debt, and farm necessities, the use of remittances for any other items were seen as improper and an abuse of trust.

Many men opted not to send money because they did not believe their wife understood how to manage the family funds properly. Santos Bugarin regularly returned with remittances that his wife, Esperanza Bugarin, was not allowed to use. Santos was saving his remittances to purchase land and livestock. Consequently, Esperanza lived off selling the eggs her chickens would lay an arrangement her husband appreciated and did not object to. She would sell the eggs by going door to door. The money she made permitted her to pay her daily expenses. Santos prepaid store owners, and left her money for unexpected expenses, therefore she was not to use his savings. Santos wanted to invest his money in land and cattle, consequently Esperanza used very little of her husband’s money. Her sacrifice to only use a small amount of the money permitted their advancement.⁴⁴² The sacrifice Esperanza endured in silence cannot be minimized because she did not ask for his help. Esperanza placed the full responsibility of the family survival upon herself.

Unlike Esperanza, Roberto Carrillo Johnson’s wife Josie wrote him a letter informing him of the difficulties she was having taking care of the children without him. She had explained how she struggled to pay the rent and she was looking for a new home. Roberto responded to her letter on April 25, 1957, by apologizing for not being present to aid her with the children and reassuring Josie that her struggle was not in vain as he found work. He tells her that he will send her money in the following days. Roberto attempts to reassure Josie of his commitment to the family and that his migration as a Bracero is justified as the family would benefit from his pay.

⁴⁴² Maria R. Ávila, *La Noria*.

Josie, unlike Esperanza, informed her husband of her difficulty and attempts to solve the issues she was facing in his absence.⁴⁴³ The reality is that women were desperate to attain remittances as it depended on the family's survival. Esperanza and Josie provide two distinct experiences on how woman navigated the program.

THE DECISION NOT TO SEND

On December 21, 1944 in the "Comentarios al dia" of *El Informador*, an anonymous submission states, "no one else but ourselves can take care of our money. We prefer to spend our money by our own hands than for it to be safe kept and eventually spent by others. For Braceros money is not gifted but earned with sweat. It is up to him to decide who he is working for."⁴⁴⁴ The individual who submitted the comment finds it that only Braceros should spend and safeguard his earnings and that others will not save it but utilize it to their discretion. He points out that men work extremely hard for their wages and should decide if they are working for themselves or others. This can only lead one to assume that this individual's remittances have not been utilized to his wishes by his loved one instead spent in a manner he finds inappropriate. In some cases, Braceros stopped corresponding with their family, justifying their desertion to the mishandling of their money. Braceros expected their family to save and invest their earnings in the farm and pay off outstanding debts. But at times family members used the remittances to support visios or a fictional lifestyle.

Ramona, the daughter of a Bracero, sat in her father's corner store explaining that they have the store because her father stopped sending her grandmother money. Ramona's father was

⁴⁴³ Josie Carrillo Johnson, "Letter," in Bracero History Archive, Item #645, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/645> (accessed August 11, 2017).

⁴⁴⁴ *El Informador*. "Comentarios Del Dia." December 21, 1944. <http://www.hndm.unam.mx/consulta/resultados/visualizar/558a353f7d1ed64f16b3aea0?resultad=3&tipo=pagina&in tpagina=3&palabras=bracero>. (Accessed July 10, 2017).

a single man and the youngest of three sons when he left as a Bracero. He would send everything to his mother and would keep the minimal amount, according to Ramona.⁴⁴⁵ His intent was to aid his mother financially, pay her medical expenses, and have her purchase land and cattle for him. But he started to hear rumors that his brothers had quit their jobs and moved in with their “wives” (When a man moves in his girlfriend, it is with the intent of marriage, and the community sees them as a married couple.) to his mother’s house. Consequently, instead of investing his money, his brothers had been taking it from their mother to support their families, their drinking, and gambling habits. Ramona’s father’s breaking point was when he sent his mother money to get dental work which her other sons took and spent. When he visited his mom, he expected to see her new teeth and some livestock. Instead, he met his sisters-in-law and saw his brothers home doing nothing. According to Ramona, he went back two days after arriving, disappointed. Her father never sent them money again, saving it himself. His family was angry with him for abandoning them. The money Ramona’s father was sending back created this idea that the United States provided Mexican workers the opportunity to elevate themselves and their family, without publicizing the conditions and experiences men faced in the fields.

After returning, Ramona’s father bought a small plot of land, opened the market, and married her mother. His desertion enabled his upward mobility. The market continues to function and remains as a family business. Ramona’s father felt betrayed while his family considered themselves abandoned. Ramona’s recollection of her father’s experience of betrayal plays a distinct role and is rationally explained. Her father was betrayed by his family who misused and stole the money he worked so hard for to elevate himself and eventually his family from poverty.

⁴⁴⁵ Ramona, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (June 28, 2014). Ramona did not want to give her last name or her father's name because her lawyer advised her not to speak to anyone about her father's experience. She is still attempting to get the 10% savings.

The community believed his actions were necessary, viewing his brothers as selfish and lazy for not working in the program. His brothers and mother used the remittances to their discretion. Her father assumed that the money would be used to purchase land and livestock which his brothers would work and manage. The misuse of Ramona's father's funds and the lack of following his instructions was a direct violation of his trust. Instead they spent it recklessly. His decision to cut off his family is one many would make and rationalize as the correct choice for them. Betrayal can sever significant relationships while others seem untouched. "The glue of family and society is the ability to trust. Without it there is no community" or family unity.⁴⁴⁶ Ramona understood that her father attempted to help his family, yet they did not help themselves forcing him to abandon them financially. His decision to desert his family (mother and brothers) enabled him to prosper and invest his hard-earned money to support his wife and children years later.

Ramona's uncles maintained a lavish lifestyle according to her father with his money. However, they did utilize some funds for food and bills as they did not lose their mothers farm and no indication of malnourishment is mentioned. But Ramona's father only focused on their misusage such as gambling and his brothers not contributing to the household. Ramona's father's decision to no longer send remittances is one many would agree as proper for the situation. However, he does not establish credit for his mother or return home to oversee her dental care, instead he continuous laboring in the United States waiting for his next contract at the processing center. By no longer sending remittances his mother was left to the mercy of her other sons and her own labor.

⁴⁴⁶ Elena Lesser Bruun And Suzanne Michael, *Not on Speaking Terms: Clinical Strategies To Resolve Family And Friendship*. (London: W.W.. Norton & Company Inc., 2014), 116.

The anonymous submission “Comentarios al día” of *El Informador* and Ramona’s father’s experience provide reasoning behind Braceros’ decision not to send remittances. The struggles families faced were difficult without Braceros, yet men wanted to see a reward for their sacrifice. The usage of funds was promoted to buy land and pay debt, by utilizing them for anything else was a misuse of remittances. Yet, the lack of remittances forced women to take on new roles.

THE IMPACT OF LOW REMITTANCES

Braceros did not send money regularly enough for women to feed their children. Due to the inconsistency of the remittances, women went beyond their role and began to make decisions over livestock and land to guarantee the family survival. They also began to work cooking and selling food, washing and ironing clothing, cleaning homes, sewing large and poorly paid orders of embroidery, and harvesting their land. When women were not able to obtain work strictly within the domestic sphere, they sought the most closely related work to aid the family and maintain their honor. María Gutiérrez remembered, “crying because I had all my kids sick with measles and how was I supposed to cure them with no money, I didn’t even know how I would feed them at times let alone cure them. I had to sell a little cow for only 40 pesos, really cheap. I sold it to be able to eat and buy medicine.”⁴⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Braceros did not envision that sickness or other catastrophes would profoundly limit the impact of their remittances on the family economy. Maria found herself using credit and selling goods in order to survive the circumstances that arose for their children’s and own survival. Maria resorted to partake in domestic work for other families while she simultaneously had to take care of her own children and household. She explained, “I would cook and wash for other people, but they couldn’t afford

⁴⁴⁷ Gutierrez, Maria. Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (April 1, 2009).

to have me working for them. They had their money problems, too.”⁴⁴⁸ Domestic labor opportunities were limited and temporary as women across México found themselves with limited remittances and opportunities.

Some men who chose not to send remittances, made agreements with the family elder and shop keepers to ensure their loved ones would have access to food and protection. Unfortunately, many women such as Eva Ortiz, “had to go to different stores asking for them to extend her credit for food,” as her husband did not return regularly enough to pay off her debt with store owners.⁴⁴⁹ Like Eva, Carmen Hernandez spoke of her husband's absence as difficult as she was not sent any remittances and depended on credit and her in-laws. She explained, “I suffered, and I didn’t. The ingrate of my husband didn't send me anything but he [was] dependent on his parents to take care of me. His parents fed me and helped me. Josefina (market owner) told me, whatever you need don't be embarrassed, once he comes back I'll [charge him]. I ate because Josefina gave me credit.”⁴⁵⁰ Carmen was highly depended on the credit Josefina gave her in the local market. Carmen pointed out that her husband’s first duty after returning as a Bracero was to pay Josefina. She believed her husband did not send her remittances because he believed his parents would aid her in what she needed. Also, she explained that her husband saw the credit at the grocery store as the only real expense Carmen would have. Unfortunately, women’s responsibility went beyond cooking a meal and the need for money added to the difficulty woman faced during the program. Unfortunately, home economics involved more than preparing food and feeding children.

⁴⁴⁸ Maria Gutierrez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (April 1, 2009).

⁴⁴⁹ Alejandra Díaz, "Eva Ortiz," in Bracero History Archive, Item #742, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/742> (accessed August 7, 2017).

⁴⁵⁰ Carmen Hernandez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (April 1, 2009).

Throughout the program women encountered periods where remittances were desperately needed but unavailable. Their recollections demonstrate the strength and endurance they possessed as women such as Rosa and María who had to sacrifice selling livestock at cheap prices and picking fruit in order to survive. The Bracero Program created this false bond and hope for women as the program advertised family connection and men's inability as a patriarch to forsake his family. Men independently chose when and how much remittances he would send, consequently, women were left to the mercy of their husband.

VENTURING OUTSIDE THE HOME

The lack of remittances and a patriarch caused women to venture outside the home, whether for food or labor. Women found it easier to maneuver alone without their children in the markets and fields. Severa Godinez had eight children and found their presence in the market and fields would slow her down, reducing her productivity. Severa Godinez's husband, José Godinez, left her instructions and had family to aid her. He did not anticipate that Severa would go to the market to purchase and sell goods. Her husband's absence permitted her the freedom to make decisions about her presence in the public sphere. Additionally, the limited remittances Jose sent caused her to sell food and participate in the local economy, a clear indication to the people of La Noria that his remittances were not enough to support his family.

However, Severa's labor outside the home was justified by the need to save and contribute to her husband's earnings to facilitate their purchase of land once he returned. Severa would also go to the field and pick fruit from the trees to save money. Many women in La Noria entered the public sphere by going to the market in Poncitlán 10 miles from La Noria to buy food for the week's meals and sell fruit for extra income.⁴⁵¹ Severa remembered, "I would go wash in

⁴⁵¹ Severa Godinez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 30, 2009).

the streams and to the market with the other women or alone. I had chores and errands.”⁴⁵² She viewed her presence at the market as part of her responsibilities as caretaker and necessary for the family nutritional survival. But she points out that her husband did not view her participation in the market as necessary but indecent. Severa explained,

When my husband returned, I was excited. I made him a special dinner with the entire family. During the dinner, my brother-in-law told my husband I was strolling the streets of Poncitlán unaccompanied doing God knows what. He flipped the dinner table over out of anger, while yelling at me and calling me things. Jose restricted me [from] going out without the children. He was so mad because his brother told him I [was] being a loose woman. How was I supposed to do anything?⁴⁵³

To Severa’s brother-in-law, his brother’s Jose’s honor and role as patriarch had been tarnished by her independence. Jose assumed that all economic and public dealings would be dealt with by his father or brother. Severa did not ask for permission, instead she took it upon herself to manage the family economics and children. José was angered and ordered her to no longer conduct herself in public alone. Jose did tell her she could not go out without a chaperone and that the children were her responsibility and should not be left to the care of anyone else. Severa resolved the issue by taking her eight children with her to the market and anywhere she went.⁴⁵⁴

Her attempt to provide for and protect her family was misinterpreted by her husband and the community as dishonorable due to patriarchal ideas of a woman’s role was only in the home regardless of her husband’s absence. Patriarchal society permitted men to seclude their wife and female relatives to protect their reputations and be honored as a provider.⁴⁵⁵ Severa accommodated her husband’s wishes but maintained her presence in the public sphere. At the same time, her honor was unquestioned with her children’s presence.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Miroslava Chavez-Garcia, *Negotiating Conquest* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004), 27.

The actions of women were altered by the presence and absence of their husband. José L. Orozco recalls that his mother shifted her actions once his father returned as a Bracero. She would be at home doing her domestic duties, rarely working as a doula when necessary. Yet when he left she had to take care of the children emotionally and financially. Orozco explains that his mother would serve as a nurse, masseuse, and doula, skills she learned through family and her experience of giving birth alone without help.⁴⁵⁶ She altered her actions in order to provide for the family while she awaited remittances and her husband's return in labor that was labeled women's work.

Women altered their actions to appease their husband and resumed their presence outside the home in his absence. José L. Orozco's father wrote regularly but did not send remittances frequently. His lack of remittances was possibly due to his mother's responds to each of his letter, she censored herself ensuring that she did not let him know of the difficulties they were facing unless it was truly necessary. She wanted his father not to worry about them but focus on his work. Therefore, she filled her letters by telling him stories of the children and ensuring him of their love. The ability of Orozco's mother to remain silent of her struggle is extraordinary as she had to work in "women's" work (nurse, doula, etc.) outside of her home causing Luis to help raise his younger siblings. But most notably she preferred to work then ask her husband for remittances and adjusted her behavior in his presence.⁴⁵⁷

The concept of honor transformed in México amongst the women as they clearly challenged their "normal" domestic duties. They defied social norms by participating publicly in the market, as direct consumers and venders of goods and services, their ventures into the

⁴⁵⁶ Mireya Loza, "José L. Orozco," in Bracero History Archive, Item #158, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/158> (accessed August 11, 2017).

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

mountains for food whether accompanied by another woman or alone, demonstrated that women were no longer waiting patiently at home but providing for their families. The change may seem insignificant by today's standards, but it was significant enough for men to flip tables and shout at their wives in anger. More importantly, women in La Noria did not judge each other's actions outside the home but understood them as necessary as they were no longer a wife and caretaker but provider and head of household.

