UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Cheap for Whom? Migration, Farm Labor, and Social Reproduction in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali Borderlands, 1942-1969

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

Alina R. Méndez

Committee in charge:

Professor David G. Gutiérrez, Co-Chair
Professor Natalia Molina, Co-Chair
Professor Luis Alvarez
Professor David FitzGerald
Professor Everard Meade
Professor Michael Monteón

2017

The Dissertation of Alina R. Méndez is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation began when I stubbornly decided to write my senior thesis during my junior year at UC Berkeley. I researched and wrote my thesis a year early because I wanted to enroll in professor William B. Taylor's research seminar before he retired at the end of that academic year. And I am so glad I did. Professor Taylor was an exceptional teacher who inspired students to follow their *inquietudes* and continues being a supportive mentor even in retirement. I was able to apply to graduate school and continue the research thanks to the letters of recommendation that Paul Ramirez, Michael Iarocci, and professor Taylor provided me. I am eternally grateful for their help.

I completed this dissertation thanks to Natalia Molina. No expression of gratitude could be enough to thank her for all the encouragement, support, and guidance she provided me since my first year in the graduate program. David G. Gutiérrez pushed me to think critically about the questions I wanted to ask and helped me shape my research interests into a clear and viable project. I loved his Mexican American historiography seminar so much that I enrolled in it twice. Luis Alvarez, David FitzGerald, Ev Meade, and Michael Monteón, the other four members of my dissertation committee, were very supportive since I enrolled in one or more of their classes. I thank them for the knowledge and wisdom they have shared with me during these past few years. I thank Nancy Kwak for her continuous encouragement and dedication to helping all the graduate students in the History Department. Wendy Matsumara, Rafael Alarcón, and Tanya Golash-Boza read parts of my work and gave me valuable feedback that helped me advance my project in new ways. Debbie Kang has been a great mentor and I thank her for always making time in her busy schedule to meet with me.

I was fortunate to be part of a great community of graduate students at UC San Diego. Mayra Avitia and Laura D. Gutiérrez shared their wisdom and friendship since the day they welcomed me into the History Department on Admit Day. Alexis Meza and Crystal R. Pérez were the other two members of what I like to call the "Coffee and Pastries Club." Whether we studied at coffee shops or the library, the coffee and pastries (or chocolate bars) *no podían faltar.* Luis Sánchez López and Jorge N. Leal were the best cohort buddies one could have. Mohamed Abumaye, Michele Brewster, Maria Carreras, Kate Flach, Natalye Harpin, Mary Klann, Ulices Piña, Jorge Ramirez, Gerardo Rios, Stevie Ruiz, Elizabeth Sine, Maki Smith, Megan Strom, and Salvador Zarate made UC San Diego a better place.

Outside of UC San Diego, Maru Balandran, Delia Fernandez, Michael Aguirre, and Jeannette Estruth offered their friendship and support. Maru, my "friend from Chicago," constantly reminded me that we might write our dissertations in isolation, but we are not alone in our journeys. Daniel Millan, Ismael Illescas, and Jessica Ordaz (along with Jorge N. Leal, Alexis Meza, and Jorge Ramirez), made our "Structural Violence and the Power of Migrant Imaginaries" working group an exciting and generative space. The fellows at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at UC San Diego, especially Raquel Pacheco, Jane Lily Lopez, Alfredo Corchado, Thomas Passananti, and Tania Islas Weinstein, were wonderful colleagues I will certainly miss.

I was also very lucky to meet incredible faculty at various conferences who encouraged me to continue my research and suggested new questions and approaches. Lori Flores, Guillermina Gina Núñez, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, Stephen Pitti, Ernesto Chavez, George Sanchez, and Larisa Veloz were very generous with their time and

advice. Sharing a chapter of my dissertation at the 2016 Western History Dissertation Workshop hosted by the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University was certainly one of the best experiences I had in graduate school. I thank Andrew Graybill, Johnny Mack Faragher, Joshua Reid, Steve Aron, Louis Warren, Rachel St. John, Phoebe Young, Katrina Jagodinsky, Jeannette A. Estruth, Margaret Boren Neubauer, Tommy Richards, and Kevin Waite for their amazing feedback and Ruth Ann Elmore for coordinating the workshop. William Deverell and Neil Foley were enormously helpful with their suggestions as to how to best organize the dissertation.

A Jack Henning Graduate Fellowship in Labor Culture and History from the Archie Green Fund for Labor Culture and History, a Dissertation Research Grant from the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States, and a Fulbright-Garcia Robles Research Grant from the Institute of International Education made it possible to conduct archival research in Mexico and the US. A Dissertation Fellowship from the Ford Foundation and a Visiting Fellowship at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at UC San Diego, moreover, provided me the vital free time to write the dissertation.

I thank Laura Mendoza, Paulina Mendoza, Leslie Arellano, Marybel Robledo, Catherine Nicklen, Veronica Garcia, Jacqueline Amparo, Anthony Trochez, and Anthony Chong for their friendship. También le agradezco a la familia Martínez Vázquez por abrirme las puertas de su hogar durante mis visitas al DF. Gracias a mi prima Rebeca, su familia, y a mi tía Leopolda, quienes hacían de mis viajes a Morelos toda una aventura. Gracias a las familias Ramírez Brambila y Ayala Herrera por el cariño y apoyo que me

han brindado. Rosario Ramírez, Oscar Zavala, Virginia Flores, y Victoria Zavala son my familia querida. Gabriela Bernaldino is the smart and fun younger sister I never had.

My brother Ernesto Méndez has always been more than a brother, often taking on the duties of a father although he is just a few years older than me. He is that calm, reassuring voice that tells me on the worst days that everything will be ok. Mis padres, Felipe de Jesús Méndez Méndez y Graciela Ramírez Méndez han sido siempre mi inspiración y orgullo. Los dos me enseñaron el significado del trabajo duro y la esperanza de un mejor futuro. La vida me dio la mejor mamá del mundo y por ello siempre vivo agradecida. Francisco Javier Ayala Herrera, *mi complice*, is another blessing in my life. He sat next to me in coffee shops and libraries for seven years while I worked on this dissertation, saw me present my work in several conferences across the country, and lent a happy ear to my incessant dissertation talk. I thank him for this and much more.

VITA

Education

2009	Bachelor of Arts, University of California, Berkeley
2014	Master of Arts, University of California, San Diego
2017	Doctor of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego

Grants and Fellowships

2010-2012	San Diego Fellowship, University of California, San Diego
2013	Latino Museum Studies Program Fellow, Smithsonian Latino Center/National Museum of American History
2014-2015	Jack Henning Graduate Fellowship in Labor Culture and History, Archie Green Fund for Labor Culture and History
2015-2016	Group Convener, Multi-Campus Graduate Working Group, University of California Humanities Research Institute
2015-2016	Dissertation Research Grant, University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States
2015-2016	Fulbright-Garcia Robles Research Grant, Institute of International Education
2016-2017	Visiting Fellow, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego
2016-2017	Dissertation Fellowship, Ford Foundation

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cheap for Whom? Migration, Farm Labor, and Social Reproduction in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali Borderlands, 1942-1969

by

Alina R. Méndez

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor David G. Gutiérrez, Co-Chair
Professor Natalia Molina, Co-Chair

This dissertation argues that the agriculture industry in California's Imperial Valley has enjoyed ample access to cheap labor since the mid-twentieth century because Mexicali, Baja California Norte, its Mexican neighbor, has subsidized the reproduction of a transborder labor force employed in agriculture but otherwise denied social membership in the United States. This subsidy from Mexicali to the Imperial Valley began in 1942 with the start of the Bracero Program and continued well past the

program's end in 1964. The guest worker program produced contrasting socioeconomic transformations on each side of the border: the Imperial Valley obtained a cheap source of labor, while Mexicali faced mounting socioeconomic pressures from a growing and urbanizing population.

Cheap for Whom demonstrates that key individuals and institutions on both sides of the US-Mexico border learned important lessons about the profitability of creating a transborder labor force that externalized labor maintenance and reproduction to Mexico. The Bracero Program normalized the practice of employing workers—or as the Spanish term "bracero" suggests, employing *brazos* (arms)—without incorporating them into the communities where they labored. The social costs of maintaining a seasonal migrant labor force, in other words, remained hidden under the Bracero Program because braceros were employed in the United States during seasonal periods of labor need and expected to return to their families and communities in Mexico once they were no longer required in American fields. The Bracero Program was thus a pivotal moment in the US transition from importing workers to exporting jobs; it served as a first exercise in outsourcing the responsibilities of maintaining and reproducing workers.

Introduction

On January 26, 1954, a photographer for the *Los Angeles Times* captured a process known as "drying out": an undocumented Mexican agricultural worker stretching one foot across the international boundary to touch Mexican soil, thereby regularizing his immigration status in the United States. This commonplace practice had become controversial (and newsworthy) that winter, as Mexico and the United States wrangled over a labor agreement to replace the Bracero Program, which had expired on December 31, 1953. Mexico declared it would prohibit its citizens from emigrating to the United States but migrants continued their northward journeys to the US-Mexico border. The scene that the *Los Angeles Times* immortalized showed "drying out" as a physical tug of war over an unauthorized Mexican agricultural worker: on one side of the border a Mexican immigration official tried to pull the worker into Mexico, while two men standing on the US side helped the migrant keep his footing on US soil. Caught in the middle was the worker, who had just set one foot in Mexicali, Baja California Norte, making sure the rest of his body remained in Calexico, California.

The practice of "drying out" had its origins in 1947 when the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) authorized American growers to transport "wetback" (undocumented) agricultural workers to Mexico and return them as fully sanctioned guest workers. Although the Mexican government agreed to the 1947 measure in order to reduce the number of unauthorized Mexican migrants working in American agriculture and increase the number of guest workers laboring under the Bracero Program, by

January 1954, when this photo was taken, their support was faltering.[1] The Mexican and US governments had reached an impasse in their negotiations to renew the Bracero Program, a binational labor agreement that had coordinated the importation of Mexican laborers to the United States for agricultural work since 1942. While contracting of Mexican workers remained at a standstill, the United States resorted to the unilateral measure of recruiting workers at the US-Mexico border. In response, Mexico closed its borders in an effort to forestall emigration.[2]

Caught in the middle of this discord were the *aspirantes* (men "aspiring" to obtain a guest worker contract) waiting in Mexico for the Bracero Program to resume. Thousands of these aspirantes "milled and stampeded against the international boundary fence," the *Los Angeles Times* reported, awaiting entry into the United States through the border sister cities of Calexico and Mexicali.[3] Much to California growers' disappointment, the unilateral contracting of braceros at the Mexicali border only lasted two weeks. As it shut down the border operation, the US Labor Department announced that Congress had to first approve and apportion funds for the unilateral program to continue.[4] For its part, the Mexican government was quick to agree to the renewal of the Bracero Program. Two weeks of border contracting had shown Mexico that the United States would continue worker recruitment with or without the participation of the

---

[1] Otey M. Scruggs, *Braceros, "Wetbacks," and the Farm Labor Problem* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 297.
[2] "U.S. Rejects Labor Plan, Orders Opening of Border: Local Hiring Due," *Brawley News,* January 16, 1954, pg. 1; "Mexican Workers Jump Line Fence in Bid for Contracts: 700 Escape to U.S.: Some Yanked By Customs Men," *Brawley News,* January 22, 1954, pg. 1, 8.
[3] Bill Dredge, "6000 Mexicans Mill About Fence at Border," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1954, pg. 1, 4.
[4] "Importing of Labor To Halt Tomorrow: Lack of Funds, Legal Authority Forces Suspension of Program," *Brawley News,* February 4, 1954, pg. 1, 8.