MALE REACTION TO FEMALE LABOR

The program benefited families in a case by case basis, but it did not universally elevate every Bracero and their family. Its impact was uneven and unpredictable, as influenced by numerous factors, such as the shifts in policy governing the program, the pay offered by farmers, the potential for fraud and theft, swings in each country's economy, and the individual situations of each family. Rather than uniformly uplift Mexican families, the absence of the major bread winner created the need for female labor outside the home. Women had to participate in the local economy and assume business responsibilities forcing them out of the house into a generally male sphere that had now become female. The presence of woman solely being in the home was minimal to non-existent during the program. The traditional gender roles and spatial images remain prevalent in Mexican society; the Bracero Program began to shift gender roles to include women in the public sphere. The financial gain of a dual income provided stability and economic benefits, but again, those gains were tenuous and unpredictable. Many women in México began to work outside of the home for wages, often selling foodstuffs or other items in the informal economy because immigration has changed and evolved their role in the home. Men understood their wives would adopt new roles and enter the public sphere to an extent, but they were not prepared for the independence and freedom women gained because of their long absences.

The "proper" woman was defined in Mexican society as one who does not defy her husband and maintains her virtue. México's patriarchal culture "provides concepts and practices that inform the actions" of each sex.⁴⁵⁸ Mexican culture shapes the social behavior of men and "proper" women. The woman of La Noria and all Bracero wife's, mother's, and daughters are neither "angels" or "oppressed" but resilient and navigators of their distinct circumstances. The absence of men from La Noria enabled the development of women's views of reputation and rules regarding respectability and honor. The new role of women would be negotiated and created distinctly in each community throughout México, and it would depend on their individual circumstances. "Their social activities outside the home challenged provincial norms of ...patriarchy and their reputation."⁴⁵⁹ Mexican women were limited to a domestic role in México's "patriarchal [them] in divorce cases and told them that domesticity and motherhood constituted their [Mexican] citizenship" a system that became enhanced by the male absence, due to the Bracero Program.⁴⁶⁰

CHANGING THE FEMALE ROLE

The Mexican Civil Code of 1928 permitted husbands to prevent their wives from working outside the home if it interfered with their duties in the home.⁴⁶¹ The code established the control of women as sanctioned by government. The absence of their husband allowed them to seek permission only from themselves. It was easy to blame women for breaking morality or social norms, but they were responding to the difficult situation men and the government placed

⁴⁵⁸ Oatley,33.

⁴⁵⁹ Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern México*, 172-173.

⁴⁶⁰ Mary Kay Vaughan, "Women School Teachers in the Mexican Revolution: The Story of Reyna's Braids" *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 2 No. 1, (1990): 143-168, 143.

⁴⁶¹ Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary México*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005),19.

them in, considering the socio-cultural context of Mexican patriarchy. The limited remittances forced women to labor for the survival of the family regardless of the consequences. Women were meant to sit at home and suffer starvation and poverty, in order to protect their husband's manhood. Women who labored outside the home had already exhausted all means of survival and feared permanent abandonment and/or the death of their husband.

The Mexican authorities proposed alternatives such as supervised and vocational work to Mexican immigrant families' dependence on the programs remittances. Women should have raised their children and awaited the husband's return because "respectable women" did not migrate in search of employment, have others raise their children, endanger the elderly, nor betray their husband's trust. This double standard placed woman in a difficult predicament. Remittances failed to meet the financial needs of the household, so women sought work outside the home, but this frequently led to social disdain and ostracism.⁴⁶² Regardless, women had the responsibility to finance the burden of the male absence and limited remittances. Women became resourceful and creative in providing for the family, taking on unfamiliar roles and duties to survive.

The idea that women were to sit at home and wait for remittances that either never arrived or were already owed caused them to negotiate their presence in the public sphere. Regardless of their family network or lack of it women were seen throughout Mexican society in new roles. Many women migrated to work in cities, large farmland, and/or sell food to Braceros at the border as they waited to for their contract. Mexican families suspected that program selection centers did not offer respectable employment opportunities for women. Husband's and family members were certain that women who migrated to the Bracero processing centers in

⁴⁶² Rosas, 186.

México City and at the border worked in the entertainment industry, service sector, or sex trade. Mexican women in reality worked mainly in the domestic field as cooks, vendors, and waitresses. Many women were selling food, blankets, and hats to men waiting at the processing centers in both México City and the United States-México border.

The women selling goods at the processing centers and markets were not managed by a male authority making them vulnerable to vices that would tarnish her honor. In each sector of labor, employers' hiring policies narrowly defined feminine qualifications and economic opportunities to constrain women to the domestic sphere and under the authority of a male superior. The shift in working women's position in the industrial workforce was due to the rapid economic development and middle-class activism. Susie Porter notes female mutual aid societies participated in activities similar to those of men, but that reflected on their status as working-class women. Women working away from the home without their husbands' permission demonstrated her lack of respect for their husbands and honor. Female labor away from home was seen and portrayed as family abandonment by society and the government.

Migrant women laboring were not mothers aiding in their families' survival, instead they represented their husbands' shortcomings. Their labor away from the home and unsupervised migration ruined a women's reputation. Gloria Garza filed a complaint in San Martin de Hidalgo's business bureau as she was denied service and work in her local community because she had worked in the selection center.⁴⁶³ Her earnings allowed her to pay her children's education, her mother's medical expenses and support her family. Gloria had exhausted all her means and only sought to aid her family. She viewed her actions as necessary for her family's survival, and because of the limited remittances and harsh times other women were experiencing

⁴⁶³Archivo Historico Municipal de San Martin de Hidalgo, Jalisco, México. *Gloria Garza Deposition*. Box 3, Folder 1.

Gloria assumed women would understand her decision. Instead, her entire family was ostracized. The community viewed the family as permitting and encouraging female labor for using her wages. More importantly, woman who migrated at the processing centers could not have their honor and virtue verified, and therefore, dishonored her husband and his family.

Women also found it difficult upon their return from processing centers to find domestic labor in their community. Teresa Ramirez, whose Bracero husband had not returned for three years (he may have passed away in the United States), sold shoes and bedding items at the processing centers for eight months. She saved up to six months of finances and regularly set remittances to her mother.⁴⁶⁴ The remittances were sent to care for her four daughters and family expenses. Teresa expected the community of Hidalgo, Jalisco, to understand her decision, especially because of her husband's abandonment of their four daughters. Unfortunately, not only was Teresa ostracized but so were her daughters and extended family. Friends and neighbors avoided, ignored, and cut all ties to Teresa and her family. This alienation affected Teresa's ability to gain employment as a domestic, specifically ironing clothing. Teresa had to charge low rates in order to be hired for her services, forcing her to continuously migrate to the processing center in Empalme, Sonora, until the program ended.

Despite women's increasing frequency in public spaces, at the market, or in the fields, men still viewed them as naive of the dangers outside the home. "Woman's primary role in México is to obey her husband and her family while caring for the home and children."⁴⁶⁵ However, the Bracero Program shifted women's priorities from protecting the Braceros honor, to their family's financial survival. When faced with the choice of "protecting the honor" of the

⁴⁶⁴ Archivo Historico Municipal de San Martin de Hidalgo, Jalisco, México. *Teresa Ramirez Deposition*. Box 9, Folder 5.

⁴⁶⁵ Institute for Latino Studies University of Notre Dame "Women, Men, and the Changing Role of Gender in Immigration" Volume 3 Issue 3 Fall 2009, 2-3.

family, or keeping their children fed, mothers chose the latter over the former. Bracero wives explain, “we kept working, teaching our kids, putting them through school by ourselves, it was difficult.”⁴⁶⁶ The program created a change in the roles women undertook as men labored in the United States, forcing them to not only conduct female duties but seek work outside the home and in some cases, migrate for employment.

La Noria did not have any women labor in the processing centers, nor did many migrate to other cities. Rosas daughters labored in factories and fields but would return daily to their home (as mentioned in Chapter 4). Braceros who filed for divorce considered their wives’ labor outside the home a poor reflection on their marriage and honor.⁴⁶⁷ Women were vilified for their labor outside the home by their husband, family, and government. In the state of Jalisco “between December 1942 and October 1948, an estimated 12,994 returning Braceros filed for divorce” citing female abandonment.⁴⁶⁸

ABANDONMENT AND DIVORCE

Two cases in particular demonstrate the marginalization of women by a system in which men, regardless of their actions, could not be at fault. The first case is of Sergio Acosta and María Ruelas Acosta. The second case is of Raul Mendoza and Jimena Torres Mendoza. In both cases the women left their children under the care of a family member in order to work in the processing centers. Neither man took responsibility for limited remittances or acknowledged the need for their wives’ labor outside the home. Instead they victimized themselves. Both men claim that their wives “abandonment” was not financially driven, but due to Maria and Jimena’s

⁴⁶⁶ Lidia Cano Cano, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 10:00-10:17.

⁴⁶⁷ I utilize two divorce cases from Dr. Ana Rosas dissertation to demonstrate that female labor for the survival of the family was an attack on manhood.

⁴⁶⁸ Rosas, 185.

lack of morality and judgement. Both men did not believe that they should reconcile with their wives, and they each sought a divorce from them. To do so was a “betrayal and embarrassment for having sacrificed themselves for a woman without sound judgement.”⁴⁶⁹ Both women, according to their husbands, betrayed their trust and were careless with their children. Returning Braceros were disappointed when they learned of their wives’ unaccompanied labor migration to program selection centers or factories.

During the divorce proceedings, the women's accounts or justification for their behaviors were not recorded in the court's transcripts. Rosas explains that “according to Mexican officials they were nowhere to be found.”⁴⁷⁰ Mexican divorce laws enabled for the termination of the marriage with only one-person present. Regardless of this modern concept of divorce, it was not socially acceptable or beneficial to women as proceedings favored men regardless of the situation. Instead of addressing the economic vulnerability of women and the family, Mexican society demonized women’s attempts to sustain their families and not allowing their husbands to fulfill his role. Women were to benefit and be uplifted by their husband’s success in the program. An inability to financially support them shamed the family and men’s honor. Additionally, Mexican women’s labor outside the home was blamed for an increase in crimes committed against the town’s elderly and the rise of “orphaned” children who were left in the care of a family member while their mother worked. Patriarchal society believed men must be the sole provider while keeping their women at home protected from immorality.⁴⁷¹

Women were condemned by government officials for leaving their children behind, therefore casting their migration as an act of betrayal to their family, town, and country. Most

⁴⁶⁹ Rosas, 185.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 186.

⁴⁷¹ “Women, Men, and the Changing Role of Gender in Immigration,” 1-2.

notably, Sergio Acosta stated that his wife left to “live, work, and act worse than a man at a program selection center,” leaving to question the morality and behavior of men while in the program.⁴⁷² The Catholic Church found Bracero vices the product of their inability to have their family with them.⁴⁷³ The concept of patriarchy had been revised for its transnational structure according to Mireya Loza in which manhood, specifically fatherhood and provider, was defined by remittances and labor.⁴⁷⁴ Their labor as Braceros and remittances were symbolic to their participation and faithfulness, regardless of their actions away from their family. In his words, Acosta pointed out that men are partaking in immoral actions at the selection centers at the United States-México border. Acosta himself insinuated that men were violating their vows and trust between a husband and a wife. Prostitution took place at around processing centers, labor camps, and towns in which Braceros found themselves in, many exchanging their money for sexual services. Loza points out in *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* that focusing on vices demonizes the Bracero which historians tend to do when focusing on vices and adultery. But the double standards men had for women and Acosta’s own testimony show that the meaning of motherhood remained embedded in the home, as they were easily corrupted by their partaking in labor. Most notable is that women presence outside the home was believed to directly lead to infidelity yet, a man’s morality was unquestioned if he sent remittances. The infidelity of men is left unquestioned as their role as providers permit them a sexual double standard.

⁴⁷² Rosas, 185.

⁴⁷³ Loza, Location 277-278.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., Location 264. Kindle Edition.

LA CALLE Y LA CASA

Socially acceptable traits and actions for men and women created a double standard for women in Mexican society. The presence of women outside the home frequently marked them as prostitutes, over sexual, and shameful. Men feared for their wife's safety, honor, and reputation, and its implication on the family name. The roles of men and women are "identified spatial distinctions of *la calle* (the street) and *la casa* (the home). Because men are the bread winner and the heads of the household, they can freely navigate through society."⁴⁷⁵ The freedom men had allowed them romantic and casual relationships in both the United States and México.

In La Noria, men's sexual indiscretions were known but were not challenged by women publicly. In many cases women were told by their mother "aguantate, no te vas a divorciar."⁴⁷⁶ In many cases women were advised and forced to remain married by their family regardless of their husband's abusive nature, affairs, or lack of financial support. On the other hand, men were encouraged to divorce their wife due to her infidelity or disrespect to him and the family. Divorce shamed women had returned them to their fathers. Romantic affairs were ignored as long as men fulfilled their financial responsibility to their family.

Bracero Juan Briseño had a relationship with a Mexican woman in California, causing him not to return for eighteen months to his family. Briseño stated, "I had a girlfriend and a wife. I was lonely in the United States. I came back to my wife and kids; I never stop[ped] sending them money or writing."⁴⁷⁷ Briseño emphasized the aid he provided for his family regardless of his infidelity pointing out that he never abandoned his family. His continuous financial support for his wife and kids excused his extra marital affair, according to his reasoning. He stated, "I

⁴⁷⁵ "Women, Men, and the Changing Role of Gender in Immigration," 1-2.

⁴⁷⁶ Private Conversation with Pedro Arteaga

⁴⁷⁷ Ramiro Briseño, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (April 1, 2009).

broke it off with the other woman. I couldn't abandon my family.”⁴⁷⁸ His loneliness in the United States was a justifiable reason for his affair, a freedom his wife did not have. Women were supposed to stay virtuous and faithful to their husbands regardless of their feelings of loneliness. The frankness of Briseño demonstrates the double standard that still exists in México today in which a man's actions are not to be questioned. Ramiro does not see his extramarital affair and eighteen months away from his family as a betrayal because he continuously sent his wife money.

In a patriarchal society, extramarital affairs by men are overlooked because it was justified as part of men's nature. The most striking and lasting impression of Ramiro's interview was that as he spoke of his extramarital affair, neither his tone nor his expression changed even though his daughter was present. His daughter Pilar Luna's face was filled with shock, yet she did not interrupt the interview to question him or brought it up after. It leaves one to assume that Ramiro views his actions were his right as a man. Patriarchal society encouraged male infidelity and female purity, making an extra marital affair as ordinary for men to have “a blind eye is turned to these behaviors because men provide the financial support of a household.”⁴⁷⁹

Women viewed their husband's affair as a result of their failure to meet his needs or his right as a man. Mexican society held “marriage as women's agreement to obey their husbands without question, relinquish control of her physical body, fulfill his sexual needs, and assist in the home.”⁴⁸⁰ Many women who were interviewed were asked if they believed that their husband had an extra marital affair while in the United States, all answered about the same, “If he did,

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ “Women, Men, and the Changing Role of Gender in Immigration,” 2-3.

⁴⁸⁰ Tinsman, 33.

that does not matter. He came back and took care of me.”⁴⁸¹ Men enjoyed a sexual double standard that reinforced their authority in marriage and the family, making their extramarital indiscretions tolerable and forgivable because they financially supported their family.⁴⁸²

The exchange of gossip, information, and the supervision of female sexuality unfolded in both public and private places. "Through conversation and gossip, the values of community life were shaped and dispersed, and behavior was censored and regulated. Malicious words about women's presence in the public sphere destroyed honor, forcing women to defend themselves to the community."⁴⁸³ Woman gossiped about neighbors and other woman's misfortune especially those who found themselves unsupervised and participated in local economics. Women had to guard and constantly prepare to defend their reputation from gossip. Society held women at higher standards and sexual piety while the men's reputations were mainly affected by violence or theft.

NORMALIZING THE PUBLIC PRESENCE OF WOMEN

The driving force behind men's success in the Bracero Program was based on the women's accommodation of the program's conditions, particularly family separation. However, the Mexican government did not expect or acknowledge the potential changes in the decision-making roles in families, business, and farm management. Men were assured by Mexican government officials that their wives and daughters would follow their instructions and continue working on the family farm and waiting at home patiently, as the program would benefit the family's earning potential.

⁴⁸¹ Natividad Luna Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009).

⁴⁸² Stephanie Smith, "If Love Enslaves...Love Be Damned!" *Divorce and Revolutionary State Formation in Yucatán*, edited by Olcott, Jocelyn, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern México*. (Duke: Duke University Press, 2006), 99-102.

⁴⁸³ Sloan, 107.

Mexican women's secure and safe role of a mother was fundamentally altered by the Bracero Program, forcing upon her new and undoubtedly stressful roles of a provider and father. Women were to remain chaste, faithful, and without scandal. The absence of their husbands and new roles forced them out of the home and thereby demanding a change to change their social roles and norms. Women had to be the male and the female figure for their children as well as become solely responsible for the well-being and survival of the family. The Mexican government failed to acknowledge that the wages Braceros were earning was not enough to sustain a family in México and their expenses in the United States. Men's minimal remittances, if there were any, caused Mexican women left behind to enter the labor force. Women were no longer committed to working and living as a dependent of the extended family or careless Bracero. Mexican women's assertion and transition into head of household roles through migration signify while other certainly increased.

Men and women did not prepare for the impact that long-term separation would have on their marriage or the family. Women learned to be independent, resilient, and flexible in their circumstances. The woman of La Noria did not seek aid from the Mexican government as they did not want to be a burden or acknowledge their husband's failure to provide for the family. The Mexican government also did not address how the Program's male only terms of employment were to effect women and their transition into heads of household. The program failed to acknowledge the impact the male absence would have on women. Female heads of household left behind were in desperate need of employment opportunities that would help finance their families' needs during their Bracero relatives' migration. Bracero failures to write, send remittances, and return upon their contract's termination caused families to fall into debt and women to labor outside the home.

Regardless of the amount of remittances and the social pressures associated with honor, the program forced women outside the home in various forms. Women worked as domestics, picked fruit, shopped at the market, and became street vendors. Some of their presence may be more gasping or shocking for the time ex. Street vending which some may be minimal and even expected ex. picking fruit. But regardless of the capacity their presence outside the home and in the public sphere they began normalizing women unchaperoned and laboring in México. Resistance was of course met. Men saw it as a direct challenge to his authority which caused women to be ostracized by relatives, friends, and woman. But regardless of the difficulties women faced their presence slowly created change for women in Mexican society, of no longer a frail but a survivor.

The public presence of woman became slowly normalized by the Bracero Program. Men saw women at the processing centers in both México City and the border as secretaries and vendors. In the United States, they encountered American women in the work sector such as in grocery stores, nurses, cooks, waitresses, and secretaries. However, not all men modernized their idea of women in public sphere as normal. Yet, the Bracero Program created a modern Mexican woman through male absence. Women were forced to survive without her husband's presence, she could labor outside her home, and could manage to negotiate her presence in the public sphere. Additionally, women raised sons that saw their mother more independent, normalizing her presence outside the home for younger generations. More importantly, the daughter of Braceros will become the women who will labor outside the home in larger numbers than previous generations, normalizing the existence of a female labor force in México.

Chapter 6: Our Savings: La Marcha Sigue

*Les mando en este
contrato
El fruto de mi trabajo
Mi esperanza es de con
ello, puedan salir
adelante
Junto con su ralicado,
mandaba carta que
explicaba
Que nos dejaba un
ahorro,
Que nos dejaba un ahorro,
Que el gobierno les guardaba,
Su mica como constancia,
Y una nota que decía
reclamen este dinero
que me ha costado la vida⁴⁸⁴*



Illustration 7.1: Braceros in the United States posing after work

⁴⁸⁴ Rosa Marta Zarate and Francisco Herrera, *Mi Padre Murió en el Norte* Genres: Regional México, Music, Latino Release: September 11, 2009, Round Whirled Records.
Photographs are in author's possession. Briseño Family Collection.

Jose Luis Briseño Hernandez still has the photographs of himself in the fields of the United States. He shows me his Bracero visa that allowed him into the United States to work in the fields almost 60 years ago. Briseño Gonzalez is one of tens of thousands of aging workers who waited decades for the Mexican government to return his money. He calls himself lucky to have kept his contracts, visa and photographs. It made it easier for him to process his paperwork for his *Ahorro Campesino*. He knows many who continue to fight for their money.⁴⁸⁵

The United States government deducted ten percent of men's paychecks to be safeguarded in the Rural Saving Fund, according to the Executive Agreement of 1942. The ten percent was to be transferred to the Mexican Agriculture Credit Bank into the *Fondo de Ahorro Campesino* and was to be returned to each man at the end of his contract. The War Food Administration received in dollars the funds from men's paychecks in their Berkley, California office, which was deposited at Wells Fargo Bank and the Union Trust Company in San Francisco. Wells Fargo and Union Trust transferred the funds to Banco de México, which was designated to transfer the funds to Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola. The transfer process resulted in the uncertainty of amounts, funds being mismanaged, and the delivery of funds taking years. The manner in which funds were deposited into a single instead of individual accounts enabled the mis-management of the *Fondo de Ahorro Campesino*. Financial books failed to specify the amount each man was owed, therefore men had to wait for the bank to locate the written document that Wells Fargo sent to ensure each man was paid the correct amount, a process that took two years in 1945. Yet, the manifestations in México's streets and the United

⁴⁸⁵ Briseño Gonzalez *La Noria*. Interviewd by Mayra Ávila June 22, 2014.

States throughout the 2000's demonstrated that men had been waiting for decades, and many still continue waiting.⁴⁸⁶

The Bracero Justice Movement, a Bracero aid and social justice movement organization, sought to recuperate ten percent deduction from each paycheck Braceros received. Mireya Loza, explains that the money was to be placed in a savings account, which Braceros would access once they returned to México.⁴⁸⁷ Gilbert Gonzalez points out that many men formed long lines in México City waiting for funds that had been “lost or unavailable.”⁴⁸⁸ Both Loza and Gonzalez find that México did not implement a system to facilitate the return of funds to Braceros, causing many to protest. The chant “¿*Qué queremos los Braceros? Justicia! Ahora!*”, was not only heard in the late 1940s, but in the 2000s as men continued their struggle to receive the money owed to them.⁴⁸⁹ The process of tracing the movement of money using Archivo General de la Nación (A.G.N.), newspapers, documentaries, court cases, and oral histories has been a complicated task due to the combined demands of Braceros and their family members, and the research of scholars into Bracero history, that has drawn attention to several important questions.

This chapter sets out to answer the following questions: How was the money transferred through the *Fondo de Ahorro Campesino* and how was it sent to México? Who kept track of Bracero's wages in the United States? Who monitored the transfers? And, who ensured that Braceros received their money in México? By tracing the movement of funds from bank

⁴⁸⁶ Jaime Vélez Storey, “Los braceros y el Fondo de Ahorro Campesino”, edited by Maria Eugenia Anguiano Téllez and Miguel J. Hernández Madrid, in *Migración Internacional e Identidades Cambiantes* (El Colegio de Michoacán, 2002), 30.

⁴⁸⁷ Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, And Political Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016) Kindle Edition.

⁴⁸⁸ Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 95.

⁴⁸⁹ Dir. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness* Prod. by Gilbert G. Gonzalez. Films Media Group, 2010. 58 mins, 43:15.

accounts in the United States to Mexican banks, and how the funds in México became “unavailable,” this chapter shows how in most of the cases, funds were recorded, transferred and misused. But more importantly, it demonstrates how Braceros and their families continue fighting for the money that was rightfully theirs.

On February 4, 1944, *La Presa* reported that in the corner of Montolinia and 5 de Mayo, in México City, long lines of Braceros formed outside of the offices del Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola to gain their savings.⁴⁹⁰ These lines would form daily with Braceros waiting for hours without receiving any of their *Fondo de Ahorro Campesino*. For many of Braceros that did not live in México City that would be costly, as they would have to pay for boarding and meals. Financially, they could not remain in México City for days, less alone months. The amount of housing and food would drain them financially, spending the money they were waiting to receive. In México City, many men called “coyotes” would offer to purchase Braceros savings papers for a minimal amount, roughly about half the worth.⁴⁹¹ The purchasing of Braceros’ savings was not only done by coyotes but also by transit police, who would monitor the corner of el Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, since the purchase and sale of Braceros savings became as lucrative as the legendary “mordida.”⁴⁹² Braceros experiences with corrupt program officials, xenophobia in the United States, and now the withholding of their funds in México, manifested an anger and determination that has lasted through the years.

On March 1, 1944, Braceros marched and protested in front of the Palacio Nacional and the Secretaría de Gobernacio, to raise awareness about the failure to transfer Braceros’ money from the United States to México.⁴⁹³ Protestors demanded ~~that~~ the director of the Banco

⁴⁹⁰ Vélez Storey, 19-20.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 22.

Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, engineer Cesar Martino, to authorize and release the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino to each respected Bracero. Martino announced that the bank was not at fault, but the agriculture companies in United States that held on the men's savings until the end of each individual's contract. Martino alleged that funds could take up to six months to be deposited. Therefore, Martino justified the withholding of funds by explaining that he could not release money that has yet to arrive.

In the following months, the Mexican press released editorials that calculated that the deposits from the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola to the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino were around eight million pesos. Yet, these calculations were short. According to *El Universal* an estimated 11.5 million pesos were deposited in the account, which only paid out 2.5 million pesos.⁴⁹⁴ The discrepancy caused the Mexican press to investigate and expose the number of pesos the account held. On December 16, 1945, *Excelsior* in México City exposed that the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino had a balance of 150 million pesos. The corresponded of the Associated Press, Leslie Highley found that the Bracero Program in Washington, that worked in agriculture and locomotives, had approximately 30 million dollars set to be deposited. This signified that as a group, Braceros had made 300 million dollars in their summed-up salary. ⁴⁹⁵ The War Food Administration released a statement to the press with the amounts deposited in Mexican banks:

Table 7.1: Amount received in pesos

1943	11,419,218
1944	25,018,002
1945	36,460,241
Total	\$72,897,461 pesos

⁴⁹⁴ Vélez Storey, 22 and 29. *El Universal*: December 16, 1945'

⁴⁹⁵ Vélez Storey, 29. *Excelsior* December 16, 1945.

The Banco de México transferred a total of 35,183,791 pesos (48.2%) to Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola between January 1943 to December 1945, while Banco de Ahorro Nacional deposited 37,713,670 pesos (52.2%), which summed up to the amount the Food Administration had released.⁴⁹⁶ Yet, in a memo the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social sent to president Ávila Camacho states that the bank has received Braceros funds in the following amount: ⁴⁹⁷

Table 7.2: Amount received in dollars per Year

1943	924,668.91
1944	6,272,844.13
1945	9,403,580.99
Total	16,601,094.03

The totals amount released by the War and Food Administration is slightly lower than the amount deposited in dollars, which can be excused by the change in the exchange rate of the peso, deposits, and the Braceros' payouts.

In 1945, the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social had set the exchange rate at 4.85 pesos, making the amount received in pesos of 80,515,306. According to information given to the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, \$80,000,514.00 (pesos) had been paid to the Mexican government in compliance with the Bracero Program agreement by the United States.⁴⁹⁸ Yet, the amount it claimed to receive, versus the amount calculated by the exchange rate, is over half a million pesos that are unaccounted for. In the same Acuerdo Presidencial, the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social claimed it had paid \$49,878,700.26, and that \$30,121,813.74 was to be paid out.⁴⁹⁹ The fund came into question as the amounts claimed by the Mexican government was lower than those declared by the United States.

⁴⁹⁶ Vélez Storey, 29-30. Universal December 16, 1945

⁴⁹⁷ Archivo General de la Nación (A.G.N.) Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Series 106368/ Box 0884 (546.6/120.1).