Mexican state. The incident gave the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* striking photographs that depicted thousands of desperate men pressing against the border fence in hopes of obtaining a work contract. But the attention was short-lived: once the spectacle of border contracting ended, the national newspapers that had rushed to Calexico and Mexicali promptly left the region.

Producing a Transborder Class of Cheap Labor

For all the news stories and photographs of unilateral contracting at the Calexico-Mexicali border, the episodic coverage failed to discuss the ongoing demographic, social, and economic transformations that the Bracero Program was generating in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. Similarly, most scholars have examined the guest worker program in the Imperial Valley through episodes, focusing on border tugs of war, strikes, or peaks in the number of unauthorized entries or deportations recorded for the region. A regional study of the Bracero Program is necessary not only to fully understand how the Bracero Program transformed the spaces where it took place, but also to understand how these places in turn shaped the program's day-to-day operation. The Imperial Valley was behind many of the institutional changes that occurred within the Bracero Program throughout its more than twenty years of existence. The region's growers constantly employed their political and economic power to secure a cheap and disposable source of labor under circumstances that best fit their interests. Across the border, Baja California's authorities recognized the benefits of becoming a supplier of cheap labor for the Imperial Valley and other agricultural centers in the Southwest.

This dissertation demonstrates that key individuals and institutions on both sides of the US-Mexico border learned important lessons about the profitability of creating a transborder labor force that externalized labor maintenance and reproduction to Mexico. The Bracero Program normalized the practice of employing workers—or as the Spanish term "bracero" suggests, employing *brazos* (arms)—without incorporating them into the communities where they labored. The social costs of maintaining a seasonal and migrant labor force, in other words, remained hidden under the Bracero Program because braceros were employed in the United States during seasonal periods of labor need and expected to return to their families and communities in Mexico once they were no longer required in American fields. One of the main goals of this dissertation is to complicate our common use of the term "cheap labor." For whom is labor cheap? I argue that the agriculture industry in the Imperial Valley has enjoyed ample access to cheap labor since the mid-twentieth century because Mexicali, its Mexican neighbor, has subsidized the reproduction of a transborder labor force employed in agriculture but otherwise denied social membership in the United States. This subsidy from Mexicali to the Imperial Valley began in 1942 with the start of the Bracero Program and continued well past the program's end in 1964. The guest worker program produced contrasting socioeconomic transformations on each side of the border: the Imperial Valley obtained a cheap source of labor, while Mexicali faced mounting socioeconomic pressures from a growing and urbanizing population.

Afraid that bracero recruitment near the US-Mexico border would generate massive flows of northward migration, the Mexican government attempted to prevent this by placing its contracting centers first in Mexico City and then in other cities in the

Mexican interior. This, however, did not stop jobseekers from migrating north to Baja California. Thousands traveled to border cities with the objective of crossing the international border and obtaining employment in the United States as a bracero or as an undocumented worker. Mexicali operated during these years as a "receptacle" for unemployed workers and those deported from the United States and a "springboard" for many more making their way into the United States.[5] Unlike the Imperial Valley, which could rely on the Border Patrol to prevent a massive influx of Mexican migrants, Mexicali could do very little to stop the thousands of men, women, and children who migrated to the border during the Bracero Program. Baja California's population, for instance, rose from 78,907 in 1940 to 226,965 in 1950. In another decade, the state's population had almost doubled again to 520,165.[6] This migration constituted what sociologist Néstor Rodríguez has called "autonomous migration"—a process by which ordinary people have largely ignored officially authorized immigration and labor programs and attempted to "spatially reorganize their base of social reproduction in the global landscape."[7] Facing few options in their search for better livelihoods, internal and international migrants utilized the limited agency they enjoyed by migrating autonomously to Mexicali and the Imperial Valley.

The personal and family experiences of Mexican guest workers contracted to work in the Imperial Valley under the Bracero Program demonstrate how Imperial Valley

---

[5] Oscar J. Martinez coined the terms "receptacle" and "springboard." Oscar J. Martinez, *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996).
[6] *6˚censo de población, 1940* (México: Secretaría de la economía nacional, Dirección general de estadística, 1943); *Séptimo censo general de población, 6 de junio de 1950* (México: México: Dirección general de estadística, 1952); *VIII censo general de población, 1960 Baja California, Territorio* (México, D.F.: Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Secretaría de Industria y Comercio, Dirección General de Estadística, 1963).
[7] Néstor Rodríguez, "The Battle for the Border: Notes on Autonomous Migration, Transnational Communities, and the State," *Social Justice* 23: 3 (1996).

growers increasingly externalized the reproduction costs of Mexican agricultural workers to Mexicali. Although the Bracero Program era has come to be known as a period of male sojourner migration, this study reveals that Mexican families opted to reunite or live in close proximity when the opportunity became available. Thousands of women and children from the Mexican interior resettled in Mexicali to join husbands, fathers, and brothers working in the Imperial Valley. Many of these men became regular workers, laboring season after season in the same fields and for the same employers, sometimes as braceros, and other times as unauthorized migrants. By the 1950s the INS recognized the importance of these men, naming them "Special" braceros for their skills and for their privileged status as experienced, regular workers in the region. This created what labor organizer Ernesto Galarza called a class of "bracero professionals," a reliable, permanent, and trained source of labor.[8] With more job security, many of the Imperial Valley's Special braceros began resettling across the border in Mexicali where they could live with their families, enjoying a lower cost of living and freedom from the threat of deportation they faced on the US side of the border. Although many of the Special braceros eventually obtained legal permanent residence and were often followed by their own families several years later, the children in these households most often became the region's next generation of cheap labor. The Bracero Program reproduced cycles of poverty among the migrant families that replenished the ranks of American agribusiness's cheap labor with each new generation. Mexicali's transborder families, in

[8] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960* (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1964), 93.

other words, were the ones who truly paid the price of the cheap labor that braceros and undocumented workers provided the Imperial Valley.

Braceros and their families were marginalized in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands through more than economics. Imperial Valley law enforcement agencies and local newspapers produced and spread narratives and stereotypes that racialized Mexican migrants as transient, potentially criminal, and deportable labor. With every new planting or harvesting season the *Imperial Valley Press* and the *Brawley News* reminded valley residents to lock doors and remain cautious of the temporary population of migrant workers. At the end of each harvesting season these newspapers reported the large raids that police units and the Border Patrol conducted in valley cities, which cited excessive drinking, fighting, and a growing sex economy as the reasons for the raids. In both Mexicali and the Imperial Valley migrants were unwelcome competition in the regional labor market. And although migrants were at times considered a "social problem" in Mexicali, they never experienced the same racial otherness there that they did in the Imperial Valley. With time Baja California's authorities began to realize the economic potential of the growing transborder population and developed a political economy aimed at capturing the dollars that braceros and unauthorized migrants earned across the border. Baja California governor Braulio Maldonado Sandez began describing his state as a land of immigrants, a place where enterprising and hard-working individuals together forged a better homeland.

No place in Mexico or the United States better illustrates what Ernesto Galarza meant by the term "merchants of labor" than the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. Whereas American agriculture had long relied on padrones, or labor agents, to supply it

with seasonal, migrant labor, the Bracero Program converted the nation-state into a main recruiter of the country's agricultural labor.[9] In his book on the subject, Galarza condemned the Bracero Program for the ways the US and Mexican governments acted as "merchants of labor" for American agribusiness.[10] What perhaps Galarza did not realize is that the demographic changes that the program generated in Baja California is what forced the state to increasingly embrace this role as a merchant of labor. Hoping to alleviate the socioeconomic pressures of internal migration, Baja California's government gradually adopted a political economy that capitalized on its function as a supplier of cheap labor for the neighboring Imperial Valley. By the 1950s, after a decade of futile efforts to reduce internal migration, state authorities finally acknowledged the economic reality of the border region and set out to create a transborder labor pool that would serve both Mexicali and the Imperial Valley. Baja California had become highly dependent on the employment that many of its residents found across the border.

The interdependence that the Bracero Program institutionalized between Mexicali and the Imperial Valley thus accelerated the start of neoliberalism in the borderlands region. Most scholars agree that neoliberalism began in the United States in the 1970s when the country "traded factories for finance" and that it spread to developing countries in the 1980s under the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.[11] This timeline, however, ignores the important steps that the Mexican state and American industry took

---

[9] Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880- 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 232-233.
[10] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 169.
[11] Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).

in the 1960s for greater economic integration. With its 1965 Border Industrialization Program (BIP), for instance, Mexico invited American manufacturers to set up assembly plants (*maquiladoras*) in Mexico that would take advantage of the country's cheap labor.[12] The main objective of the BIP was to relieve the unemployment that the end of the Bracero Program was expected to produce in Mexico's northern border states. What studies of the BIP have failed to examine is how the Bracero Program was key in generating Mexican internal and international migration patterns and a border political economy that prepared Mexico for the maquiladora system by first providing a reserve army of labor to American agriculture. The Bracero Program was a pivotal moment in the US transition from importing workers to exporting jobs; it served as a first exercise in outsourcing the responsibilities of maintaining and reproducing workers.

By the 1970s the lessons of the Bracero Program had also become clear to scholars. Michael Burawoy was one of the first to argue that Mexico's migrant-sending regions subsidized American agribusiness by producing workers who migrated to the United States in their prime productive years.[13] Two decades later, after California voters passed Proposition 187, sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo again drew attention to this issue. Hondagneu-Sotelo argued that the proposition, which denied public school education, healthcare, and other public benefits to undocumented immigrants and their

---

[12] María Patricia Fernández-Kelly, "Mexican Border Industrialization, Female Labor Force Participation and Migration," in *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor*, ed. June C. Nash and María P. Fernández-Kelly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Jorge A. Bustamante, "Maquiladoras: A New Face of International Capitalism on Mexico's Northern Frontier," in *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor*, ed. June C. Nash and María P. Fernández-Kelly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

[13] Michael Burawoy, "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material from Southern Africa and the United States" *American Journal of Sociology* 81 no. 5 (1976): 1050-1087.

children, illustrated that Americans tolerated migrants who took low-wage jobs as long as the migrants' families did not settle in the United States. The proposition, in other words, was about denying immigrants "the resources that it takes to sustain everyday family life."[14] Centering their analysis on the concept of social reproduction, feminist geographers have demonstrated in the last two decades that migrants are ideal workers as long as they subsidize the American economy as "hyperflexible producing bodies." When migrants settle permanently in the regions that employ them, they become "hypervisible reproducing bodies" that fuel xenophobic responses such as California's Proposition 187.[15] This dissertation contributes to this literature by showing how migrants in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands adopted transborder livelihoods in order to access jobs in American agriculture even if their social reproduction in the United States was denied.