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

Since different agencies on both sides of the border, along with news outlets in both countries, released accounts of future and current deposit, interest, payouts, and estimated totals, the amount of money in the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino was unknown. Consequently, in order to assess and account for the funds in 1946, the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social published *Los braceros*, which include the salaries and the funds deposited in the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino.⁵⁰⁰ The book divides the deposits by Agriculture and Locomotive workers to trace the amount each group deposited from 1943 to 1946:

Table 7.3: Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, S.A. (Agriculture)

YEAR	TOTAL RECEIVED	TOTAL PAID
1943	11,419,218.52	2,644,874.04
1944	25,018,003.53	13,260,361.59
1945	39,852,176.87	20,318,818.15
1946	3,865,889.13	19,304,998.03 (up to May)
Total	\$80,155,288.05	\$55,304,051.81

Table 7.4: Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, S.A. (Locomotive)

Year	Total Received	Total Paid
1943	4,484,792.50	1,070,706.58
1944	31,917,902.28	15,188,003.64
1945	48,062,493.22	34,538,915.10
1946	3,633,664.66	3,923,906.68 (up to June)
Total	\$88,098,852.66	\$83,721,532.00

The outline profile of the Bracero funds was created with the direct assistance of the banks that received the deposits.⁵⁰¹ The sum of both totals is 168,254,140 pesos, ten percent of the money men earned, with 139,025,584.81 paid back to Braceros. The Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión

⁵⁰⁰ Dirección de Previsión Social, *Los braceros*. (México, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Dirección de Previsión Social, 1946).

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 89.

Social also calculated that approximately ten percent of Braceros, which were estimated at 30,306, worked the minimum of two months; sixty percent 181,832 worked six months, while thirty percent 90,916 men remained in the United States for the maximum amount of fourteen months.⁵⁰²

The Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social created a chart itemizing each group by time in the United States contribution:⁵⁰³

Table 7.5: Workers individual and collective pay in pesos

Number of workers	Time worked in the United States	Individual wages (pesos)	Total (pesos)
30,306	2 months	1,206.94	36,577,774.24
181, 832	6 months	4,827.79	877,847,270.86
90,916	14 months	8,448.48	768,116,362.00
			\$1,682,116,362.00

The Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión found the chart faulty as it assumed each man made the same wage. For instance, contracts that utilized an hourly wage did not specify how many days or hours each man, individually, worked. Bracero oral histories and wage information in chapter three show that average wages varied by farm. Additionally, Braceros claim to work 14 to 16-hour work days, yet weather and crop affected this. Now, for men that were paid piece rates, their contract did not provide how much they picked a day. Also, it did not consider the amount of times men returned to work after each contract. Most importantly, it established that not every Bracero had the same amount of contribution and therefore, payments would vary. The Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión states that the savings account and manner of collecting the

⁵⁰² Ibid., 86.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 86.

ten percent was faulty and a failure from the beginning. As each Braceros pay was distinct, due to being paid by weight or hourly, as well as location, season, and crop.

There was no way of really knowing the amounts that were supposed to be deposited and who should receive what amount.⁵⁰⁴ The mismanagement and lack of record keeping from the inception of the Bracero Program permitted the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino to become an account with multiple depositors, whose deposits were not individually tracked or accessible to its patrons. The inadequate management of the accounts leads one to assume that men were paid an average sum instead of the actual savings they were entitled to. This permitted a surplus of money in the account.

In December of 1945 due to the findings in *Los braceros*, the Mexican government informed the American Embassy that they wished to remove the clause in the Bracero contract and the international agreement that collected and referred to the Fondo de Ahorro Campesino. Yet, in *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Septiembre de 1945-Agosto de 1946*, the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores does not mention the cancellation of the Fondo de Ahorro. Instead, the report mentions accident, unusual deductions, insurance payments, and workers' compensation deductions from Braceros pay.⁵⁰⁵ México was unable to amend the agreement until its renewal in 1948. The amendment ending the savings account was not ratified by the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores in 1948. In his *Memoria de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Septiembre de 1947-Agosto de 1948*, Jaime Vélez Storey explains that no deduction would take place on Bracero salaries as men's wages continue to be held by the banks and their release is slow and unknown.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 89-90

⁵⁰⁵ Vélez Storey, 32-33.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

An official document from the Secretaría del Trabajo y Prevision Social Acuerdo Presidencial finds that the process to pay a Bracero his savings took about one year, if they managed to have the bank to respond.⁵⁰⁷ Yet, in Secretaría del Trabajo y Prevision Social Acuerdo Presidencial titled, *Devolucion del 10% de Ahorros de Braceros*, stated the American authorities of the Department of Agriculture deposit the saving funds to the Mexican banks, 30 days after the men are repatriated back to México.⁵⁰⁸ Therefore, the year the banks claimed it took to repay Braceros was untrue and funds were not made available by choice.

The Cuenta de Ahorro was managed by Banco Agrícola, which was the primary holder of the accounts of Braceros. They solely knew the amount that were deposited and withdrawn from the account. The amount found in the account was questioned by newspapers regularly as mentioned prior, in which the account provided yearly amounts, but not daily deposits or individual payouts. The banks never provided a detailed ledger with individual Bracero names whose money was being deposited or withdrawn. The bank was able to provide the amount of deposits to match Wells Fargo's accounts, yet the withdrawals were unchecked and taken by word. The mismanagement of the funds can be seen in ledger by T. Cervantes Luna, "individual in charge of the box" on the 20th of December 1952. The ledger provides an example of the vague explanations of withdraws and clear usage of funds for the banks business and governments discretion:⁵⁰⁹

Table 7.6 : "The box of Mexican Migrant Workers" Banco Nacional de México, S.A.

Account of the box of the 1st operation that the Al. C. Director de Asuntos de Trabajadores Mexicanos Migratorios, for the month of November and previous months.
 November 1... Existence as of now.....\$111,703.17
 Deposits:

⁵⁰⁷ A.G.N. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Series 106368/ Box 0884 (546.6/120.1).

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ A.G.N. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Series 106494/ Box 1010 (565.1/16).

November 17 Deposits today s/g vouchers.....	\$581.25	
Deductions:		
Checks drawn against Banco Nacional de México, S.A. in favor of the beneficiary.....	\$686.68	
Checks drawn against the same institution, for the transfer to the account of Moneda Nacional	\$23,812.96	
Sum.....	\$112,311.42	\$24,499.64
Amount to match.....		\$87,811.78
Same Sum.....	\$112,311.42.....	\$112,311.42

Existence AL 1/0 of previous months \$87,811.78

The accounts deposit of \$581.25 is notable as Braceros savings fund deductions were no longer part of the bi-national agreement as of 1949. Therefore, the accounts should have no deposits other than interest payments in 1952. Next, the beneficiary deduction is recorded on November 17 as a single deduction. By beneficiary it means a Bracero payment, but an individual name is not recorded. The use of the noun beneficiary meaning one person will be paid 686.68 pesos, a single payment is made during that 17-day period. Also, the note provides an insight to what the Braceros wages were; the Bracero made \$1,1415.80 in wages laboring in the United States. Now, this quantity is possible if the Bracero worked for the Railroad Company. For example, Aaron Castañeda Gamez, who in 1944 made a yearly wage of \$961.75 at the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, making his ten percent \$96.75.⁵¹⁰ Contracts normally ended at the sixth month mark and were only extended eighteen months. Therefore, the amount is high for one single payout but not unluckily. But the vagueness of the ledger is significant. The ledger does not name the individual being paid out. The naming of the individual or contract would provide record of payment for future inquiries. The accountant is not named in the ledger, signifying that multiple individuals handled the account and detailed information facilitated the misuse of funds.

⁵¹⁰ Aaron Castañeda Gamez, "Tax form," in Bracero History Archive, Item #515, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/515> (accessed June 20, 2017). Note: the exchange rate was 4.50 at the time.

Next, Banco Nacional de México transferred \$23,812.96 to Moneda Nacional without explanation on the ledger as a reason for the large deposit. The deposit into Moneda Nacional ledger by Accountant Guillermo Valdes read as follows:⁵¹¹

Table 7.7: Movement of the account 66701 Moneda Nacional de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores for the month of November of 1952.

Concepts	In	Out	Existencia
Balance as of the 31 st of October, 1952	\$209,461.79		
Deposited in the Banco de Comercio, S.A. on November 1952	\$301,304.34		
Checks issued in the month of November		\$260,068.31	
Existence in the Banco de Comercio, S.A. November 30, 1952		\$250,733.82	
Sumas	\$510,802.13	\$510,802.13	
The Existence of the Returns to October 1952			\$116,015.75
Returns the month of November			\$6,470.68
Total Returns			\$122,486.43

Accountant Guillermo Valdes ledger does not have the deposit from Banco Nacional de México in its November ledger. The \$23,812.96 deposited is unaccounted and unmentioned in the ledger. The account 66701 (above ledger) if connected with the program demonstrates that large deposits are made monthly, even though the savings fund ended in 1949. Various Braceros claimed they had savings deductions in the 1950s. Yet, according to the bi-national agreement, the Fondo de Ahorro was terminated in 1949 because time and difficulty in repayment. Banco Nacional de México, S.A. remained in charge of the account after the savings deduction ended. Additionally, the account 66701 Moneda Nacional de la Secretaría de Relaciones is not labeled

⁵¹¹ A.G.N. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Series 106494/ Box 1010 (565.1/16).

as a Migrant account or Bracero like Banco Nacional de México, S.A. account titled “The box of Mexican Migrant Workers.” The movement between banks changed who the beneficiary was and the overall usage of the funds.

The management of the ten percent deduction from Braceros and their distribution was a failure since the programs onset. The funds were being deposited to a single account as it is transferred between banks. The banks in the United States nor in México created individual accounts. The management of the account in 1944 came into question as the Mexican Labor Ministry officials responded to the United States War Manpower Commission’s concern on how Braceros were being paid back their savings fund withholdings once back in México. The response was, “The institution is technically and practically apt to return the total amount of savings funds to Mexican [workers] ... we have established a system of bookkeeping ... which allows us to have the individual accounts up-to-date.”⁵¹² The records of the system of bookkeeping claimed by the Mexican Ministry is yet to be found.

The records found are not of the savings amount for each Bracero but of their back pay that was owed to them by their employer, which was deposited to the Cuenta de Ahorro.⁵¹³ Men were to wait 14 days before leaving a camp for their pay and transportation at their expense. Many men left prior to the allotted time and did not receive their pay or have their transportation reimbursed to them. Many men who left without pay believed that their employer had swindled them. Yet, their pay was deposited to the savings account without their knowledge, the detail ledgers with contract numbers, names, and employers exist. Consequently, some Braceros are

⁵¹² Alfredo Corchado and Ricardo Sandoval, “Braceros want an old promise met” *The Dallas Morning News* January 27, 2002. <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/immigration/braceros1.htm>. (Accessed January 22, 2018).

⁵¹³ National Archives and Records Administration (NACP), Record Group 211, Entry 196, Box 1, Records of the War Manpower Commission (B-D) at College Park, Maryland.

not only owed their savings but their wages which have not been acknowledge to this date by either government as being part of the savings account.

Men could not walk into the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola and with their identification card withdraw their funds upon their return. The creation of individual accounts was possible as the Department of Labor created a list of Braceros each month whose contracts were terminated and repatriated. Within these lists was the amount each man paid into the Fondo de Ahorro. The list was sent to Secretaría del Trabajo y Prevision Social, which does not acknowledge providing this list to the banks nor do any bank records acknowledge a Bracero list with their individual savings amount existing.⁵¹⁴ Consequently, once the money was transferred to the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola, it was placed in one account without record of the recipients or amounts corresponding to each Bracero. There are countless letters from the Banco Nacional Crédito Agrícola asking the president to contact the War Food Administration for payment of contracts in order to pay each individual. These letters were a summary of multiple Braceros who attempted to collect their funds, which the bank claimed their funds had not arrived. The letters had Bracero names, contract numbers, amount due, and dates labored. Clearly Braceros attempted to retrieve their funds as soon as they returned to México.

THE STRUGGLE TO ATTAIN THEIR SAVINGS

Braceros wrote to their president (México had four different presidents during the 22 years of the program) about the savings guaranteed to them by their contracts upon their return from the United States. On December 29, 1945 Luciano Delgado and Jose Hernandez contacted president Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) via telegram to intercede for them in receiving their savings. Delgado and Hernandez are instructed by the Oficina Mayor de la Presidencia de la

⁵¹⁴ A.G.N. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Series 106368/ Box 0884 (546.6/120.1).

Republica to contact the Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de México in the United States, as it was in charge in depositing the funds in the credit institutions of el Banco de Ahorro Nacional and el Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola.⁵¹⁵ The instructions that Delgado and Hernandez received demonstrate that the staff of the Oficina Mayor de la Presidencia de la Republica was not aware of how deposits were made or that there was a third depositor. According to the War Food Administration, Wells Fargo and Union Trust transferred the funds to Banco de México, which was designated to transfer the funds to Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola. In October of 1943, Braceros founded The Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de México in the United States in Fullerton, California, to address and challenge the treatment of Braceros.⁵¹⁶ The Alianza sought to protect their rights as stated in the bi-national agreement.⁵¹⁷ They collected membership fees but were not responsible for collecting or depositing the ten percent savings for the Bracero Fondo de Ahorro. There is no correspondence between the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola and Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de México in the United States in this matter.

The Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola contacted attorney Roberto Amoros of the Oficina Mayor de la Presidencia de la Republica to provide a copy of Delgado and Hernandez's letter to verify the office of the president's instructions for the bank to pay the 10 percent savings the ex-Braceros had requested. While examining the Archivo General de la Nación, the bank would respond in the same manner to every man like Delgado and Hernandez attempting to collect their money. They would inform the Bracero that the Oficina Mayor was unable to deliver the money because the men were not at home when the notice to pick up their funds was sent, or the delivery address was incorrect. Luis Gonzalez Aguilar check for \$177.67 was sent to

⁵¹⁵Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ A.G.N. Manuel Ávila Camacho Series 103050/ Box 0446 (437.1/340).

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.; University Special Archive., Galarza Papers Box 19 Folders 6 and 7.

his previous employers' address in the United States. His check was returned to the Manuel Tello from the Dirección General del Servicio Consular, who forwarded his check to the Dirección General de Correo, which were to deliver the check to the correct address in Mexicali, Baja California.⁵¹⁸ It is unclear if Gonzalez Aguilar received the check. There are many unknowns when it came to Bracero's receiving their money as request for payments outnumber the men who acknowledge receiving a partial payment.

There is proof that a few Braceros received a partial sum of their savings. Juan Vega Olvera from México City informed President Manuel Ávila Camacho on May of 1944 that he had received \$331.69 of the \$635 owed to him.⁵¹⁹ It is unknown the process that Vega Olvera underwent to receive his funds or if he ever received the \$303.31 still owed to him. Additionally, it is unknown how Vega Olvera knew he was owed \$635. However, one must note that Vega Olvera was from México City, facilitating his ability to stand in line at the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola in México City any day he was given and with little financial strain. Even with Vega Olvera residency in México City, the process was slow as he felt the need to reach out to the president to facilitate and expedite the process.