The Bracero Program

Involving two nations and millions of people, the Bracero Program left an impressive historical record in government, institutional, and personal archives, in publications, and in the memories of two lands. Set in the middle of the twentieth century, it revealed the managerial capacity of the nation-state in recruiting and

[14] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Women and Children First: New Directions in Anti-Immigrant Politics," *Socialist Review* Vol. 25 (1995), 176.
[15] See Cindi Katz, "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction," *Antipode* Vol. 34 No. 4 (2001): 709-728; Altha Cravey, "Toque una Ranchera, Por Favor," *Antipode* 35, no. 3 (2003): 603-621*;* Barbara Ellen Smith and Jamie Winders, "'We're here to Stay': Economic Restructuring, Latino Migration and Place-Making in the US South," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33, no. 1 (2008): 60-72; Nina Martin, "The Crisis of Social Reproduction Among Migrant Workers: Interrogating the Role of Migrant Civil Society," *Antipode* 42, no. 1 (2010): 127-151; Olga Sanmiguel-Valderrama, "Border Enforcement at Family Sites: Social Reproductive Implications for Mexican and Central American Manual Labor in the United States," *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 5 (2013): 78-92.

transporting migrant workers across international boundaries. The Bracero Program operated at the local, state, and federal levels in Mexico, making it easy for conflicts to emerge among authorities serving different populations and therefore with different priorities and objectives. Baja California governor Braulio Maldonado Sandez, for instance, often came to disagree with the federal government over details about bracero contracting or about how internal migration should best be managed. Similarly, the US government was never a homogenous body that acted in unison. The varying mandates of the INS, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Agriculture often put these units at odds with each other. The federal bureaucracy leading these departments acted away from cameras and microphones yet informed many of the policies that affected the day-to-day operation of the Bracero Program. The personnel "revolving door" that existed between grower associations and various Department of Labor agencies gave California agribusiness a large influence over what were supposed to be strictly government procedures.[16]

The Bracero Program's leadership was overwhelmingly male, and the bracero workforce almost exclusively so—which has ensured that until recently the history of the program was written as a history of men. However, recent books by Ana E. Rosas and Mireya Loza have made clear that there is still much to learn about the Bracero Program, especially about the women who were directly and indirectly connected to the guest worker program. Mexican families suffered separation from loved ones, and some were abandoned by men who never returned to their homes after leaving for bracero work in

[16] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 127.

the United States. The hoped-for financial rewards were slow to materialize: even when emigrant men did send money to their homes in the Mexican interior, they often did not send enough or went months without mailing remittances to their families. Throughout the Bracero Program era, the Mexican government promoted a narrative of family sacrifice in support of the male breadwinner and his success. This left little room for women to discuss their suffering in public or express discontent with the program. The image of the hard-working family man that the Mexican government promoted in the United States, moreover, obscured the extramarital, and sometimes queer, associations that braceros established during their stay in the United States.[17]

A Nation of Immigrant Workers

By importing Mexican workers for agricultural labor in the United States, the Bracero Program reflected the country's centuries-old reliance on immigrant labor. This American tradition began when British colonizers enslaved Africans for forced labor in the New World. The end of slavery initiated a series of successive migrant waves that provided American agriculture with abundant sources of cheap labor. Like their Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian predecessors, the male Filipinos who worked across the West during the early twentieth century were ideal workers for an expanding American economy that valued "unmarried young men in the prime of their lives and unencumbered by nuclear families."[18] Although California was early to embrace

[17] See Ana E. Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California, 2014) and Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
[18] Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 91.

commercial agriculture and quick to industrialize, this did not stop its farmers from promoting the Jeffersonian fantasy of a nation made up of small farmers. The characterization of Mexican migrant workers as "birds of passage" or "homing pigeons" helped perpetuate the agrarian ideal of family farm labor. This also left Mexicans outside of California's imagined community.[19]

The racialization of ethnic Mexicans as "always the worker, never the citizen" was indicative of the racial scripts circulating across the United States throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[20] The stereotypes initially related to blacks, Native Americans, and Asians were recycled or readapted and applied to Mexican migrants, who at certain points were welcomed as "birds of passage" and at other moments scorned as inassimilable foreigners.[21] The most consequential of these stereotypes was that of the "illegal" Mexican migrant.[22] Migrant "illegality" and deportability quickly provided the United States a disciplining tool that threatened undocumented migrants with expulsion if they made themselves visible or challenged the status quo. As Nicholas De Genova has argued, deportability, more than deportation itself, made undocumented migrants an underclass of easily exploited, disposable, cheap labor.[23] The vulnerability that came with

---

[19] Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
[20] Mark Reisler, "Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of the Mexican Immigrant during the 1920s," *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 45 No. 2 (1976): 231-254.
[21] Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013),
[22] Before ethnic Mexicans became associated with undocumented legal status, Chinese migrants were the first targets of a changing immigration regime that created the "illegal" immigrant with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[23] De Genova observes that "undocumented migrations are constituted in order not to physically exclude them but instead, to socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability." Nicholas De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 31 no. 1 (2002): 429.

unauthorized status, or the tenuous security of a guest worker contract, is what made braceros and undocumented workers in the Imperial Valley a tractable labor force preferred by growers.[24] The competition that this generated between migrants and citizens (or longtime residents) is what Mae Ngai has called "the national boundaries of class," or the divisions organized labor drew around legal status.[25]

Because they took arduous and low-paying work that few were willing to do, seasonal migrants were "indispensable outcasts" in agricultural communities.[26] Migrant agricultural workers drew from a repertoire of strategies that helped them cope with, and sometimes also contest, their marginalization. Where all-male populations resulted in "bachelor societies," the men most often created a working-class culture that empowered them, even if only for fleeting moments. Finding refuge in alcohol, gambling, and other forms of leisure and entertainment, male workers asserted control over their free time and their bodies.[27] The braceros and unauthorized workers who labored in the Imperial Valley

---

[24] Cindy Hahamovitch, for instance, argues that as long as guest workers remain vulnerable to deportation and are denied the option of permanent authorized immigration, the United States will continue producing second-class denizens. Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 242.

[25] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). For more on the complicated history between Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans, see David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[26] Frank T. Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880- 1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[27] One of the largest debates in labor history considers how much power or agency workers exercised when they drank excessively or formed an overly masculine, or rugged, working class culture. While some view workers as mere pawns, others highlight the meaningful relationships that the men formed. We can conclude that male social spaces were potentially empowering, though often circumscribed by their own limitations. See Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts;* Peter Way, "Evil Humors and Ardent Spirits: The Rough Culture of Canal Construction Laborers," *The Journal of American History* 79 no. 4 (1993): 1397-1428; Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

were no exception, for they spent large portions of their earnings in what Loza terms the "economies of vice" that followed migrant workers.[28] Nevertheless, when the indignities of abuse and exploitation were so severe that carnal pleasure could not provide enough respite, braceros resisted with their feet and "skipped" their contracts to find employment elsewhere.[29]

Like contract "skipping," Mexican migrants' unauthorized movement across the US-Mexico border asserted their individual agency in a context of growing immigration restrictions and border policing. The seemingly open borders of the United States began to close in the nineteenth century when the nation's growing bureaucracy developed a documentary apparatus to enforce increasing migration controls.[30] This apparatus further intensified with the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act and the creation of the Border Patrol.[31] Although Congress created the Border Patrol to enforce the exclusion of Chinese, Japanese, and eastern European migrants, the agency quickly began focusing its efforts on Mexicans. This narrow interpretation of US immigration law, Kelly Lytle Hernández has shown, "drew a particular color line around the political condition of illegality."[32] Even when Mexican immigrants became increasingly connected to "illegality," the Border Patrol was known in agricultural regions, like the Imperial Valley or the Rio

---

[28] Loza, *Defiant Braceros,* Chapter Two.
[29] Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 146.
[30] See Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); John C. Torpey, "Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate Means of Movement," *Sociological Theory* 16 (1998): 239-259; and Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009),
[31] As Ngai has shown, the Act produced the "illegal" alien as a new legal and political subject, whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 04.
[32] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2010), 22.

Grande Valley in Texas, to be friendly to growers who depended on unauthorized workers. Many members of the force considered this grower-friendly policy a practice that was necessary for the region's economic survival.[33]

Sources and Methodology

Avoiding not only what Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller have described as "the bounds of nationalist thought," that often confine migration studies to the nation-state, but also the "extreme fluidism" of more recent transnational studies, "Cheap for Whom?" interprets the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands as a historically and economically integrated region bisected by a political frontier.[34] This methodological approach represents an important intervention in the historiography of the Bracero Program, which, though extensive, has failed to study the myriad ways in which the guest worker program affected *both* sides of the US-Mexico border. With its emphasis on place and families, this dissertation also demonstrates the importance of combining macro- and micro-level perspectives that reflect the national and local dimensions of migration and labor. As James Brooks et al. have observed, "microhistory underscores the need for local perspectives in understanding global patterns and wider narratives, as well as offering unique insights into phenomena and patterns that may lie outside of macrohistorical narratives or flatly contradict them."[35] This study centers the experiences of Mexican

---

[33] Sergio Chávez, *Border Lives: Fronterizos, Transnational Migrants, and Commuters in Tijuana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[34] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology," *International Migration Review* 37 no. 3 (2003), 576.
[35] James Brooks, Christopher R. DeCorse, and John Walton, *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning, and Narrative in Microhistory* (Santa Fe, N.M: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008), 04.

workers and their families in the larger macrohistory of the Bracero Program to illustrate how migrants created alternative avenues for family interaction and reunification despite the spatial barriers that the program imposed on them.

The newspapers printed in the Imperial Valley and Mexicali best reflected the Bracero Program's local and national contours. The *Imperial Valley Press* and *The Brawley News* constantly advocated for growers' interests, putting forth the idea that what was good for the agriculture industry was good for the valley. Despite their function as a mouthpiece for the region's grower class, the articles that these newspapers published include invaluable information absent in other sources. When Mexican migrant workers came into contact with the valley's various law enforcement agencies, or became involved in accidents as victims, culpable parties, or helping hands, these newspapers made visible an otherwise invisible population. Moreover, in their reports about migrant workers, these publications contributed to the process of ethnic Mexicans' racial formation in the region. Describing migrant men as "wetbacks," "hardworking," or "hungry for work in Imperial Valley fields," these newspapers repeated racial scripts circulating across the Southwest—while also adding a few new labels such as "good spenders." Mexicali's newspapers, on the other hand, often served as the voice of dissent against the Mexican government. *El Regional* and *ABC,* for instance, accused the local and federal governments of corruption and blamed officials for creating overpopulation problems in Mexicali and turning a blind eye to the abuse and exploitation that migrants suffered on both sides of the border. Though motivated by their own political interests, the editors of these newspapers presented alternative interpretations of the narratives that the Mexican state circulated at the time. These papers, besides making public information

that the government often wanted censored, also reflected the political landscape of the time.

Like Mexicali's newspapers, the archives of Mexican government offices also contain information that the administrators of the Bracero Program preferred to ignore. I consulted Mexico's General National Archive (*Archivo General de la Nación*), the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Relations (*Acervo Histórico Diplomático-Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*) and the Archive of the State of Baja California (*Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California*) for voices absent in official government documents and publications. Although they are government products, these archives collected a wealth of information that came directly from braceros, aspirantes, and other individuals affected by the Bracero Program. The correspondence that migrants sent to Mexican presidents and Baja California governors throughout the mid-twentieth century are remarkable. Whether they petitioned for help regularizing the status of their properties or obtaining Bracero Program contracts, Mexicans turned to their government in times of need. Literate or not, aspirantes found ways to communicate with mayors, governors, and, ultimately, presidents. They did this by relying on others to communicate their collective needs, practicing something akin to the "communal literacy" Patrick McNamara has described among nineteenth-century indigenous communities using scribes and lawyers to obtain government favors.[36] Through their letters and telegrams, these twentieth-century migrants made themselves heard during critical moments when it

[36] McNamara developed the term "communal literacy" to describe the way in which Zapotecs from the Sierra Juarez relied on scribes and lawyers to communicate with the Mexican state in the nineteenth century. Patrick J. McNamara, *Sons of the Sierra: Juárez, Díaz, and the People of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, 1855-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

was most convenient for the Mexican state that they remain silent. Both men and women wrote to their local and national leaders asking for bracero contracts, transportation passes to the interior, land, or direct economic aid. Others wrote with complaints or accusations about the corruption that always surrounded the Bracero Program. Presenting themselves and their problems to officials, migrants also revealed what they believed were important identity markers that made them legible to the state. This correspondence helps us understand how migrants appropriated the language of the nation-state to try to obtain the help they needed, even when these pleas landed on deaf ears.

The oral histories that the Bracero History Archive collected from former braceros and their families in the early 2000s provide us another source for understanding how migrants have made sense of their experiences. I draw from twenty-four oral history interviews of men who worked and lived in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. In my reading of these testimonies I follow Mireya Loza's suggestion that we "think of an oral history interview as one performance produced by a particular scenario and acknowledge that a different scenario might produce a different oral history."[37] Had the men been interviewed after a long day at work when they were still braceros, they might have denounced their living and working conditions and minimized the opportunities that their employment gave them. Most ex-braceros interviewed by the Bracero History Archive, however, mentioned the hardships they experienced yet highlighted their achievements and the help they received from employers. Many recognized the widespread racism and abuse that braceros suffered, but most assured their interviewers

[37] Loza, *Defiant Braceros,* 14.

that they had had a good experience and were treated kindly. Because these interviews were collected when the men were in the twilight years of their lives, they certainly reflected the ways ex-braceros came to produce a collective memory of their own. Collective memories such as these, as Monica Perales found among former members of a Texas community, "served as a mechanism by which working people found agency within their limited range of choices."[38]

Terminology and Dissertation Organization

Although contemporary sources identified the migrants who crossed without government authorization or documentation as "wetbacks" or "illegals," I utilize the terms "unauthorized" and "undocumented" interchangeably to refer to them. I reserve the term "bracero" for the migrants contracted to work in agriculture under the Bracero Program. It should be noted, however, that Mexicans often referred to men who migrated to the United States to work in agriculture as "braceros," irrespective of their immigration status. For lack of a better word, I employ the term "American" to refer to US citizens or to organizations or institutions operating in the United States.

Many contemporary sources used the term "domestic" to refer to the workers who had labored in the Imperial Valley before the Bracero Program, thus differentiating them from braceros or unauthorized migrants. Domestic workers, unlike braceros and undocumented laborers, were US citizens or permanent residents. The distinctions that labor leaders and program critics made between domestic workers and migrants certainly

[38] Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 03.

contributed at times to the racialization of migrant Mexicans as a foreign and less deserving group. It also drove a wedge between migrants and citizens (or longtime residents) when these groups would have been more successful in their fight for higher wages and better living and working conditions had they joined efforts. I employ the term "domestic" throughout the dissertation to highlight the representational work it performed and to underline how important this was for the organization of agricultural labor and migration in the borderlands region.

Chapter 1 argues the first years of the Bracero Program were pivotal in expanding aspirations and expectations concerning migration and labor across the US-Mexico borderlands. Soon after the program began, Imperial Valley growers began advocating for a border crossing system that would allow them to recruit seasonal workers directly from Mexicali and avoid the administrative red tape of the Bracero Program. Mexican border dwellers, moreover, began seeking government-sanctioned arrangements that would allow them to work in the United States but continue residing in Mexico. Despite the fact that bracero recruitment and contracting was restricted to the Mexican interior in these first years, thousands of migrants flocked to the US-Mexico border in hopes of obtaining employment in the United States. The letters and telegrams that these internal migrants sent to the Mexican president during this period reflected the misery and hardship that they confronted in their journeys. And although the guest worker program was supposed to supply US agriculture with only a temporary labor force, many of the braceros who labored in this region soon became permanent, even if seasonal, workers in the Imperial Valley, returning each year under new labor contracts or as unauthorized workers. These newcomers arrived in a region segregated by race and class. By the time

the Bracero Program began in 1942, the Imperial Valley had a long history of employing migrant labor to perform the arduous tasks necessary for agricultural production. Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and white Americans often intermingled in fields, labor camps, cafes, and bars as marginalized members of the regional society. Despite their spatial, social, and occupational marginalization, contracted workers and their undocumented counterparts quickly became an important consumer group in the region, prompting Imperial Valley's business owners to cater to their needs.

Chapter 2 reveals how local responses to the Bracero Program contributed to the formation of a transborder working class forced to situate its social reproduction in Mexico. Imperial Valley growers intensified their efforts to recruit workers in Mexicali and achieved this in 1948. The internal migrants who traveled north hoping to secure bracero contracts in Mexicali's recruitment center encountered a strong nativism led by local newspapers condemning the presence of homeless migrants. Scorned as they were when they first arrived, the migrants who settled in Mexicali accelerated the city's urbanization and its expansion of public services. While Mexicali responded to the demographic changes that the Bracero Program provoked, organized labor in the Imperial Valley attempted to impede the displacement of domestic workers by Mexican nationals contracted under the program. The National Farm Labor Union (NFLU), led by Ernesto Galarza in the Imperial Valley, coordinated a series of strikes focused on protesting the large numbers of unauthorized migrants working in the region. What Galarza and the NFLU did not realize at the time, though, is that the pressure they placed on Imperial Valley growers and the Border Patrol had unintended consequences. Instead of

substituting undocumented workers with the men that the NFLU represented, more and more growers turned to border commuters who crossed the border using local passports or a permanent resident (green) card.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how Imperial Valley agribusiness consolidated its reserve army of labor in Mexicali. This mid-1950s were a turning point in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. Thousands of aspirantes rushed to Mexicali in January 1954 upon hearing the news that the United States was contracting workers at the border in a unilateral program. Although the program lasted only a few weeks, it initiated an enormous wave of internal migration that continued for several more months and swelled Mexicali's transient population. While Baja California's authorities coordinated with the Mexican federal government to return internal migrants to their homes in the interior, the INS began an aggressive carrot-and-stick campaign that sought to reduce the employment of unauthorized workers and increase grower cooperation with the newly-resumed Bracero Program. Nonetheless, the stream of internal migrants continued to grow, giving Baja California the population it needed to finally obtain statehood in 1952. After statehood, Baja California's, first elected governor, Braulio Maldonado Sandez, took Baja California in a new direction, welcoming the hard working "brothers from the interior" who brought prosperity to the region with their dollar earnings. In 1956, Maldonado Sandez launched a state-managed labor pool that provided workers to both sides of the Calexico-Mexicali border. Embracing the state's role as a supplier of cheap labor for California's agricultural regions, Maldonado Sandez showed American capital his firm commitment to transborder cooperation.

Chapter 4 illustrates how the interdependence between Mexicali and the Imperial Valley continued to grow even as the Bracero Program neared its end. Baja California used its control over the state's contract quotas to drive labor unions and social organizations into the corporatist state the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), Mexico's ruling party for seven decades, was building across the country. As it apportioned its allotted bracero contracts among trade unions, resident groups, and agricultural organizations, Baja California gave preference to state residents and to the heads of "large" households to ensure that the prosperity that the Bracero Program generated would remain in the borderlands region. As more and more Mexicali families depended on the seasonal employment of California agriculture for their livelihood, Brawley doctor Benjamin Yellen became the loudest critic of the new labor regime that was quickly consolidating in the borderlands region. The statements that Yellen collected during these years demonstrated that braceros were too often the victims of medical malpractices and unscrupulous labor camp operators who made huge profits cheating the workers. Yellen also gathered the testimonies of domestic US workers who had been displaced by migrants earning substantially lower wages for twice the work. The cheap labor of Mexican migrants in the Imperial Valley had become so essential that once growers realized the end of the Bracero Program was inevitable, they turned to their economic power and legal influence to ensure they would have uninterrupted access to this labor force.

Chapter 5 focuses on the end of the Bracero Program in 1964 and its aftermath. The end of the binational labor agreement made apparent what many valley residents already knew: transborder workers had become a permanent feature of the regional labor

market. While the nation focused on the ongoing debate between southwestern growers and organized labor, a large percentage of the Imperial Valley's agricultural labor force continued to quietly change its migration status, acquiring legal permanent residence (green cards), while living in Mexicali and crossing the border to work in the United States. Growers justified their reliance on migrant workers arguing that domestic labor was "unskilled" or "unqualified" to perform the kinds of farm work that braceros had been doing for more than two decades. These growers apparently found no irony in the fact that they were the ones who insisted throughout the Bracero Program era that contracted workers were "unskilled" labor. Meanwhile, Imperial Valley residents condemned the employment of border commuters in a growing number of occupations. Mexican residence, more than legal status, is what now pitted domestic workers against border commuters. And although these tensions continued, a new generation of labor organizers came to recognize in the late 1960s that their success depended on incorporating border commuters into their movement.[39] If border commuters were cheap labor for agribusiness and potential allies to organized labor, they were also important consumers in Mexicali. The higher wages that braceros and border commuters earned in the US encouraged the Mexican state to continue supplying cheap labor to the United States. Mexico achieved this with its 1965 Border Industrialization Program that invited multinational companies to set up assembly plants in northern border cities. This accelerated the expansion of neoliberalism in the US-Mexico borderlands: the program

[39] Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chávez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011).

not only maintained labor social reproduction in Mexico, but it also outsourced the labor itself.

Chapter 1: "We sure want 'em next year!" Braceros and Undocumented Workers in the Making of a Cheap Labor Force, 1942–1946

On December 11, 1942, the *Brawley News* reported that Captain Willard R. Speares of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) was urging the Imperial Valley's businessmen and citizens to aid in keeping braceros contented by "practicing the policy of goodwill."[40] The first group of Mexican guest workers had arrived in the valley just a few weeks before on a special train of eleven cars from Mexico City. On that day, November 18, Jose Gutierrez, the Mexican consul at Calexico, had spoken to the newly arrived braceros about the importance of their work as "soldiers on the farms."[41] A few short weeks later, Speares was addressing Imperial Valley residents in similar terms. Although "wages [were] good," Speares argued, braceros were not there just for the money: they were "thoroughly sold on the idea that they are doing a patriotic job helping the United States to grow food crops." To make his point clear, Speares reported that Imperial Valley growers employing braceros had expressed "great satisfaction" with the work guest workers were doing and that only four men had been returned to Mexico out of the 1,100 braceros employed in the Imperial Valley. As some historians have shown, the first years of the Bracero Program were marked by a binational attitude of cooperation under the Good Neighbor policy. Growers and farming communities often welcomed the first bracero contingents in their communities with food, music, and

[40] "Speares Urges Practice of Goodwill Toward Mexicans Brought In To Aid Farmers," *Brawley News,* December 11, 1942, pgs. 1, 4.
[41] "Mexican Farm Laborers Come To Aid Ranch Crop Effort," *Brawley News,* November 18, 1942, pg. 1.

dancing.[42] Imperial Valley growers, for instance, had organized a barbecue to welcome their new employees.

The Imperial Valley's grower community was naturally the most interested in receiving braceros for the "labor market insurance" that they offered American agribusiness at a time of great instability.[43] Captain Speares, however, was ensuring that the larger community also supported the Bracero Program and that they understood what the local economy could gain from welcoming Mexican contracted workers. The Imperial Valley's merchants and salespeople, argued Speares, could be "helpful when these Mexico laborers come to [them] today by seeing that they get what they want to buy in local stores. Few of the men speak English and it is therefore difficult, sometimes impossible, for them to make their wants known. If storekeepers will have patience and do what they can to assist the workers, a great deal of friction will be avoided and bonds of goodwill established that will ease many difficulties." Noting that from a "cash standpoint" valley merchants stood to benefit from the Bracero Program, Speares advised storekeepers to cultivate their business with braceros and to "employ Spanish interpreters who can sell to the Mexican workers. The men are getting good money, and they want to spend it." Police departments, moreover, were "asked to give this same service, by putting an officer who speaks Spanish on the beat where the Mexican workers congregate after working hours." Braceros' language handicap, insisted Speares, could get "the Mexican strangers" into difficulties. According to the FSA representative, braceros were

---

[42] See Loza, *Defiant Braceros* and Manuel García y Griego, "The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964," in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States,* ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1996).
[43] Wayne A. Grove, "The Mexican Farm Labor Program, 1942-1964: Government-Administered Labor Market Insurance for Farmers," *Agricultural History* 70, no. 2 (1996), 303.