Bracero wives and widows also sought aid from the president. Mireya Loza found that Altagracia Estrada Flores, from Uruapan, Michoacán asked President Manuel Ávila Camacho "to issue her a copy of her deceased husband's contract to claim his savings. She explained that she was left to care of their seven children after his death in Santa Barbara, California on March 4, 1944."⁵²⁰ She sought her husband's savings to aid her in supporting their children. María Luz Rodríguez Viuda de Sarmiento from Chalchihuites, Zacatecas on May 5, 1948 asked the

⁵¹⁸ A.G.N. Miguel Aleman Valdez Series 1064920 Box 0950 (671/5298).

⁵¹⁹ A.G.N. Miguel Aleman Valdez Series 106367 Box 594 (546.6/1-31).

⁵²⁰ Loza, 138.

president for help retrieving her son's savings from Banco Agrícola. Her son had passed in the United States working under contract number 59301.⁵²¹ María Luz Rodríguez as a widow depended on her son for financial survival. His savings was to aid her in supporting her surviving children. Some women sought aid directly from the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola itself to collect their loved one's Fondo de Ahorro. Agipina Medina Viuda de Escobedo wrote to the Banco Nacional de Crédito Agrícola on June 10 and 24 of 1947, requesting her deceased husband's Sabino Escobedo Espinosa Fondo de Ahorro. The bank acknowledged receiving her two letters and advised her to provide a copy of her husband's contract to them which she could request from the Secretaría de Gobernación.⁵²² The bank went as far as providing Agipina the address of the Secretaría de Gobernación which the bank in its correspondence rarely did. It is unclear if Agipina Medina Viuda de Escobedo, María Luz Rodríguez, or Altagracia Estrada Flores ever obtained the savings, but the multiple letters sent demonstrate that women were actively attempting to recuperate the funds at the time.

To women and families this money provided stability for a period until the family adjusted to not having its patriarchal provider. The women mentioned above utilize the word *viuda* (widow) or mention how their husband/son was the only male provider emphasizing the importance this money has on the family dynamics. Women were rarely aware of the deductions or the amount due to their Bracero relative, as men and women hardly discussed contracts and pay. It is clear that few Braceros knew the amount owed to them, themselves but were aware of the deduction. Bracero's and their kin in their request to collect their money had to provide contracts as proof for a payout.

⁵²¹ A.G.N. Miguel Aleman Valdez Series 106367 Box 594 (546.6/1-31).

⁵²² Ibid.

To both Braceros and their kin, the Cuenta de Ahorro was to aid the family in purchasing land, paying off debt, and allow for upward mobility. To many Braceros whose biweekly paychecks after deductions would range from cents to a couple hundred dollars this savings fund permitted them to add to the money they had saved on their own. The money men expected to receive once they returned symbolized their success in the program regardless of the struggles they had faced.

REDISCOVERING THEIR SAVINGS

Ventura Gutierrez, a labor organizer whose involvement began with his grandmother being a Bracero's widow, inquired over Social Security benefits at American federal insurance program. Gutierrez' grandmother believed that she was entitled to his Social Security benefits as he labored as a Bracero for years and had paid into it (she believed he paid into Social Security). His search through her documents "led him to a document about the compulsory savings account."⁵²³ He realized that she was entitled to ten percent of his grandfather's collective wages. Gutierrez search led to the organization of Braceros and their widows, who he sought to aid men who with time forgot or moved on from the idea of retrieving their savings.

On May 5, 1998 Gutierrez brought together four Braceros as an initiative of *Unión sin Fronteras* to determine what should be done about the savings that was withheld. The group decided to unanimously resolve what to them was an example of fraud at the highest levels of government.⁵²⁴ Gutierrez and the four Braceros sought to answer the questions in everyone's mind, where is the money and how do they retrieve it? Gutierrez spent two years (1999 and 2000) organizing rallies and seeking lawyers to press Bracero claims to the savings they were

⁵²³ Belluck, "Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay."

⁵²⁴ Loza, 145.

owed.⁵²⁵ Through meetings and press conferences in Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán, the three largest Bracero sending states, Gutierrez was able to form and gain attention for their cause. Gutierrez subsequently founded the Bi-national Braceroproa Alliance's whose mission is to organize Braceros and their families in hopes of pressuring the Mexican government to pay the men the money they earned.⁵²⁶

Braceros in the United States and México began to rally, hold demonstrations, and gain international attention. Braceroproa Alliance led a protest at the corporate offices of Banrural in México City shutting down the bank in effort to force the bank to work with Braceros. A symbolic "caravan" by the Braceroproa Alliance, a group that has been pressing the American and Mexican governments for reimbursements of up to \$1 billion, started with rallies early April 2002 in Yakima, Washington, with stops at Mexican consulates in key cities along both sides of the border until arriving in México City.⁵²⁷ Members of the alliance planned to lobby the Mexican Congress for reparations, while gaining support along the way.

The rallies and protest brought Braceros and their families to express grievances, anger, provide hope and create unity in the struggle for Bracero rights. In California, Alex Becerra observed a protest from far he watched Braceros bearing banners and picket signs and singing Mexican folk songs.⁵²⁸ To Becerra, the protests seemed useless; his father an ex-Bracero had told him about his experiences in the program. The funds seemed a myth and Becerra like his father had given up hope of receiving the money. ⁵²⁹ Becerra is not alone in his doubt the issue of the

⁵²⁵ Belluck, "Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay."

⁵²⁶ Adam Goodman and Verónica Zapata Rivera, "Bracero Guestworkers, Unpaid" *Jacobin* October 16, 2013. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2013/10/bracero-guestworkers-unpaid/> (Accessed June 6, 2017).

⁵²⁷ Gariot Louima, "Bracero Protest 'Caravan' Comes to L.A." *Los Angeles Times*. April 11, 2002 <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/apr/11/local/me-37375> (Accessed June 5, 2017).

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

savings fund was forgotten because many had given up hope. The rallies, marches, and protest were to give hope and voice to an issue that needed to finally be addressed.

In a protest represented in the documentary, *Harvest of Loneliness*, elderly men and women with a cane in one hand and a sign on the other walked without fear chanting, “*Braceros, Unidos, Jamás Serán Vencidos!*” (Braceros United, Will Never be Defeated).⁵³⁰ The message of the protest was simple: We Want Our Money, We No Longer Wanted Promises. Braceros and their supporters protested throughout the United States and México, no longer allowing themselves to be ignored into silence. Men and women with aid of the Bi-national Braceroproa Alliance set up tents and make shift kitchens outside of President Vince Fox’s “White House” -a home which protesters claimed symbolized the misuse of funds for personal advancement from their “corrupt government.”⁵³¹ On February 7, 2004, more than 2,000 Bi-national Braceroproa Alliance’s Braceros and their supporters descended upon the family ranch of President Fox in the State of Guanajuato. A smaller group managed to make it to Fox’s door, where they demanded to be paid. Their protest received attention in the Mexican media, who also wondered what happen to the money Braceros were owed.⁵³²

The media on both sides of the border could not ignore the Bracero manifestations that were occurring monthly on both sides of the border. Braceros began meeting weekly in parks, plazas, and meeting halls creating a fraternity, which would provide hope for men and their families and strengthen the movement. It is against this backdrop that Bi-national Braceroproa Bracero members filed a class action lawsuit on March of 2001 in California against the United

⁵³⁰ *Harvest of Loneliness*, 43:24

⁵³¹ Pablo Pérez, “Braceros: Los Campesinos Mexicanos se plantan en la ‘Casa Blanca.’” HispanoPost en México <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubPNodCJCWI>. (Accessed June 22, 2017.)

⁵³² Goodman and Zapata Rivera, “Bracero Guest workers, Unpaid.” In part, led Fox to approve a lump sum payment of 38,000 pesos (just under \$3,000) to each person who could prove that he had been contracted as a Bracero decades ago.

States and México on behalf of 300,000 Braceros and their heirs.⁵³³ According to the United States government records, at least 32 million dollars were withheld from Bracero wages. “It is unclear how much money was returned to Braceros and estimates varied considerably.”⁵³⁴ The 1946 Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social report *Los braceros* that 80,155,288.05 was deposited and only 55,304,051.84 (about 69%) had been paid out.⁵³⁵ “Advocates and academics estimate the amount of money owed including interest could be more than \$500 million or more.” In the archival research I conducted not one single Bracero writes to inform that he received his savings, yet there are oral histories of men acknowledging they were paid their savings upon their return. In my interviews not a single Bracero, I came across had received their savings (until after the 2006 lawsuit). If men had been paid there were certainly a lot more that had not received their savings.

As the manifestations and cries of the injustices faced by men during the Bracero Program increased, President George W. Bush Jr. announced his administration’s views on immigration reform in his first formal request to Congress on January 7, 2004. The proposal, which was delivered in the form of a statement of principles, included, among other things, the creation of a temporary worker program for newcomers and for immigrants currently living in the United States without authorization. Bush explained that such reform was needed to reduce the potential national security threat of having eight million unidentified, unauthorized immigrants in the United States. He also stressed that the proposed reform would help prevent future exploitation of immigrants and human smuggling and protect the wages of all workers.

⁵³³ Belluck, “Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay.”

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Dirección de Previsión Social, *Los braceros*. (México, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Dirección de Previsión Social, 1946).

The announcement was given days before Bush's meeting with México's President Vicente Fox at the Summit of the Americas.⁵³⁶

The announcement of a possible second Bracero Program by President Bush Jr. in 2004 caused many to question its reinstitution and the shortcomings of the first program. In the discussion poor working conditions and protection for workers were among the main topics. The issue of money owed to Braceros was also raised as the media began to investigate the original Bracero Program and speak to various Bracero Associations and men.⁵³⁷ The announcement by President Bush and his scheduled meeting with President Fox provided organizers the necessary platform for their cause to gain international media attention. After those events, the lawsuit, marches and manifestations occurring could not be ignored.

The United States government maintained the lawsuit belonged in Mexican courts. The United States claimed that the statute of limitation had passed, therefore; they were legally no longer able to be sued, pointing out that they had immunity.⁵³⁸ The Mexican government insisted it was immune from suits filed in foreign courts and stated it had no documentation to support the Braceros' claims.⁵³⁹ Lawyers representing the United States and Mexican governments in the case refused to comment to reporters, as did the United States Justice Department officials in Washington, and Interior and Foreign Ministry officials in México City. But publicly, American lawyers hired by the Mexican government, supported an expected bid by

⁵³⁶ Maia Jachimowicz, "Bush Proposes New Temporary Worker Program" *Migration Policy Institute*. February 1, 2004. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/bush-proposes-new-temporary-worker-program> (Accessed June 5, 2017).

⁵³⁷ Pam Belluck, "Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay." *The New York Times*. April 29, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/29/us/mexican-laborers-in-us-during-war-sue-for-back-pay.html?mwrsm=Email> (Accessed June 5, 2017).

⁵³⁸ 219 F. Supp. 2d 1027; 2002 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16497. www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic. (Accessed: June 20, 2017).

⁵³⁹ Corchado and Sandoval, "Braceros want an old promise met."

the United States Justice Department to have judges throw out the Braceros' lawsuit.⁵⁴⁰ It was believed that if the lawsuit was to take place in México, it would be quickly thrown out in Mexican civil courts. It was beneficial for Braceros to file suit in the United States even if it dealt with a "Mexican matter" as "American courts have a history of weighing human rights cases from around the world."⁵⁴¹ Also, it was argued that the United States was the location where the initial deductions had taken place.

Mexican officials attended meetings with former Braceros in the winter of 2000. Mexican Interior Minister Santiago Creel also met with a Mexican congressional committee investigating the scandal, promising cooperation with the probe.⁵⁴² The Mexican government set up a commission to investigate Braceros accusations of their missing savings account. Juan Hernandez, the director of the President's Office on Mexicans Living Abroad, directed an "exhaustive study" which was conducted by "good people" Mexican legislatures and federal prosecutors. The committee's goal was to no longer "close our eyes to them (Braceros) as may have been done in the past by both governments," clearly marking México's acknowledgement of the funds.⁵⁴³

Two other defendants named in the lawsuit were Wells Fargo Bank and Banrural Banco (which was Banco de Crédito Agrícola until 1976). Wells Fargo Bank, spokesperson Larry Haeg, said that the only documents the bank had been able to find were from 1944 and 1945. The documentation, according to Haeg, indicated that Wells Fargo was one of the many depositories, and "had no information that this matter wasn't handled satisfactory."⁵⁴⁴ The Wells Fargo

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Belluck, "Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay."

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

documents from 1944 and 1945 are part of a report filed by Emil Leunberger, then-Vice President for the Bank's Foreign Department, after he returned from two trips to México to visit with officials from the Banco Nacional de México.⁵⁴⁵ In the 1944 report, Leunberger exposed that “Mr. Rodrigo Gomez, Banco Nacional de México manager expressed satisfaction with the banking relations they have with us, and seemed particularly pleased with the arrangement whereby we act as depository for the salary deductions of Mexican railway and farm in this country, which have passed through their account with us.” In the April 1945 report, Leunberger stated that “Mr. Carlos H. Palmer, Foreign Department Chief “oversaw the arrangements whereby the salary deductions of Mexican farm and railroad laborers are deposited with us for credit of the Banco de México, México City.”⁵⁴⁶ Wells Fargo’s Los Angeles spokeswoman, Kathleen Shilkret, said researchers had not located documents that detail how much, how often or the process by which they transferred money to Banco Nacional de México. Wells Fargo legal-affairs officials stated that the bank was not liable for the lost money, “because we were just a funnel from one party to another.”⁵⁴⁷ Braceros could not prove that Wells Fargo breached their contract that bank entered into with a depositor or borrower.⁵⁴⁸ Therefore, Wells Fargo had legally transferred all funds and was not liable for any amount of money owed to Braceros.

Banrural stated repeatedly that bank officials had not found records that proved the deposits were made. Banco Agrícola had millions of pesos in the red before it was merged with Banrural, and no accounts marked Bracero was found in their records.⁵⁴⁹ But once officials from

⁵⁴⁵ Yvette Cabrera, “Bracero savings transfer proved WWII-era papers from Wells Fargo show money deducted from paychecks was sent to a México bank.” *The Orange County Register* November 17, 1999. <http://www.kentlaw.edu/faculty/rstaudt/classes/2009PublicInterestLaw/Bracero%20Savings%20Transfer%20Proved.doc> (Accessed June 5, 2017).

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ 219 F. Supp. 2d 1027; 2002 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16497. www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic. (Accessed: June 20, 2017).

⁵⁴⁹ Corchado and Sandoval, “Braceros want an old promise met.”

Banrural were provided documents obtained from Wells Fargo Bank's corporate archives in San Francisco, the bank was willing to accept individual claims.⁵⁵⁰ Banrural explained the misinformation and misplacement of the account as an error that occurred do to the merger, Hermes Castro Ojeda, a Banrural spokesman stated.⁵⁵¹ Banrural Banco spokesman, Victor Manuel Villareal, asked Braceros to submit copies of all documentation, from contracts to pay stubs.⁵⁵² The request by the Banrural Banco for Bracero's and their heirs to submit all documentation to them was met with mistrust by Bracero advocates, Braceros, and their heirs.

A simple visit to the Archivo General de la Nación would have placed deposits, memos, and telegrams validating each Braceros claim to their respected savings. Or even simply reading a Bracero contract or the binational Bracero agreement (Public Law 40) would had reassured each bank that they owed money to Braceros. The question should have not been to debate or contest men's claims but the management of an account with millions of pesos not payable to a sole person but a collective group of men. The intricate movement of deposits during the program were not established by Braceros but the United States and Mexican governments. The money was sent to regional offices of the federal government's wartime manpower agencies, which forwarded the cash to Washington. From there the money went to Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco, where the Mexican government-maintained accounts. Afterward, México's central bank issued credits to Banco Agrícola and Banco Nacional del Ahorro – the national savings bank that was supposed to redistribute the funds. According to archival records, the Banco Agrícola and Banco Nacional del Ahorro had received millions from Wells Fargo and other depositors. These banks and its affiliates had to produce this account.

⁵⁵⁰ Cabrera, "Bracero savings transfer proved WWII-era papers from Wells Fargo show money deducted from paychecks was sent to a México bank."

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Belluck, "Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay."

On August 3, 2002, Judge Charles R. Breyer of Federal District Court in San Francisco, dismissed the lawsuit. Judge Breyer wrote that he did “not doubt that many Braceros never received Saving Fund withholdings which they were entitled to.”⁵⁵³ In dismissing the claim, Judge Breyer ruled that México and its banks, which were state owned at the time, were covered by sovereign immunity. The judge also dismissed claims against Wells Fargo Bank, which had been responsible for transferring the money to México, finding that the lawyers for the Braceros had failed to state a claim against the bank.⁵⁵⁴ The judge also dismissed claims against the United States, stating that the statute of limitations had run out, but he did allow for the case to be reopened if proof that Braceros were unaware of the deductions could be presented. If the lawyer representing Braceros could prove that, then the statute of limitations had not started, and they could successfully appeal their suit against the United States.⁵⁵⁵ Rather than México and its banks taking upon themselves the obligation “to do what’s right in this case, they have always hidden behind legal technicalities.”⁵⁵⁶ The United States and Wells Fargo Bank transferred the funds as instructed by the Bracero Agreement.

Alejandro Romero Gudino, who heads the legal department of México's National Bank of Rural Credit / Banco Rural, the federally run farm-credit bank, is quoted by *Los Angeles Times* in 1999 stating, “Why didn't they make a claim after five years, or 10 years, or 15 or 20 years?”⁵⁵⁷ The answer is simple and complex: many Braceros attempted to regain their savings

⁵⁵³ Barbara Whitaker “Judge Dismisses Mexican Laborers’ Suit for Savings Taken From Pay in 40’s.” The New York Times August 30, 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/30/us/judge-dismisses-mexican-laborers-suit-for-savings-taken-from-pay-in-40-s.html> (Accessed June 7, 2017).

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ken Ellingwood, “Braceros Demand Lost Legacy Savings: Aging Laborers Seek Millions Deducted From Earnings And Sent To México” November 15, 1999 *Los Angeles Times* <Http://Articles.Latimes.Com/1999/Nov/15/News/Mn-33954> (Accessed September 1, 2014). Ellingwood, “Braceros Demand Lost Legacy Savings: Aging Laborers Seek Millions Deducted From Earnings And Sent To México”

unsuccessfully since 1943, many gave up, while others were unaware their contracts provided for such deductions. Natividad Yáñez explained that Ruben Luna, her husband, never mentioned that his pay had a ten percent deduction and was unaware until the protest began in the streets of México.⁵⁵⁸ Rosa's husband never provided her a contract and therefore, she did not become aware of the deduction until a lawyer went to La Noria.⁵⁵⁹ Bracero, Ramiro Briseño, explains that he never looked at his checks but did have deductions. He had heard of the savings account during the program but had no expectations of ever receiving his savings.⁵⁶⁰ Braceros and their wives were not aware of the savings as the emphasis in their contract was duration and wages, which were located on the first page of the contract. The Bracero contract for Carmen Pérez Pacheco was five pages long and it contained provisions of the Standard Work Contract, but according to his widow, Modesta Gonzalez, the first page was the only sheet he was given, and it does not recall four other pages. Yet, Jose Franco-Montano's contract is a single page that does not mention any other sheets or provisions.⁵⁶¹ Braceros contracts varied by year and location, therefore men were unaware of changes that went beyond pay, charges for boarding and meals, and duration of employment. This confusion is due to the creation, termination, and change of management regarding the savings deduction, and by allowing growers to create their own contract.

As the program was renewed throughout the years, the management and existence of the Fondo de Ahorro changed. "The Fondo de Ahorro deductions were terminated on January 1,

⁵⁵⁸ Natividad Luna Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (March 29, 2009).

⁵⁵⁹ Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (June 27, 2014).

⁵⁶⁰ Ramiro Briseño, interviewed by Mayra L. Ávila on the Bracero Program, La Noria, Jalisco, April 4, 2009.

⁵⁶¹ Labor contracts for Jose Franco-Montano and Carmen Pérez, in authors possession.

1946 through December 31, 1947. However, some Braceros continued working in the United States under the original agreements that “contained the ten percent deduction.”⁵⁶² In 1948, the United States and México entered into another agreement in which each Bracero entered into a contract directly with his employer in the United States. In this way, the United States was no longer a signatory to the individual work contract. Under this agreement, which was in effect from February 1948 through October 1948, the employer again withheld ten percent of each workers wages. However, the withheld wages were to be returned directly to the Bracero in the form of a check upon termination of the work contract.”⁵⁶³ The check was redeemable only when endorsed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service as the worker returned to México.⁵⁶⁴ A new international agreement was again negotiated in 1949, and under this program no savings deductions of any kind were to take place.⁵⁶⁵ These changes created confusion among Braceros and government agencies.

Regardless of the “missing accounts” and changes in the contracts, the Mexican government asked workers and their advocates to present their individual claims at the nation's current farm bank. This was a decision made by the Mexican government prior to the settlement of the lawsuit, “But only 13 branches across México were designated to accept the inquiries.”⁵⁶⁶ In the United States, Braceros could file compensation claims at the Mexican consulates. The problem for the Braceros residing in the United States, many of whom are naturalized citizens, is

⁵⁶² 219 F. Supp. 2d 1027; 2002 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16497. www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic. (Accessed: June 20, 2017).

⁵⁶³ 219 F. Supp. 2d 1027; 2002 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16497. www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic. (Accessed: June 20, 2017).

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Steven Mikulan, “Braceros Rally Outside Mexican Consulat.” LA Weekly <http://www.laweekly.com/news/braceros-rally-outside-mexican-consulate-2395300> (Accessed May 31, 2017).

a government decree declaring that the money can only be picked up in México.⁵⁶⁷ The picking up of funds solely in México became the next battle for Braceros as some resided in the United States, undocumented. Through manifestations, letters, and petitions, México permitted the picking up of funds at the Mexican consulate. Each Bracero, or his survivor(s), was paid roughly \$3,800.⁵⁶⁸

Less than 30 percent of Braceros are still alive, and all are 60 years and older.⁵⁶⁹ The claims of men as Braceros were hampered by the passage of time. Most Braceros were elderly, dead, and many discarded or misplaced contracts and Bracero visas that they no longer viewed as important or necessary. Albino Reyna Gallegos, who lives in México and was a 100 years old, worked in Oregon and California, but he, like many others, do not have his documents as proof, just his memories.⁵⁷⁰ However, some still have paperwork, like Jose Franco Montano from La Noria, Jalisco; widow Severa Godinez de Franco, whose husbands' contract shows he worked in Oregon; and Carmen Pérez Pacheco from Poncitlán, Jalisco, who worked in California.⁵⁷¹ Braceros and their kin were left with the burden to prove their participation, since the government did not have proof, names, or any documentation to aid those who had no records.

But more importantly, regardless of how long Braceros had waited, the money still belonged to each Bracero. "This is a classic human-rights issue where we're talking about the interest of individuals who were wronged. This is also about a greater social issue. This is important to the Hispanic community because this is about the community's soldiers in the field who are now seeking justice," said Mr. Bill Lee, a top civil rights prosecutor in the Clinton

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Pablo Pérez, "Braceros: Los Campesinos Mexicanos se plantan en la 'Casa Blanca.'" HispanoPost en México <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubPNodCJCWI>. (Accessed June 22, 2017.)

⁵⁷⁰ Belluck, "Mexican Laborers in U.S. During War Sue for Back Pay."

⁵⁷¹ Author has these contracts in her possession.

administration, and now a partner in the San Francisco-based law firm Lieff, Cabraser, Heinmann and Bernstein.⁵⁷²

With only 13 branches designated and a mandatory Mexican pick up, these numbered locations were filled with the 300,000 plus Braceros and/or their kin. Men, widows, and children of Braceros set out to meet the initial submission and pick up deadline of January 2003, which has been extended. Activists in the United States organized caravans to facilitate travel for the countless Braceros who could not afford flights or individual travel. A caravan went to Mexicali on December 20, 2002 to obtain pension checks on the Mexican side of the border for those living in California. Various communities throughout México, such as in La Noria, along with neighboring ranchos of Ranchito Nuevo and Poncitlán men and widows loaded in trucks and headed to Guadalajara. The Mexican government has begun to pay Braceros their savings.

In 2011 a large number of La Noria residents and neighboring ranchos received their Fondo de Ahorro check of \$3,500. Braceros, widows, or next of kin arrived with proof of participation in the program. The Mexican government requested people to turn in original visas, contracts, or paystubs to receive their funds. In La Noria, Sandra Yáñez, a Bracero daughter and activist, urged residents to take color copies but not to turn in their original documents. She took it upon herself to color the copies residents' documents. She found it odd that the government preferred originals instead of copies. She explained that she did not trust the Mexican government and did not want to take any chances.⁵⁷³

Sandra Yáñez accompanied her father David Yáñez and aunt Natividad Yáñez along with various Braceros and widows from La Noria to Guadalajara, where they were to disburse the

⁵⁷² Corchado and Ricardo Sandoval, "Braceros want an old promise met."

⁵⁷³ Sandra Yáñez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (July 6, 2014).

funds. She described the crowd as a “tercer edad” reunion.⁵⁷⁴ Sandra described the long lines of elderly men and women wrapping around the bank in the hot sun. Men and women waited up to seven hours to receive their funds, which Sandra found as an injustice. She explained men and women collapsed of heat exhaustion and that just added to the insult Braceros faced throughout the years. She does point out that one individual died waiting from a heart attack, and Natividad confirms the account. To Sandra, the process was poorly organized as the elderly should not have to wait in the sun for hours. Instead, the funds should have been sent to local branches for pick up at different dates alphabetically. Natividad and David used the handicap line that was only an hour to two waiting. Natividad mentioned that she would have not been able to wait seven hours in the sun since her health would have suffered. Forcing people to wait for seven hours throughout the three days of payouts was inhumane.

Sandra joked that the first thing people did with their money was to buy water.⁵⁷⁵ Many Braceros, their widows, and family members stated that they would pay off debts and get medical treatment with their funds. Natividad joked that she would pay off her funeral expenses, while her daughters told her she had no excuses not to see a doctor.⁵⁷⁶ David explained he used his money to buy new farm equipment.

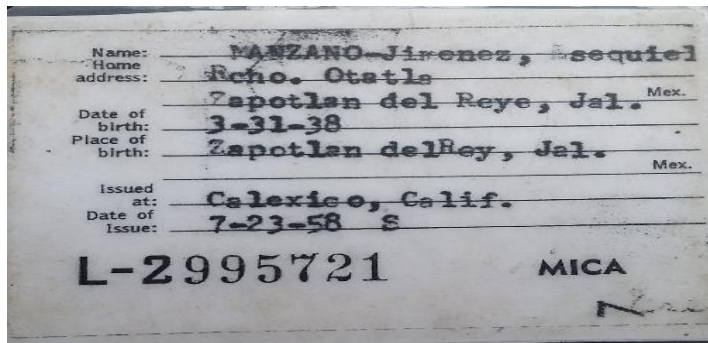
However, many have not received payments due to spelling errors, lack of proof, or, unfortunately, because were swindled by local lawyers. Ezequiel Manzono-Jimenes, from Poncitlán, Jalisco, contracted a lawyer who was representing and aiding various local Braceros in the filling of their paperwork for a minimal fee, plus expenses. Manzono-Jimenes and local Braceros paid 500 pesos each for their lawyer’s expenses, and travel to Guadalajara to submit

⁵⁷⁴Tercee edad meand senior citizens.

⁵⁷⁵ Sandra Yañez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (July 6, 2014).

⁵⁷⁶ Conversation with Natividad Yañez, Maria Rosalba Ávila, and Isabel Luna.

and retrieve their pay. According to Manzono-Jimenes, in the five years they had their lawyer, only a handful of men have received their benefits. Manzono-Jimenes was notified that there were issues with the spelling of his name and, since first and last names did not match, his identity could not be confirmed. Ezequiel's name had been written with an "s" instead of a "z."