"in a strange land where they do not understand the customs and where their own ways are not known. They can easily become victims of their own lack of sophistication or of unscrupulous persons."

As a previous manager of an Imperial Valley ranch, Speares was said to be "familiar with requirements of valley ranchers." His work experience suggests that Speares understood the large and longstanding place that Mexican workers filled in the Imperial Valley's labor market. His descriptions of the guest workers arriving in the Imperial Valley, however, depicted a group of men completely foreign to the region. Speares was in some ways correct in emphasizing that many of the braceros arriving that fall might experience a culture shock, for they were mostly from Mexico City and central Mexico. More than preparing the Imperial Valley to demonstrate its goodwill to braceros, however, Speares was reinforcing existing narratives about Mexicans' cultural difference. Emphasizing the guest workers' "lack of sophistication" and their language limitations, the FSA official drew a strong line between braceros and valley residents. Like the union leaders who would come to fiercely oppose undocumented migration to the Imperial Valley in the late 1940s, Speares drew a wedge between longtime Imperial Valley residents and the Mexican newcomers.

Assembling a Cheap Labor Force

Culturally different or not, braceros were valued in the Imperial Valley for the cheap and reliable labor that they provided agribusiness. Though first recruited to the Imperial Valley for their role as supplemental workers during a wartime emergency, braceros quickly became permanent and vital members of the larger transborder region.

By 1943, for instance, Imperial Valley growers were not only asking that the Bracero Program continue, but to also that they receive the same workers each season. The arrival of braceros and undocumented workers from Mexico's interior changed the Imperial Valley's labor market in a few short years, as Mexican migrants replaced a diverse conformation of ethnic Mexicans, Dust Bowl migrants, and Filipinos. Local, state, and federal officials like Speares facilitated this process by singing the praises of the Imperial Valley's newest immigrant workers and harshly criticizing returning veterans and defense workers for seeking living wages that reflected the wartime inflation and rising cost of living. The men who worked in the Imperial Valley under the Bracero Program during World War II were only a small part of the total workforce. Soon undocumented workers began following in the footsteps of the first braceros, ultimately outsizing the bracero population. These parallel groups of workers gave Imperial Valley growers the power to push American citizens and permanent residents off the fields.

This process of worker displacement and replacement would not have occurred so rapidly if thousands of Mexicans had not migrated autonomously outside of the formal designs of the Bracero Program. With their binational agreement, the governments of Mexico and the United States activated an unstoppable stream of internal migrants who traveled to the US-Mexico border with the staunch determination to earn dollars. Mexican migration to the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands during the Bracero Program constituted what sociologist Néstor Rodríguez has called "autonomous migration": a process by which ordinary people have ignored officially authorized immigration and labor programs and attempted to "spatially reorganize their base of

social reproduction in the global landscape."[44] This chapter argues that the start of the Bracero Program in 1942 expanded common perceptions about the possibilities of labor and migration across the US-Mexico border. For thousands of Mexicans, the Bracero Program was irrefutable proof that the United States had a large demand for their labor. The new international cooperation suggested that both states were willing to act as labor agents, encouraging migrants and growers to imagine new labor and migration configurations. As Mexican jobseekers began migrating to Mexico City and border areas in numbers that far exceeded the parameters of the Bracero Program, growers in turn understood that this autonomous migration could be exploited to an enormous potential. Once Mexican workers decided that they would pursue higher wages in the United States, and once American growers began to hire Mexican migrants in large numbers as a means of lowering wages, there was no turning back. Both the aspirantes hoping to obtain bracero contracts and the growers who wanted to employ them were relentless in their efforts.

For Mexican workers and their potential employers, the border was an obstacle that could be eliminated with the cooperation of the state. Border residents were quick to realize that a modified Bracero Program could be a beneficial labor arrangement for both sides of the border. Although bracero recruitment was only taking place in Mexico City, aspirantes flooded the office of President Manuel Avila Camacho with requests to help them obtain contracts at the US-Mexico border. Other aspirantes enlisted the help of labor unions and chambers of commerce to advocate for a Bracero Program of border

[44] Rodríguez, "The Battle for the Border."

commuters. Like the aspirantes seeking to create new opportunities under the binational agreement, Imperial Valley growers proposed their own labor plans to their government. More importantly, when Imperial Valley residents began to publicly oppose undocumented migration, these growers relied on friendly state officials to dampen the protests and ensured the growth of a new labor regime.

In the next few pages I provide an overview of the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands and its history. The name "Imperial" reflected the aspirations of the valley's founders who viewed themselves as desert conquerors building an agricultural "empire." This empire was founded on the cheap labor of seasonal migrants and a marginalized ethnic Mexican population. And it operated on both sides of the border: in Mexicali, an American company operated its own cotton empire in a region largely isolated from the rest of Mexico. Still a federal territory when the Bracero Program began, Baja California was largely unprepared for the demographic and social changes that the binational labor agreement would bring to the region.

The Imperial Valley-Mexicali Border Region

An area defined by the international boundary that bisects it, the Imperial Valley-Mexicali region illustrates the way that unequal state powers and the predominance of American capital have shaped landscapes, peoples, and economies beyond the territorial limits of the American nation-state. The Imperial Valley-Mexicali border region is where southeastern California and northeastern Baja California Norte meet. Known since the era of Spanish conquest as the Colorado Desert, this desert plain west of the Colorado River was renamed by American investors in the early twentieth

century as the Imperial Valley.[45] Imperial County came to be an important center in agricultural production, but it has also been one of California's most impoverished counties. The region is a product of desert reclamation: one of what Phillip H. Round calls the "dreams" of the Southwest.[46] The history of the Imperial Valley's desert reclamation, and its subsequent success in commercial agriculture, reveal the gross differences between the myths of democracy and equality the region's developers and promoters advertised and its stark reality of widespread poverty and inequality.

The vast inequalities that have characterized the Imperial Valley throughout its history were firmly grounded in the region's start as a new settlement under American capital. Benny J. Andrés notes the colonization of the Imperial Valley at the turn of the twentieth century was imagined as "a grand egalitarian effort." Developers envisioned the region would be made up of a core of white landowning families aided by white and nonwhite wage workers. This vision soon proved illusory, however. By 1910, for instance, three corporations had a monopoly over water, transportation, and land, and widespread speculation and the consolidation of vast estates soon facilitated the growth of absentee landownership and tenancy dependent on a growing population of nonwhite migrant workers.[47] Under this system, a few Asian immigrants managed to achieve a

---

[45] Héctor Manuel Lucero, "Peopling Baja California," in *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Bajalta California,* ed. Michael Dear, Gustavo Leclerc, and Jo-Anne Berelowitz (New York: Routledge, 2003), 92. Benny J. Andrés explains, "Promoters of the Colorado Desert selected the term 'Imperial' to reflect a desire to tame, manipulate, and monitor desert 'wilderness,' river 'wildwater,' and racial 'wildness.' Benny Joseph Andres, "Power and Control in Imperial Valley, California: Nature, Agribusiness, Labor, and Race Relations, 1900-1940" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2003), vii.

[46] Phillip H. Round, *The Impossible Land: Story and Place in California's Imperial Valley* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 13.

[47] The California Development Company held a monopoly over water rights in the Imperial Valley; the Southern Pacific Railroad controlled transportation, and the Colorado River Land Company owned most of the Mexicali Valley. To maximize profits, moreover, the region's elite created crop and livestock associations and cooperatives that vertically integrated their operations. Eric I. Boime, "Fluid Boundaries:

degree of upward mobility, finding opportunities to become labor contractors, tenant farmers, and eventually landowners.[48] One Japanese farmer, for instance, owned a ranch that spanned the Calexico-Mexicali border and recruited Japanese workers in Mexicali.[49] However, most nonwhite workers remained impoverished and were forced to constantly migrate in search of employment. The disproportionate levels of power that a small elite held in Imperial Valley, Andrés explains, "were based on race, wealth, and access to legal and police authority."[50] The first decades of growth and development in the Imperial-Mexicali border region, in other words, defined a regional socioeconomic order largely marked by racial boundaries.

Time and again, Baja California's fate, particularly that of its main border cities, has been tied to the United States. Some call this a "history of rebound," for whatever happens in California immediately has repercussions in Baja California.[51] Founded in 1903, Mexicali was initially planned as a mirror, or extension, of its sister city Calexico. The Colorado River Land Company purchased 876,000 acres of land in the Mexicali

---

Southern California, Baja California, and the Conflict Over the Colorado River, 1848-1944*,"* (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002), 10; Andres, "Power and Control in Imperial Valley," 81, 114, 175.

[48] Andres, "Power and Control in Imperial Valley," 174. Maria Eugenia Anguiano Tellez, *Agricultura y migración en el valle de Mexicali* (Tijuana: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1995), 22-23. For more on the history of Punjabis in California see Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[49] Deborah S. Kang, *The INS on the Line: Making Immigration Law on the US-Mexico Border, 1917-1954*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 31.

[50] Andres, "Power and Control in Imperial Valley," 396.

[51] Miguel Léon Portilla and David Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California: historia breve* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2011), 150. Luz María Ortega Villa and Guadalupe Ortega Villa also emphasize the common observation that Mexicali's history is connected more, even from its origins, to the history of California's southeast than to the rest of Mexico. This integrated history, Lucero observes, is the main reason why Mexicali and Tijuana developed separately, each under the influence of its northern neighbor. Luz María Ortega Villa and Guadalupe Ortega Villa, *Donde empieza la carne asada: Consumo de bienes culturales en sectores populares de Mexicali* (Mexicali: Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, 2005), 15; Lucero, "Peopling Baja California," 89.

Valley in 1904 and began its monopoly over land and cotton cultivation.[52] Some of the first immigrants to the Mexicali Valley were Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian employees of this company, tasked with digging the canals that began transporting Colorado River water to the Imperial and Mexicali valleys in the first decade of the twentieth century.[53] The Mexicans who joined these early Asian workers were escaping poverty and a dying mining industry in the south of Baja California's peninsula.[54] Despite the region's isolation from the Mexican interior, many Mexicans made their way to the valley during the next two decades. Many of these internal migrants were attracted by the region's growing cotton industry, some aspired to find employment in the United States, and many others hoped to acquire *ejido* land under Mexico's agrarian reform.[55] Determined to prevent another filibuster mission like William Walker's failed attempt to conquer Baja California and Sonora in the nineteenth century, Mexican president Lazaro Cardenas had made the colonization of Baja California by Mexican citizens a priority of national defense. When the United States began repatriating Mexican citizens and their children to Mexican border towns like Mexicali during the Great Depression, the Cardenas administration quickly regarded them as the ideal colonizers of Baja California.[56]

---

[52] Anguiano Tellez, *Agricultura y migración en el valle de Mexicali*, 52.
[53] Anguiano Tellez, *Agricultura y migración en el valle de Mexicali,* 22-23.
[54] See Robert R. Alvarez, *Familia: Migration and Adaptation in Baja and Alta California, 1800-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
[55] Felipe Güicho Gutiérrez, *Y nació Pueblo Nuevo* (Mexicali: Instituto Nacional Para la Educacion de los Adultos, 1999), 13.
[56] Since many of those repatriated from California and Arizona had been farmworkers, the Mexican government preferred these migrants because they allegedly possessed "more knowledge about agriculture." See Anguiano Tellez, *Agricultura y migración en el valle de Mexicali,* 81. Miguel León Portilla and David Piñera Ramírez explain the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) was the main supporter of these colonization efforts. Léon Portilla and Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California: historia breve*, 160.

The growing number of Mexican settlers in the Mexicali Valley increasingly pressured Baja California's territorial government to expropriate the region's fertile land (including the Colorado River Land Company's) and redistribute it to Mexican citizens. Settlers also pressured local authorities to reduce competition from Chinese labor, leading governor Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1923–1930) to restrict Chinese immigration by the 1930s.[57] José Valenzuela argues the agrarian movement reached a new height in Baja California in 1937 and became the spark that drew a stream of enterprising migrants to the Mexicali Valley. He underlines the way that men, women, and children migrated to the region despite its extreme temperatures and the hard work entailed in "opening new land" for agriculture. Baja California's agrarian reform, moreover, did more than create ejidos for agricultural production. The federal government also turned some of the land previously held by the Colorado River Land Company into *colonias*, residential neighborhoods with smaller, more affordable plots of land. This reaffirmed, according to Miguel León Portilla and David Piñera Ramírez, the coexistence of the two forms of land tenancy that have characterized the Mexicali Valley: the ejido and the colonia.[58] Although more and more migrants arrived in the Mexicali Valley after 1937, only a small minority were able to purchase or obtain agricultural land. Most worked as hired hands in the Imperial and Mexicali valleys.[59]

---

[57] Anguiano Tellez, *Agricultura y migración en el Valle de Mexicali,* 82. Benny J. Andrés, Jr., *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015).
[58] Miguel León Portilla and David Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California: historia breve* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de Mexico, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, 2011), 159.
[59] Anguiano Tellez, *Agricultura y migración en el valle de Mexicali*, 82.

While agricultural workers in the Mexicali Valley had some success with their land redistribution demands, their counterparts in the Imperial Valley were less effective making labor gains throughout the 1930s. Gilbert G. González has indicated that Mexican workers came to dominate the labor market by the late 1920s, at which point they comprised over a third of Imperial County's total population. Imperial Valley growers relied on labor contractors to fill their seasonal labor needs from a diverse pool of Mexicans, Filipinos, South Asians, blacks, whites, and a smaller number of Japanese, Chinese and Koreans. With shed and machine jobs largely limited to white workers, nonwhites performed most field work, and many of these jobs were also segregated by race or ethnicity (Filipinos, for example, were the primary lettuce and asparagus harvesters). Besides the arduous work they performed in the fields, sometimes in 100-plus-degree temperatures that placed them at risk of dying from heat exhaustion, migrant workers lived in deplorable conditions. The lack of housing in the Imperial Valley forced seasonal workers to set up tents in ditch banks or to occupy decrepit shacks located at the edges of the fields where they labored.[60] Frustrated by these conditions, agricultural workers led a series of strikes in the Imperial Valley in 1933 and 1934. These strikes, however, were largely unsuccessful because Imperial Valley growers hired strikebreakers and enlisted the help of the Border Patrol, county sheriff, and the Mexican consul in Calexico to intervene on their behalf.[61]

When the Bracero Program began in 1942, the Imperial Valley's agricultural labor force was still largely diverse. Whites, ethnic Mexicans, blacks, and Filipinos

---

[60] Gilbert G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 162-163.
[61] González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing,* 173-196.

worked seasonally in the Imperial Valley and maintained larger migratory circuits across the Southwest. Winter and spring were the busiest seasons, bringing thousands of workers together for the lettuce, pea, carrot, cabbage, tomato, beet, cantaloupe, and melon harvests. As World War II wore on, however, many of the white workers who had been pushed into California's agriculture by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl found a way out through the military and defense sectors. By August 1945, for example, the United Press was reporting that some Dust Bowl migrants had earned large sums of money working in the defense industries in California and that they were traveling back to the Midwest or to the east coast.[62] The racial diversity in the Imperial Valley's agricultural labor force further decreased as the Bracero Program continued and expanded in the 1950s. The guest worker program and its parallel stream of unauthorized workers depressed wages, pushing not only whites out of agriculture, but also ethnic Mexicans.

On the Margins: Pueblo Nuevo and the East Side

When braceros and larger numbers of undocumented migrants began arriving in the Imperial Valley, they entered a society marked by stark racial and class hierarchies. Most seasonal workers established residence in the various federal labor camps dotting the region or on the eastern sides of Imperial Valley's towns. In Brawley and El Centro, the railroad tracks marked the boundaries between an impoverished and largely nonwhite east side and a more affluent and white west side. This racial and class segregation was so striking that in July 1946 the *Brawley News* reported that while few of Brawley's

[62] "Correspondent Interviews Dust Bowl Farmers," *Brawley News,* August 29, pg. 6.

westside residents left town during the summer months, approximately seventy to eighty percent of the eastside residents did. Many of Imperial Valley's working class communities had grown as ethnic Mexicans secured regular employment throughout the year and began settling permanently in the region. González explains that growers referred to these early residents as "house Mexicans" or the "better class of Mexicans" to differentiate between them and the seasonal residents who lived in field camps.[63] Many of the ethnic Mexicans who lived on Brawley's east side had long roots in the region and had lived in the valley for twenty or thirty years. Their networks extended well beyond the region, for many had relatives in other farming areas in California, Texas, and New Mexico. Some of these early residents gained recognition as local leaders. Jesus Chabolla, for instance, owned a tortilla factory on the east side and was remembered upon his death as a former president of the Alianza Hispano-Americana and a member of the Pacific Woodmen of the World.[64]

For all of their roots in the region, Imperial Valley's ethnic Mexicans were a marginalized population in an already marginalized place. Of the fifty-five students who graduated from Brawley High School in 1946, only three had Spanish surnames.[65] This low educational attainment was compounded by Brawley's significantly lower spending on public education, for Brawley spent $79 on each elementary school student in 1944, when the state median was $94.[66] Public health in Imperial County, another strong marker of a population's well-being, reflected the region's many problems. Keith Mets,

---

[63] González, Mexican Consuls aand Labor Organizing, 163.
[64] "Brawley Resident of 20 Years Dies of Heart Attack," *Brawley News,* June 26, 1946, pg. 3.
[65] "55 Graduate From Brawley High at Tuesday Ceremony," *Brawley News,* May 29, 1946, pg. 1.
[66] "Grade Schools Spent $78.88 per '44 Pupil," *Brawley News,* March 20, 1945, pg. 2.

one of the valley's most influential growers and president of the Imperial County Tuberculosis Association (among many other roles), declared in December 1943 that the county had "twice as high a death rate from tuberculosis as the rest of the state and three times as high as the rest of the nation."[67] It was not until the Navy began performing its own inspections of the valley's eating establishments, moreover, that city officials across the county began proposing the creation of a sanitary code and its enforcement. In Brawley, the Navy named twenty-one eastside cafes as "out of bounds" for servicemen. The names of these establishments, such as Polo Norte Cafe, Bamba Cafe, La Central, La Tapatia, Mi Fortuna, El Obrero, La Fama, Morelia Cafe, and El Sonora, made it clear that many of their patrons were Spanish speakers.[68]

The owners of the businesses that catered to the Imperial Valley's ethnic Mexican population constituted a small but significant middle class with interests in improving the community's conditions. When a group of thirty-five eastside Brawley merchants restarted the Eastside Businessmen's Association in April 1945, they underscored the "need for a voice in representing their problems in the city." The association announced plans to organize used clothing drives and a desire for improvements in education, police protection, equal rights, and building projects, such as better streets around the Miguel Hidalgo Elementary School, extension of water and sewer lines, and improved streets and alleys. Some criticized Brawley's police department for its lack of interest in investigating crimes committed on the east side,

---

[67] "Support of TB Association Urged by Mets," *Brawley News,* December 8, 1943, pg. 1.
[68] "Cafes, Hotels Are Inspected by Navy," *Brawley News*, January 27, 1945, pg. 1; "City Takes Septs to Draft Sanitary Codes, Enforcement," *Brawley News*, February 6, 1945, pg. 1, 6; "Navy Recommends 21 Cafes To Be Placed Out-of-Bounds," *Brawley News*, February 17, pgs. 1, 2.

while others complained that "a man could be killed in one of our alleys and the police might not get around to checking up for hours."[69] Less than two months later, the association held its first fundraiser, a bond rally and pageant that included a Mexicali military band and appearances by Baja California's governor Felipe Islas (1944–1946), the Mexican consul at Calexico, and the American consul at Mexicali.[70] The following March the Eastside Businessmen's Association petitioned Brawley's city council to install sidewalks and curbs on the city's east side. Gabe Abdelnour, the association's president, reassured the city councilmen that over half of the east side's property owners were willing to pay for these improvements. City leaders, however, were not especially responsive to these efforts. The city council made it clear that the city would only gravel some streets on the eastern side and mayor Elmer Sears declared that the state highway department, not the city of Brawley, was responsible for cleaning east Main Street.[71]

Mexicali's equivalent of Brawley's and El Centro's east sides was colonia Pueblo Nuevo. Raul Orozco Maciel argues this community was marginalized from its conception. Unlike the eastern side of Mexicali, which was built to American standards for the local bureaucracy and middle class, Pueblo Nuevo was set apart by its self-made homes, the delivery of water by canals, and the refuge that this community offered recent immigrants.[72] The very name of "New Town," Orozco Maciel observed in his memoir, was a symbol of Pueblo Nuevo's marginalization as a new, different destination for

---

[69] "Association is Reorganized by Eastside Businessmen," *Brawley News,* April 6, 1945, pgs. 1, 6.
[70] "Mexicali to Provide Band For Patriotic Bond Rally," *Brawley News,* May 29, 1945, pgs. 1, 4; "Bond Pageant Program to be Entertaining Event Sunday," *Brawley News,* May 31, 1945, pg. 1.
[71] "Eastside Group Seeks Aid to Improve Streets," *Brawley News,* March 19, 1946, pg. 1.
[72] Raúl Orozco Maciel, *De este lado del puente: el tradicional barrio de Pueblo Nuevo* (Mexicali: Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 1995), 07.

Mexicali's working classes. The neighborhood gained a reputation as the colonia that would receive recent immigrants who had no other resources but their labor. As Mexicali continued receiving thousands of immigrants each year, Pueblo Nuevo emerged as the home for the city's impoverished newcomers, for humble people, for those who built their own houses out of materials they gathered themselves.[73] Mexicali's sudden population growth gave rise to new settlements of people finding in former cotton farming lands the only space available to inhabit.[74] In their oral histories about Pueblo Nuevo, the colonia's older residents emphasized the hard work and cooperation that they put into the construction of their homes and gardens. They cheerfully recount, for example, that the residents were responsible for maintaining the open canals that provided their lots with potable water during the colonia's first decades.[75]

Like Brawley's east side, Pueblo Nuevo also had its own leadership that pursued improvements for the community. In April 1946, for instance, Juan Macías, president of the *Unión Residentes Bajos Río Nuevo* (Residents of the Lower Banks of the New River Union), sent President Avila Camacho a telegram requesting his intervention in a local matter. In it, Macías explained that the people who lived on the edges of the New River were being harassed by the *Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento* (Ministry of Agriculture

---

[73] Orozco Maciel, *De este lado del puente,* 31. The oral histories of Josefina Fajardo and Margarita Lopez corroborate this. Fajardo and Lopez lived in Mexicali's Pueblo Nuevo community while their husbands worked as braceros in California. The two women recount that Mexicali's houses were built with cachanillas, a plant native to the region. Veronica Cortez, "Josefina Fajardo," in Bracero History Archive, Item #422, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/422 (accessed February 15, 2011) and Rochelle Garza, "Margarita López," in Bracero History Archive, Item #410, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/410 (accessed February 15, 2011).

[74] The largely undeveloped colonias in Mexicali, such as Pueblo Nuevo, came to be known as "Polvopolis," or "Rancho Grande," due to the large amounts of dirt in these areas. Orozco Maciel, *De este lado del puente,* 24.