He mentioned that he had paid the lawyers expenses three times, attempting to file the proper paperwork to get his name fixed.⁵⁷⁷ Yet, nothing had come from it. When I interviewed

Illustration 7.2: Ezequiel Manzono- Jimenes Bracero identification card. Ezequiel in 2014, he asked if I could do anything to help him, as his lawyer wanted 250 pesos to file more paperwork in his behalf. I contacted the offices handling the Cuenta de Ahorra and Reimbursements through email, informing them of the misspelling and including Manzono-Jimenes' Bracero visa and his Voters Registration Card with his picture and complete name. Additionally, in the email I provided his phone number and current address. Within a week, Ezequiel sent word that he had received a letter from Cuenta de Ahorro, with a reimbursement date and the name of the local bank where he could pick up his money. He also had to provide his Bracero card, which I encouraged him to provide color copies of the front and back, and to take the original, but not to provide it unless the copies were not enough and his current identification card. Manzono-Jimenes had no issues receiving his money with the copies of his Bracero visa. He had received his money after a simple email after waiting for five years, paying a lawyer's expenses without solution. The

⁵⁷⁷ Ezequiel Manzono-Jimenes, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (July 4, 2014).

lawyer that Manzano-Jimenes hired had two other men, to whom I provided their children with the numbers and emails of the Cuenta de Ahorra and Reimbursement Office, which they passed on to other Braceros.

Many men and widows would not speak to me as their lawyer had advised them not to talk to anyone about the program or their case. When I went to interview Jane Doe, she apologized and stated that her lawyer advised her not to speak to anyone because they may try to swindle her out of her funds. I attempted to reassure her that it was not my intention and thanked her for her time.⁵⁷⁸ I am unsure if Jane Doe ever received her funds and how much she paid her lawyer after all the expenses. But I did find that in Ranchito Nuevo many individuals with the same lawyer had not received their funds and would not speak about the program, their experience, or their attempt to recover their funds. I left many families of Braceros the form with the Cuenta de Ahorra and Reimbursement Offices number and email information, but many tossed them after I left, in fear it was a scam. Unfortunately, Braceros and their families continue to be taken advantage of by corrupt lawyers. Attorneys have collected fees for paperwork, trips for meetings, yet have not gained men or widows their funds in the five plus years they been “attempting.” Many Braceros that I came across referred to themselves as simple *campesinos* who did not know about computers and trusted that only through a lawyer they could receive their funds.

Lack of proof also caused individuals and their kin from receiving their funds. Rosa’s husband could not receive his money because of lack of evidence. She explained that he had no records such as a pay stub, visa, or contract. Rosa explained that she accompanied her husband to Yakima, Washington, where he worked as an apple picker, to get proof from the farmers he had

⁵⁷⁸ Conversation with Jane Doe. July 5, 2014.

worked for years with. But the farmer claimed he had not kept the paperwork. Rosa assumed the farmer did not want to get in trouble for employing her husband, not just during but after the program had ended. Additionally, she mentions that her husband worked with another man's Bracero identification card and that his wife is reaping those benefits. Unfortunately, Rosa nor her husband were able to collect the funds because of lack of proof.⁵⁷⁹

LEGACY

The initial unwillingness of México to aid its elderly Braceros and their widows came as no surprise to many. Braceros were cheap labor whose pleas were ignored throughout the decades as they lacked the funds and organizations to aid in their struggles. But Braceros had a younger generation who would not be silenced. The children and grandchildren of Braceros ensured that they would no longer be ignored. The manifestations and organizations that began in 1998 sought México and the United States governments to acknowledge the program, Braceros and their rights, specifically, their savings. Braceros and their activism brought back a part of history that had been forgotten.

Through the Bracero Justice Movement (BJM) a phrase coined by historian Stephen Pitti, ex Braceros activist, and their kin began to articulate what historian Mireya Loza calls *politica de la dignidad*, which calls for the state to protect migrant workers beyond the physical boundaries of México.⁵⁸⁰ The BJM sought to recreate a collective memory in which Braceros recalled the positive and negative memories without remaining silent of their entire experience.⁵⁸¹ The fraternity that men created during the struggle to get their Fondo de Ahorro relieved, reaffirmed,

⁵⁷⁹ Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez, Interview by Mayra L. Ávila. *La Noria* on The Bracero Program (June 27, 2014).

⁵⁸⁰ Loza, 139.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 139.

and brought to light their experiences and a part of Mexican and American history many do not know.

Epilogue: Legacy: The Changes in Memory

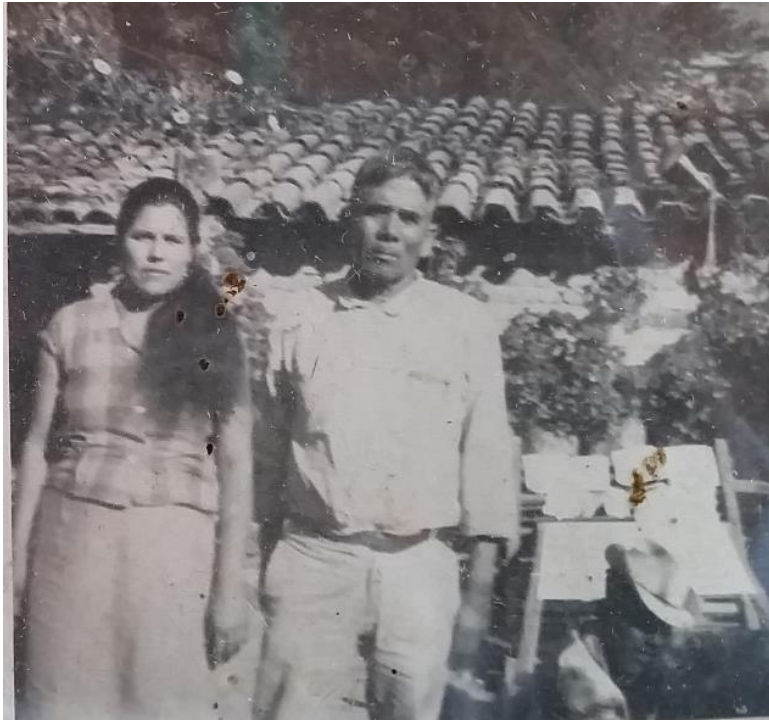


Illustration 7.3: Bracero and His Wife, La Noria⁵⁸²

The Bracero Program was extended, interrupted, re-negotiated, and re-instated many times during its twenty-two years of existence. The program is characterized by contracts that were not followed either through mistreatment, low wages, or ill conditions. The lax enforcement of the binational agreement permitted and reinforced the mistreatment Mexican laborers experienced in the United States. This is due to in large part to proximity that has enabled the long history of United States involvement in Mexican economic and political affairs, in this case, the Bracero Program.

México protected its own national interests, not necessarily the individual well-being of its people. Braceros are hardworking men who saw an opportunity for advancement while one government viewed them as exploitable labor and its own as a chip to negotiate. México's goal

⁵⁸² Photographs are in author's possession. Yañez Family Collection.

was to modernize its labor force, maintain the program and the remittances that aided the country. But in the process, it created and permitted the mistreatment of its citizens. Mexican workers to this day work the fields for a minuscule wage and are viewed as intruders lowering wages for American workers for work many of them would never do.

Yet, regardless of their label as job thieves the state of California honored Braceros for their work during the twenty-two years of the program. Braceros were recognized for their hard work by the Honorable Doug Ose of California in the House of Representatives on October 1, 2004. In his speech Mr. Ose stated:

[I] stand to recognize a group of men, Braceros for their contribution to our great nation during World War II. September 29 marked the day of the Bracero. These brave men registered to leave their wife and children behind in their country of origin and homes, while they came to the United States as the ‘soldiers of the field.’ The Bracero wore no uniform and received no medals, but today I rise to honor the Bracero just as I salute our World War II veterans. Over the course of twenty-two years, as many as five million Braceros had participated in the program, supporting our critical infrastructure. Some of them would travel back and forth from the United States to México, each time leaving their wives and children behind again.

It was through hard work that our nation was able to adequately sustain our agriculture economy as well as expand and maintain our railroads, resulting in a safe, reliable and efficient means of transporting our food, medicine, troops and other supplies for the war. In 1964, the last Bracero fulfilled their contracts, and the program came to an end. However, their contributions and the contributions of their descendants still last today.⁵⁸³

Hon. Doug Ose speech describes the vital role the Bracero played in the United States. Ose gave Braceros recognition for being part of the wartime economy and equalizes them to World War II veterans. Mr. Ose’s speech glorifies the Bracero but fails to point the daily difficulties men faced in the United States. Braceros faced racism, mistreatment, and uncertainty.

The countless Bracero protests and stories featured on news channels gained Doug Ose of California in the House of Representative's attention. He sought to recognize the Mexican

⁵⁸³108th Congress 2nd Session, “Recognizing the Braceros” Issue: Vol. 150, No. 122-Daily Edition, October 1, 2004, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2004/10/1/extensions-of-remarks-section/article/E1778-1> (Accessed January 1, 2015).

laborers with Bracero Day (September 29) in California. Doug Ose did not create an educational change, just established a day in the city calendar. But also, one must ask what caused the Bracero to become a topic of interest forty years after the program ended? Could it have been President's George W. Bush January 2004 speech proposing a temporary guest/ worker program that would bring foreign workers to work in the United States; or the countless Bracero rallies occurring in both México and the United States for the money owed to them? One can argue the numerous marches, and President George W. Bush brought national attention to Braceros. Their presence in the media caused many to ask who these men were and why they had been omitted from primary and secondary education textbooks on World War II labor.

This dissertation adds to the narrative of not only the Bracero Program but the women in México who adapted to a life without their husband's. Each chapter has begun with a song or verse, a memorial plaque, or memory which tell of the experiences men and women underwent. The first chapter is Ricardo Arjona, *Mojado* a song describing the desperation men feel to enter the United States. The song points out Mexican men wish for their backs to dry, meaning to change their identity from undocumented to legal labor. They wanted to alter the meaning of Mexican from poor and undocumented to welcomed migrant labor. The identity of Mexicans has transformed through the exchange of goods, labor, and migration. The "hybrid identity" created by the economic trade due to the railroad system was caused by the cultural exchange of goods and services. The Mexican Revolution reinforced Americans views of Mexicans as gun-wielding thugs. Mexicans had become the 'other' due to their increased presence and prominence in the United States and their perceived threat to the cultural identity of many Americans. The border policy between the United States and México has been adapted and negotiated through the decades, maintaining the Mexican as a job thief.

World War II shifted policy associated with the bi-national economy that fueled immigration since the late nineteenth century; the Bracero Program institutionalized Mexican labor flows in the United States for two decades. The Bracero Highway Plaque commemorates the Bracero who “helped to feed and nourish” Americans. The plaque only mentions Braceros briefly and more extensively crediting veterans and American skilled labor. The reference of the Braceros even if short shows that they contributed to the American economy. The Phil Ochs song *Bracero* provides a clear description of the struggles Braceros faced as they labored under contract. Ochs mentions the promise of good living and working conditions while providing the reality of long hours and poor housing conditions. The letters and documents between the United States and Mexican diplomats, offer first hands accounts of the treatment men faced in the farmlands of the United States through consul records and oral histories. The program seems ideal on paper but when men sought aid for health issues, low wages, or poor housing from the Mexican consuls, their pleas were ignored. Braceros continued to undergo the program's process in hopes of working in the United States regardless of the mistreatment. Instead, they focused on the financial gain possible.

México benefited from the program as remittances were the second largest source of money, the termination of the program would be a substantial shock to the Mexican economy.⁵⁸⁴ Mexican men continue to contribute to the American economy as they constitute the largest unauthorized population in the United States. In the last four decades, immigrant laborers have continued to negotiate their presence in the United States and their financial contributions in changing national and transnational economies. The Bracero Program did not manage

⁵⁸⁴ James F. Creagan, “Public Law 78: A Tange of Domestic and International Relations” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* (541-556), 546.

immigration, instead, it provided Mexican laborers with an opportunity to advance their family from poverty and strengthen the view of America as a place of opportunity and exploitation.

The song by Rosa Marta Zarate and Francisco Herrera, *Mi Padre Murió en el Norte* offers an insight into the emotions and impact the Bracero Program had on women in México. The lyrics of the song are found in the last three chapters, pointing out how women adapted to their new lives without their husbands. Neither Braceros nor their wives understood that family connections, letters, and remittances would have such an impact on women's actions and necessities. Women adjusted their daily lives without their husbands, almost immediately after their departure. The Mexican women's secure and safe role of a mother was fundamentally altered by the Bracero Program, forcing upon her new and undoubtedly stressful roles of a provider and father. Men and women did not prepare for the impact that long-term separation would have on their marriage or the family. Women learned to be independent, resilient, and flexible in their circumstances.

The struggles that men and woman faced during the program have not ended for many as they continue to struggle to receive their savings. The last verse of Rosa Marta Zarate and Francisco Herrera, *Mi Padre Murió en el Norte*, is of a father dying telling his daughter to take his visa and reclaim his savings account, that has cost him, his life.⁵⁸⁵ The lack of knowledge regarding the Bracero Program permitted the savings fund to go unclaimed until younger generations sought to learn their history and aid their family in reclaiming their funds. Bracero's were a source of cheap labor and their pleas were ignored throughout the decades as they lacked the funds and organizations to assist in their struggles. Through media attention and various

⁵⁸⁵ Rosa Marta Zarate and Francisco Herrera, *Mi Padre Murió en el Norte* Genres: Regional México, Music, Latino Release: September 11, 2009, Round Whirled Records.
Photographs are in author's possession. Briseño Family Collection.

demonstrations, taking place on both sides of the border, Braceros and their widows were able to sue and pressure México into settling. The savings account was the last aid Braceros provided their family.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND PRESERVATION OF BRACERO HISTORY

If you walk into a classroom or look at the post by *we are mitú*, a Latino Facebook page, and mention the Bracero Program, the common question would be, "What is that?" In 2017, the program is barely mentioned in university textbooks and can be considered a forgotten history. The history of Braceros needs to be added to the narrative of World War II labor. Braceros contribution to the American economy and struggles are necessary to understand the impact immigration labor had in the United States.

Scholars and individuals who see the value in the preservation of the history of the program are constantly working on revitalizing and sharing knowledge regarding the program. Dr. Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price in 2010 produced a documentary, *Harvest of Loneliness*, which provides first-hand accounts by Braceros, organizations, and women regarding their experiences. This documentary has been shown throughout cities in the United States and has created conversations within families of their fathers and grandfather's histories. A traveling exhibit by the National Museum of American History, "Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964" has been hosted by countless museums and organizations to provide communities access to photographs and oral histories of men who participated in the program. It brings knowledge to many who may have never heard of the program due to the cultural or ethnic background.