[75] Orozco Maciel, *De Este Lado del Puente,* 32.

and Development), which was using local police forces to prohibit residents from making any improvements to their dwellings. Noting that they were poor workers who, finding nowhere to live, had built their own small dwellings for their families, Macías declared the group of residents desired to cooperate in Mexicali's sanitizing and with its cultural development.[76] A month later Macías again telegraphed the office of the president, thanking Avila Camacho for forwarding his message to the ministry, which had begun corresponding directly with him.[77] This would not be the only time that Macías would take a leadership role in his community; he later became president of another group of Mexicali residents who sent numerous telegrams and letters to the Mexican president and Baja California's authorities to obtain bracero contracts in the mid-1950s (see chapter 3).

A Nation of Correspondents

Pueblo Nuevo's growth intensified in 1942, when thousands of aspirantes rushed to the US-Mexico border upon hearing reports that Mexico and the United States had reached a binational labor agreement. When many of these internal migrants were unable to cross the border, and began to see their few savings depleting with each day that they spent away from their homes, they began contacting Mexican authorities to help them either move forward in their journeys or return home. Luis Mendoza telegrammed Avila Camacho from Mexicali just twenty days after the inauguration of the Bracero Program on August 4, 1942. In his message, Mendoza explained that he was part of a

[76] Juan Macías to Manuel Avila Camacho, April 8, 1946, expediente 561.3/11-2, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[77] Juan Macías to Manuel Avila Camacho, May 14, 1946, expediente 561.3/11-2, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

group of four hundred *campesinos* who had traveled to Mexicali hoping to cross the border there. Because Mexicali had no employment opportunities, Mendoza noted, the men found themselves in a difficult situation. The group had already written to the Ministry of the Interior but had received no response. Desperate to improve their condition, they were considering making the dangerous trek across the Sonoran Desert because they lacked the funds to pay for transportation back to the Mexican interior. Although the local federal authorities in Mexicali had not offered any help or support to the group of transients, Mendoza indicated that the officials would be able to confirm that the contents of his message were accurate.[78] The Ministry of the Interior forwarded Mendoza's telegram to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, along with a second message that an aspirante had sent to the Mexican president from another border point. In this message, sent on August 22 from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Alfredo Rodríguez Romo asked to receive the latest updates on bracero contracting. He indicated that approximately nine hundred people were hoping to cross the border there, some of them with their families, and that they were there with no money or employment. Although Chihuahua's governor had promised that he and Ciudad Juarez's mayor would create a plan to help them, Rodríguez Romo asked Avila Camacho for prompt action in getting them the authorization they needed to cross the border or to help them return to their places of origin.[79]

---

[78] Luis L. Mendoza to Manuel Avila Camacho, August 24, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[79] Alfredo Rodríguez Romo to Manuel Avila Camacho, August 22, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

Although border cities like Mexicali and Tijuana were part of the Mexican republic, they were likely strange new lands for the thousands of men who traveled there at the start of the Bracero Program. As these men from central Mexico comingled in the Mexican north, they drew upon their identification with their *patrias chica*s (home regions) to form new friendships. Mariano González, for instance, requested help on behalf of a group of fifty migrants stranded in Tijuana. In the letter that he first sent to Mexico City in September 1942, González explained that they were all natives of various parts of the state of Jalisco and that they had migrated to Tijuana after reading in the national press that the United States had a large demand for workers. Having failed in their mission to cross into the United States, the men were making an "embarrassing spectacle" in Tijuana sleeping on the streets and lacking money to purchase food. If the president wished to help them, González argued, he could do so with a stroke of his pen, for the United States had shown its goodwill through its Good Neighbor policy. To ensure his communication would not be lost among the hundreds of letters that the presidency received every day, González also sent the president a similar message by telegraph as well as sending copies of the letter to Baja California's governor and the Ministry of Labor in Mexico City. Despite such precautions, González's request likely landed on deaf ears, for he telegraphed the president again in October, citing the group's unemployment and demanding "justice."[80] Whether or not this group of men received help from local or federal authorities, they had come together as Jalisco natives, finding solidarity among fellow *paisanos.*

[80] Mariano González to Manuel Avila Camacho, September 23, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Mariano González to Manuel Avila Camacho, October 7, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

This is not to say that aspirantes from different states of the Mexican republic did not come together throughout their journeys to seek relief from pressing circumstances. Those who traveled alone perhaps believed that their requests would be answered more quickly if they made them as groups rather than as individuals. One such group was composed of J. Jesús Avilés Alvarez and four other men, who wrote to Avila Camacho in April, 1944. Like many others, they had traveled to Mexicali to cross the border and work in the United States. The US consul in Mexicali had given them a visa to enter the United States, they said, but Mexican migration officials had denied them the provisional Mexican passports that they needed to cross the border. Noting they lacked the resources to remain much longer in Mexicali, and the "precarious economic conditions" that had pushed them to emigrate in the first place, the men pleaded for the wellbeing of their families, who remained in their homes in various parts of the country, and who would be ruined if their providers did not recuperate the money they had already spent migrating north.[81] Other aspirantes emphasized their large numbers in order to draw the attention of the Mexican authorities. Miguel García Quezada, for instance, notified the Mexican presidency that he was with a group of 3,500 aspirantes in the city of Aguascalientes and waiting to migrate to the United States under the Bracero Program. Desperate to depart as soon as possible, the group was planning to travel to Mexico City to accelerate their recruitment process.[82] Similarly, J. Santos Martínez Espinoza wrote on

[81] J. Jesús Avilés Alvarez to Manuel Avila Camacho, April 20, 1944, folder 3, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[82] Miguel García Quezada to Manuel Avila Camacho, June 16, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

behalf of 2,000 aspirantes frustrated by delays in the contracting process in Irapuato, Guanajuato.[83]

The correspondence that many aspiring migrants sent to Avila Camacho in the first years of the Bracero Program reflected a widespread interest in migrating as whole families. Some sent their requests before leaving their home towns. Eustaquio Gutiérrez from Mexicali, Heriberto García from La Barca, Jalisco, and Santiago Castillo from Hidalgo, Nuevo Leon, requested passports or authorization to migrate with their families to the United States.[84] Pablo Martinez from Tijuana underscored his difficult economic situation and the large size of his family, reasons for which he hoped they too could be authorized to migrate to the United States with him.[85] Some petitioners were specific in their migration plans: Juan Hernández Acosta, from the state of Coahuila, requested passports for himself, his wife, and four children in order to work in Asherton, Texas.[86] Florentina Hernández, a Mexico City resident, requested a railroad pass to join her bracero son in the United States or otherwise to receive whatever pecuniary help the first lady chose to provide her.[87] Other families did not wait for authorization from the Mexican government to start their journeys, but wrote when they ran into problems. María Refugio R. Vda. de Arévalo, for instance, had left Mexico City with her two sons

---

[83] J. Santos Martínez Espinoza to Manuel Avila Camacho, June 5, 1944, folder 3, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[84] Eustaquio Gutiérrez to Manuel Avila Camacho, January 23, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Heriberto García to Manuel Avila Camacho, June 11, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Santiago Castillo to Manuel Avila Camacho, May 15, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[85] Pablo Martínez to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 6, 1944, folder 3, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[86] Juan Hernández Acosta to Manuel Avila Camacho, July 24, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[87] Florentina Hernández to Manuel Avila Camacho, May 7, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

who were trying to work in the United States as braceros. After endless "*tramites*" (paperwork), expenses, and penalties, US immigration officials had denied them entry, she reported, leaving them in a "distressing situation."[88]

Some border dwellers wanted to live in Mexico but work in the United states. Tomás Cardona and two other Mexicali residents requested passports to work in the United States but planned to continue living in Mexico.[89] Homobono Leyva had migrated to Nogales, Sonora, with plans to cross the border and was currently working at a press in the Mexican border town. However, his friends had offered to help him obtain a job in Arizona's mining industry; he asked Avila Camacho for a permit to work in Arizona but live in Nogales.[90] Similarly, Jesus M. Contreras Delgado explained in his letter that he had been unemployed in Ciudad Juarez for some time and requested permission to work in El Paso using his local passport.[91] Matías C. Michel of Tijuana wanted information about what requirements he needed to fill in order to work in the United States but live in Mexico, as he did not want to live with his family in the United States. (A month after Michel's inquiry was forwarded to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, a ministry representative informed Michel that bracero contracting was only taking place in Mexico City and that there was already an excess of aspirantes waiting to be selected. The

[88] María Refugio R. Vda. de Arévalo to Manuel Avila Camacho, April 4, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[89] Tomás Cardona to Manuel Avila Camacho, June 2, 1944, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[90] Fernando López Arias to Secretario del Trabajo y Previsión Social, July 21, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[91] Jesus M. Contreras Delgado to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 15, 1944, folder 3, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

ministry advised him not to travel to Mexico City and expose himself to hardship and other problems.[92])

The most ambitious commuting request came from Tijuana. On March 15, 1943, Tijuana's chamber of commerce telegraphed Avila Camacho, petitioning him to authorize an unspecified number of workers to commute daily across the border to work in San Diego. The telegram noted Tijuana's high unemployment rate and said that American companies were willing to hire three hundred Tijuana residents immediately. Over the next several days, four labor unions (one of them a women's group) joined the chamber's efforts, sending their own telegrams and letters to the president and citing Tijuana's widespread unemployment.[93] Given the leadership role that Tijuana's chamber of commerce had taken on the issue, Avila Camacho's office quickly telegraphed Baja California's governor, Colonel Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada (1937–1944), instructing him to wire back his recommendation on the matter.[94] Sánchez Taboada replied four days later that the economic situation in Tijuana was not as desperate as the chamber asserted it was. Nevertheless, he believed that authorizing three hundred workers to work across the border in San Diego would not constitute a large problem. He advised requiring all selected commuters to prove Tijuana residence prior to January 1, 1942 and

---

[92] Matías C. Michel to Manuel Avila Camacho, July 20, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Sebastian Ortiz to Matías C. Michel, August 25, 1943, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

[93] Sindicato Control Político de Oficios Varios CTM to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 17, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Federación de Trabajadores y Campesinos de Tijuana to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 19, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Sindicato Femenil de Oficios Varios 'Leona Vicario' to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 19, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Sindicato de Cargadores 'Izquierdas' to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 22, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

[94] Cámara Nacional de Comercio to Manuel Avila Camacho, March 15, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

unemployment during the last sixty days. This would ensure, according to Sánchez Taboada, that Mexicans from other regions would not travel to Tijuana to become commuter workers leaving important jobs elsewhere.[95] Upon receiving Sánchez Taboada's recommendation, Avila Camacho's office authorized the request, ordering that all commuters meet the eligibility requirements that the governor had outlined.[96]

Several days after Avila Camacho authorized border commuting in Tijuana, his office forwarded a memorandum to the Ministry of the Interior. The document explained that a group of representatives from the Mexican ministries of foreign affairs, interior, labor, agriculture, and the US Farm Security Administration had met and discussed the commuting proposal. The group had concluded that the arrangement presented dangers to Baja California's economy and risked the work that the FSA had been doing in improving the conditions of Mexican workers already laboring in the United States. The group outlined several objections to the proposal. First, they said, Baja California needed arms for cotton picking. Second, it undercut the work that the FSA had done to force American growers to pay high salaries and to provide braceros clean and sanitary dwellings and medical services. If growers were allowed to employ Tijuana braceros directly, this would set a precedent that other growers would try to imitate, eliminating the work that the FSA had accomplished up to that point. Third, the daily crossing of braceros across the border would lead to more unauthorized migration. Fourth, employing braceros resident in Mexico would give some border growers an unfair