The National Trust for Historical Preservation, along with community members of Socorro, Texas, and "preservationists hope to turn the Rio Vista Farm in Socorro, Texas into a

museum that will tell the story of the workers and a largely forgotten [Bracero] program.”⁵⁸⁶ The museum will be housed at the 102-year-old Rio Vista Farm that was a processing center during the program from 1951 to 1964.⁵⁸⁷ The preservation of the farm and its usage as a museum provides visitors with the ability to see where men underwent processing and how. As visitors walk through the exhibit, rooms are dedicated to each step and explanation of the events that occurred in each room. The museum will hopefully have its visitors undergo a version of the processing procedure as men did in hopes of receiving a contract. By establishing a Bracero Museum at the Rio Vista Farm in Socorro, Texas, it will highlight the contributions of immigrants in the United States in an age of negativity and rise of xenophobia due to President Trump.

Xenophobia in the United States has once again focused on Mexican nationals. During the presidential race of 2016, President Trump began to focus on “illegals” which unfortunately has become synonymous with Mexican. The Border Patrol began to raid restaurants, grocery stores, and removing a woman from a hospital as she awaited brain surgery.⁵⁸⁸ But the most telling image is the one of signs throughout the state of Alabama offering American workers immediate jobs in the agricultural field picking crops.⁵⁸⁹ Keith Smith an Alabama farmer hired 50 Americans to pick tomatoes, after two weeks only 15 workers are left. Smith points out only three know how to work. Jerry Spencer, who ferries workers from Birmingham an hour away,

⁵⁸⁶ Jamie Stengle, “Socorro, Texas Wants to Restore Remains of Mexican ‘Bracero’ Program Site” *Associated Press* March 6, 2017. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/socorro-texas-wants-restore-remains-mexican-bracero-program-site-n729511> (Accessed July 10, 2017).

⁵⁸⁷ Stengle, “Socorro, Texas Wants to Restore Remains of Mexican ‘Bracero’ Program Site.”

⁵⁸⁸ Chris Sommerfeldt, Erin Durkin, And Nancy Dillon, “Undocumented Woman with Brain Tumor Seized by Federal Agents at Texas Hospital, Family Fears She Will Die” *Daily News*. Published February 27, 2017. [Http://Www.Nydailynews.Com/News/National/Undocumented-Woman-Brain-Tumor-Removed-Hospital-Lawyer-Article-1.2979956](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/undocumented-woman-brain-tumor-removed-hospital-lawyer-article-1.2979956) (Accessed January 22, 2017).

⁵⁸⁹ *PBS News Hour*. “For Undocumented Workers, It's Not-So-Sweet Home Alabama.” Aired October 28, 2011. <https://youtu.be/ZojJszoBXgI>. (Accessed January 22, 2018).

has been hiring and busing workers to the fields and points out they only last a day.⁵⁹⁰ As cameras pan to the rotting tomatoes and lonely fields, one is left to wonder where the American workers were. Once again, it is easy to blame Mexicans for unemployment but are they really taking jobs that Americans want? Americans failure to remain employed in agribusiness demonstrates that undocumented workers take back braking difficult labor Americans are not willing to take.

In the last four decades, immigrant laborers have continued to negotiate their presence in the United States and their financial contributions in changing national and transnational economies. Mexicans constitute the largest unauthorized population in the United States. The Bracero Program did not manage immigration, instead it provided Mexican laborers with an opportunity to advance their family from poverty, through the exploitation of the Bracero cheap labor. The ability to receive higher wages in the United States encouraged the permanent immigration not only of men but entire families. Most importantly, it reinforced the myth of America as a place of opportunity and work, omitting the struggles laborers face daily in the fields and in society.

In the current political climate regarding immigration and undocumented labor, the history of the Bracero Program needs to be highlighted to show how the United States had opened and closed the border throughout the years. The program created change within Mexican society and created a dependency of cheap labor as well as a transnational economy based on remittances. But as individuals, we must educate future generations about the contribution and changes the Bracero Program created in México and the United States. Braceros history should not solely be mentioned in a single sentence, but part of the national

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

history taught to children and adults in United States History courses as part of World War II. Only by learning a complete history can xenophobia be combated.

THE DISCOVERY OF MY HISTORY

The first time I heard the term Bracero was not in a United States survey course in high school, but an elective entitled Mexican-Americans II at California State University, Dominguez Hills. I was assigned Douglas Monroy's book, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression*, which mentioned the program briefly. The short mention prompted my interest, so I decided to ask my mother about Braceros. She looked at me stunned because she had not heard the term Bracero in a long time.⁵⁹¹ She told me my grandfather had been a Bracero, and how her first plastic doll was brought to her in one of his trips back. My grandfather's life as a Bracero has been recreated by pictures and memories recounted by my grandmother, mother, aunts, and uncles. My grandfather, Ruben Luna, faced many struggles as a Bracero to provide for his family in México. But my grandfather's story is one of many. Each story is as unique as the man that lived it; whose sole purpose was to provide for his family.

The program gave rise to undocumented immigration as evident in Operation Wetback which ran parallel to the Bracero Program. This idea of sweeping dollars off the floor because work is plentiful, is the idea many men have in México about working in the United States. Men see these *maletas* arrive with an individual that tried their luck as an immigrant laborer.⁵⁹² These *maletas* showcase how well they are doing as undocumented laborers by bringing back technology, toys, and house goods. These individuals also bring back money that provides an elevation in the family's socio-economic standing.

⁵⁹¹ Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵⁹² Maletas translates to luggage.

The United States-México relationship from 1965 through 1982 gave rise to the modern patterns of migration that are discussed today. In 1974 and 1979 oil reserves were seen by Mexican officials as capable of stabilizing and halting migration. As a non-member of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) México could provide oil to the United States who was facing an embargo at the time. President Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) did not negotiate a revival of the Bracero Program even though it was brought up. Echeverría viewed the oil reserves as an economic stabilizer for the Mexican economy. México reformulated its relationship with the United States regarding economic integration and foreign policy objectives, due to nationalist rhetoric that emphasized autonomy from the United States.⁵⁹³ The close link between the United States and México's political agendas caused México to refocus its domestic agenda from maintaining a status quo to focusing on deportations. However, Echeverría's independence from foreign goods caused two devaluations in 1976. Consequently, President José López Portillo's (1976-1982) administration attempted to realign itself with the United States by negotiating its oil reserves and Mexican exports. However, Congress opposed President Jimmy Carter's (1977-1981) attempt to improve the United States-México's relationship by supporting México's exports and promoting reform in the energy sector.⁵⁹⁴ As the prices of oil decreased in 1981, México was unable to pay its foreign debt, the peso was devalued, and tourism had decreased. Mexico then needed American financial support which they received for a reduced price on oil.⁵⁹⁵ In 1982, México's economic crisis made it dependent on the United States support. The economic downturn caused many Mexican nationals to seek opportunities in the

⁵⁹³ Alexandra Délano, *México and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies and Emigration since 1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 125.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 113-114.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 116-117.

United States, giving rise to immigration.⁵⁹⁶ Throughout the Cold War, the stabilizing of the Mexican economy became an American priority. For the period from 1982 to 1988, the United States passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 regulating undocumented migration, which led to the reformulation of México's Constitution.

México's passive migration policies shifted to a more proactive as it created programs, national institutions, and promoted relationships with Mexican immigrants. "In 1988, Article 89, Section X in the Mexican Constitution was reformed to formally include a foreign policy in response to immigration matters affecting Mexicans in the United States."⁵⁹⁷ México's government became involved with community groups and institutions in helping migrants receive health care, education, and literacy programs for adults to protect its citizens. México is no longer a passive country but has taken an equal role in its joint relationship with the United States as a neighbor and receiving country.

LEARNING MY HISTORY

Hearing the term Bracero for the first time prompted me to question my mother and then interview my grandmother, to tell me about my grandfather's experience. In my grandmother's stories of my grandfather, she began speaking about herself and her struggle. As I was listening to my recordings and looking at my notes, it came to me, 'What did happen to women during this time?' I only found one dissertation (2006), "Flexible Families: Bracero Families' Lives Across Cultures Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964" by Ana Elizabeth Rosas who published *Abrazando el Espiritu: Braceros Families Confront the US-México Border* in 2014. Rosas's work focusses on the women during the program beyond casual mentioning.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 130

A need for more literature and interest prompted me to begin a Senior Paper that has evolved to this dissertation. Through interviews and conversations with widows, wives, and daughters of Braceros, their strength as individuals left a lasting impression. I found each female had a unique and personal story to tell. Each women's experience depended on her relationship with her husband, his family and her parents. This dissertation makes an important contribution to the field of Mexican history and gender studies and it adds to the limited number of works dealing with the Bracero Program and women in México in the 1940s. Sources in the archives are as rare, but I found that Bracero wives and daughters were open, to finally speaking about their experience. Therefore, it should be of interest not only to scholars or students of Mexican history, but individuals interested in their family history and social changes caused by international labor programs. This dissertation comes from women who explained that no one had asked them about their experience. The Bracero Program was solely focused on men, yet women were affected by the regulations of the program and absences of their husbands. Women did not just sit at home, knitting waiting for their husband but rather they worked diligently to sustain their families and their lands. They too were part of the Bracero Program and should be included in the history of it.

This period also gave rise to the women's movement in México. The movement lobbied for national suffrage and drew them into wage labor. Female activists identified themselves as mothers to gain change and social acceptance. Working women's organizations sought to unite women from various labor sectors to defend the rights of mothers of future citizens.⁵⁹⁸ The 1940-1960s, I see as the defining years for female empowerment as women began to educate themselves in larger numbers becoming teachers, secretaries, and factory workers. We think of

⁵⁹⁸ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in México City: Public Discourse and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (The University of Arizona Press, 2003), 73.

our grandmothers as traditional and proper women, but they rebelled against patriarchal norms even if unintentionally. Women in the markets alone, on top of a donkey in the mountains, and laboring outside the home during the years of the program may have been done for survival, but it is a symbol of their strength as mothers. The program caused women to be in control of the home; they were participating in the public sphere as vendors and consumers. Women moved away from solely being in the domestic sphere. Their daughters were seeing women as the decision-makers and in control of their families. The Bracero daughters became the women who worked in the *maquiladoras*, service industry in hotels, and factories throughout Mexico, they would normalize the dual income in Mexico.

México's Border Industrialization Program (BIP), which started in 1965 to stimulate the economy of the border cities, was set up to aid returning Braceros. With the decreasing number of men being hired as Braceros the Mexican government sought to begin aiding its returning unemployed men. The formal implementation of the BIP began in 1965, through the collaboration of transnational companies who viewed Mexicans as a docile workforce capable of high productivity. These companies, along with Mexican capitalists and the public sector had intended to support the development of industry and exportation along the Mexican border. The *maquiladoras* were created to combat male unemployment, but what happened was a sudden increase in the employment of women, mainly young and unmarried, and unskilled.⁵⁹⁹ The BIP gave rise to female labor, but the Bracero Program gave rise to the normalization of women outside of the home and dual income.

⁵⁹⁹ Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social "Mexicanas trabajadoras domésticas en perspectiva: La gran deuda social," Gobierno de la República. http://www.idwfed.org/es/recursos/el-trabajo-domestico-en-México-la-gran-deuda-social/@@display-file/attachment_1 (Accessed February 16, 2018), 15-16.

The second wave of feminism in México came from the daughters of Braceros. These women are who scholars credit with changes in female labor in factories and normalized the presence of women alongside men in the work force.⁶⁰⁰ The economic shifts permitted female entrance in male-dominated industries, thus changing the concepts of women's honor and morality. Mexican women attempted to maintain their honor in the public sphere by creating and preserving female networks that emphasized the value of their work, its contributions to the modernization of the country, and its financial aid for the family. These efforts challenged the dominant beliefs that sharing space between men and women posed a moral danger to women. The concept of honor shifted by adapting itself to the workplace as the female presence increased.⁶⁰¹ Female-dominated factories caused a re-classification of women's work, strengthened gender differences by identifying women's work in the public sphere.

The participation of women in labor outside of the home depended more on the family structure rather than the economic development of the country. Sylvia Chant finds "women's employment did not appear to have affected education, migrant status, fertility, family size, resident children, husband's earnings, or total household earnings."⁶⁰² The female head-of-households entered the workforce to provide for their families to improve their overall living conditions.

The women entering the maquiladoras, factories, and the service industry were raised seeing their mothers as independent and strong-willed, characteristics they possessed but became

⁶⁰⁰ María T. Fernández-Aceves, Carmen Ramos-Escandón, and Susie S. Porter, eds. *Orden social e identidad de género. México, siglos XIX–XX* (Guadalajara: CIESAS, University of Guadalajara, 2006).; Heather Fowler-Salamini, and Mary K. Vaughan, eds. *Women of the Mexican Countryside, 1850–1990: Creating Spaces, Shaping Transitions* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

⁶⁰¹ Porter, 73.

⁶⁰² Sylvia Chant, *Women and Survival in Mexican Cities: Perspectives on Gender, Labor Markets and Low-Income Households* (Manchester University Press, 1991), 130.

highlighted by the departure of men caused by the Bracero Program. Women during the Bracero Program entered the public sphere for survival. They did not intentionally believe their actions in the market, on the donkey, or in the workforce would cause change. Without their knowledge, younger generations were taking note of their mother's strength. The real legacy of the program is the Mexican women. These countless women whose sole will to survive are models for future generations.

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Maria R. Ávila

Ramiro Briseño

Severa Godinez

Modesta González Cortez

Ramona (Rosa) González Pérez, Ramona

Maria Gutierrez

Carmen Hernández

Maria Hernández

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David Yáñez

Natividad Yáñez

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Vita

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Dr. Ávila is a scholar of Latin America history, specializing in modern México, with a focus on issues of gender, labor, and migration. She employs oral histories and conventional archival sources from repositories across México and the United States to interrogate the role of women during the Bracero Program (1942-1964). Whereas most existing scholarship focuses on predominantly male migrants themselves, Dr. Ávila examines how the migrants' wives, daughters, and female kin negotiated the absence of individuals who, by prevailing gender ideals, should have served as the patriarchal breadwinners. She finds that many Mexican women responded to the absence of their male kin by abandoning the domestic ideal, trading in their honor for the survival of their families. The result is a piece of scholarship that is at once intimately personal and transnational. She gave an excellent presentation on portions of this work at the Advancing Rural Health Symposium at University of Alabama and is currently preparing an article on the impact of letter censorship on the Mexican family during World War II, which she will submit to *Estudios Mexicanos*.

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