---

[95] Colonel Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada to Secretario Particular, March 19, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[96] Jesús González Gallo to Secretario de Gobernación, March 23, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

advantage because they would not be obligated to build dwellings for their workers as required under the Bracero Program. Employers who were complying with the international agreement would protest this unfair advantage and complicate matters. Finally, the commuting proposal would encourage other growers near the border to use their connections with local authorities and chambers of commerce on both sides of the border to make similar arrangements. This would generate more internal migration from northern regions, where workers were needed, to border cities. The group concluded that if, despite all these reasons, the group of workers was allowed to work in San Diego, those workers should be contracted under the FSA like the rest of the braceros and they should live in San Diego throughout the duration of their contracts and not be allowed to commute across the border.[97]

It is unclear whether Tijuana's chamber of commerce ever succeeded in getting official border crossing permits for these three hundred workers, and if they did, under what conditions. What the trail of correspondence surrounding this proposal does make more than clear is that Tijuana workers mobilized their networks to obtain the permits they needed to work in the United States. A year before, in October 1942, the *Confederación de Obreros y Campesinos de Mexico* (Mexican Confederation of Laborers and Agricultural Workers) in Mexico City had already advocated on behalf of labor groups in Tijuana.[98] The intervention by the Tijuana chamber of commerce in 1943 is likely what finally motivated the Mexican central government to consider the request. As

[97] Srio. Manuel Avila Camacho to Secretario de Gobernación, April 1, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[98] Conf. de Obreros y Campesinos de Mexico to Manuel Avila Camacho, October 13, 1942, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

the Tijuana labor unions and chamber of commerce emphasized again and again, San Diego employers were more than willing to employ Mexican residents who could commute every day across the border. The Mexican ministries that managed the Bracero Program, as well as the FSA, knew very well that American employers also had their own networks at the local and national levels, and that they too could mobilize them to obtain the workers they wanted. It would become clear over the next decade that Mexican authorities could do very little to stop internal migration and prevent Mexican residents from commuting to jobs in the United States. Border residents and employers had just gotten started.

An Unstoppable Stream of Migrants

As noted above, thousands of aspirantes hurried north as soon as the Bracero Program became official. The complications that arose when internal migrants were unable to cross the border became a new concern for mayors and governors in Mexico's northern border states. In what appeared like an overnight development, border towns and cities found themselves hosts to hundreds of transients. In November 1943, for instance, a Tijuana official reported to Baja California's governor that internal migrants had gone to the government offices in groups of three or four requesting aid to return to their places of origin. They had been unable to cross the border because they lacked the documents that US immigration authorities required from them. Others asked for pecuniary help upon returning from the United States, the official explained, because their employers had not paid their promised wages. In his report to the governor, the official (*delegado*) acknowledged that some migrants had stayed on the patio of the city government

building for two or three nights after obtaining permission from the police department. He noted, however, that at that moment there were no migrants in such conditions in Tijuana. The state's general secretary in Mexicali then forwarded this message to Avila Camacho's assistant in Mexico City.[99] It appears this report was in response to an inquiry that the president's office had sent to Mexicali the previous September regarding a Tijuana group's petition for authorization to emigrate to the United States.[100] Perhaps Mariano Gonzalez's telegrams and letters had not landed on deaf ears after all, but rather, very slow ears.

The internal migrants requesting public relief or sleeping on streets placed increasing pressures on local governments, who then turned to the national government for help. The mayor of Nogales, Sonora, communicated to Mexico City in September 1942 that hundreds of workers had traveled there after hearing that the United States was employing braceros. As in other border towns, the migrants stranded in Nogales were asking local authorities for help obtaining food and railroad passes back to their homes in southern and central Mexico, which the mayor described as a problem for his *municipio* (municipality).[101] As the Bracero Program continued, so did the unregulated movement of aspirantes. On April 3, 1944, the *Boletin Comercial* (Commercial Bulletin) of the Zacatecas Chamber of Commerce published a letter that Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Mercado Carrillo, stationed in Zacatecas, Zacatecas, had sent to the state governor. In his

[99] Diego Peniche Morales to Manuel Avila Camacho, November 11, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[100] Diego Peniche Morales to Manuel Avila Camacho, September 26, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[101] Anacleto F. Olmos to Manuel Avila Camacho, September 9, 1942, folder 1, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

letter, Mercado Carrillo observed that large numbers of workers in Zacatecas continued traveling to the states of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas with the ultimate goal of becoming braceros or unauthorized workers in the United States. He asserted this was worsening the conditions in many border cities as people flocked there who were of no utility to those regions, but who did consume their resources. The lieutenant colonel advised Zacatecas's governor to place signs at all railroad stations informing aspirantes of the problems that their migration would cause. Mercado Carrillo also suggested launching a campaign across the state meant to reach every municipio, urging aspirantes to stay in their homes and avoid the dangers of unauthorized migration.[102]

Mexicans' autonomous migration to the United States was a particularly large concern for Baja California's authorities. When José M. Gutiérrez, Mexico's consul in Calexico, alerted Baja California's governor in May 1943 that US immigration authorities might allow unrestricted entry to Mexican migrants, Sánchez Taboada and the central government in Mexico City rushed to avoid this. The incident began when a US Employment Service (USES) representative showed Gutiérrez a congressional resolution that would permit unrestricted migration from the Western hemisphere. Gutiérrez became alarmed this would undermine the measures that the Mexican government had adopted to prevent the emigration of border residents. In addition, under this proposal Mexican workers employed outside of the Bracero Program would have none of the job protections or formal rights that contracted workers officially enjoyed under the program. Large-scale migration of Baja California residents to the United States, Gutiérrez

---

[102] *Boletin Comercial,* "Muy Interesante a los braceros," April 3, 1944, folder 3, expediente 546.6/120, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.

concluded, would cause large problems for the territory and it was urgent that the Mexican government control the exit of braceros. According to Gutiérrez, the residents of the Mexicali Valley were excited to enter the United States as soon as they were permitted, and he expected up to ninety percent of the region's ejidatarios would abandon their lands considering the wages paid in the United States.[103] Upon receiving this report, the Ministry of Foreign Relations informed the US embassy in Mexico City that Mexico was ready to withdraw from their binational agreement and close the border if the United States allowed Mexican immigration outside of the Bracero Program. The embassy later notified the ministry that US immigration officers were instructed to only allow braceros to enter the country.[104] The Bracero Program continued, but the Mexican government was again reminded of its limited power to control its citizens' movement.

In the Imperial Valley, growers stayed informed about Mexican campesinos' unwavering interest in going to work in the United States. When five thousand aspirantes reached Ciudad Juarez just a few weeks after the signing of the Bracero Program, for instance, the *Brawley News* reported this under the headline "Too Mucho Hurry," using the occasion to poke fun at the workers' broken English.[105] A month later, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 430 aspirantes were "stranded in Mexicali, unable to cross the international border." Rafael Loza, the group's spokesman, had obtained a "special nonresident passport" to cross the border and contacted Tom Finney, head of USES in

---

[103] Colonel Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada to Manuel Avila Camacho, May 15, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[104] Ezequiel Padilla to Secretario Particular, May 24, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; J. Jesús González Gallo to Colonel Rodolfo Sánchez Taboada, June 8, 1943, expediente 548.1/19, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[105] "Mexican Farm Laborers Halted At Border-'Too Mucho Hurry,'" *Brawley News,* August 22, 1942, pg. 1.

Imperial County. Loza informed Finney the men came from Jalisco and other states in central Mexico and that their arrival "had created an unemployment problem there [in Mexicali] and that many had been jailed for vagrancy." Finney then contacted Frank Buckner, placement officer of the California Department of Unemployment, to see what state authorities could do to employ the stranded workers.[106]

"We sure want 'em next year"

Although the 430 aspirantes stranded in Mexicali most likely crossed the border clandestinely or returned to central Mexico, it was certainly not unrealistic for them to think that Imperial Valley growers could obtain an exception under the Bracero Program to hire them. As S. Deborah Kang has shown, the Imperial Valley had acted for decades as an innovator of immigration practices and procedures. Imperial Valley growers, for example, acted in conjunction with US immigration officials and the Calexico Chamber of Commerce to create a legalization program that then became formalized under the Registry of Aliens Act of 1929. Undocumented immigrants living and working in the Imperial Valley were the first to regularize their legal status under this practice. Employers were a crucial part of the legal process, for they were the ones responsible for withholding twenty dollars from a migrant's earnings that went towards the cost of a visa application and payment of the head tax required for immigration. As we will see in chapter 3, this was not the only time that Imperial Valley growers used their influence to create what Kang calls "legal innovations" in immigration practices.[107]

---

[106] "Farm Work Seekers Stranded," *Los Angeles Times,* September 24, 1942, pg. 8.
[107] Kang, *The INS on the Line,* 54-56.

It is unclear if the Imperial Valley genuinely faced a worker shortage in 1942 when the Bracero Program began, or if growers used this as an excuse to employ cheaper labor. When Dave Davidson of the Department of Agriculture visited El Centro in April, Imperial Valley farmers and businessmen informed him that braceros were not needed in the region. Tom Finney of the USES confirmed this claim, declaring that the valley did not need imported Mexican labor.[108] The following month, however, Finney told a different story. According to a *Brawley News* report, sugar beet growers had notified the USES official that they were short three hundred beet toppers, prompting Finney to declare this the first worker shortage of the year.[109] By July, Finney was reporting the valley's labor shortage as "acute," and praising the more than three hundred Filipinos who remained in the region longer than they usually did "to relieve pressure off the situation."[110] As Imperial Valley growers prepared to employ school-aged youths and Mexican women in the fields, moreover, Finney accused agricultural workers of working three days and then "lay[ing] off until they [had] spent their money in grog shops." The Imperial Valley had sufficient labor to harvest the crops, Finney argued, if workers labored six days a week.[111] This practice of blaming workers for allegedly not working hard or long enough would only intensify as Imperial Valley growers turned to braceros and undocumented workers to fill their labor needs.

---

[108] "Imported Mexican Labor Not Needed, Govt. Man Told," *Brawley News,* April 13, 1942, pg. 1.
[109] "Beet Toppers Few, Valley Grower Finds," *Brawley News,* May 7, 1942, pg. 1.
[110] "Labor Census Progressing Says Finney," *Brawley News,* July 20, 1942, pg. 1.
[111] "Women Given Jobs To Thin, Hoe Lettuce," *Brawley News,* October 27, 1942, pg.1.; "School Youths Go To Work On Local Farms," *Brawley News,* October 24, 1942, pg. 1; "Farm Labor Debated At E.C. Meeting," *Brawley News,* July 9, 1942, pg. 1.

Real or imagined, the labor shortage in California's agricultural fields underscored the stark wage differences between agricultural and other types of work and the enormous power that growers could muster in support of their interests. While beet toppers earned 40 cents an hour in the Imperial Valley, "common labor" in the defense industries earned 75 cents an hour. Noting this dramatic difference, Keith Mets, who in addition to heading up the Imperial County Tuberculosis Association was president of the Imperial Hay Growers Association, observed: "'The defense industry wages are clear out of balance for agriculture's ability to pay and we can hardly blame our men for leaving farm work paying $5 to $7 per day when they can get $10 to $20 on defense projects."[112] While Mets understood why agricultural workers were leaving the fields, beet growers in northern and central California were fighting to ensure that braceros would earn much lower wages upon arrival. Although the FSA had found that experienced beet workers were earning between 70 and 75 cents in these regions, the beet growers "were asking for a lower wage be set for Mexican imported workers arguing the shortage had forced them to pay higher wages that were not affordable."[113] California's growers, it was evident, were more than willing to forget the basic tenets of the "free" market.

The memory of the first Bracero Program, instituted during World War I, had left a strong expectation among growers that the state should help them fill their labor needs. Rather than participate in the new Bracero Program, some growers wanted to employ workers under the Ninth Proviso to Section 3 of the Immigration Act of 1917 (which

---

[112] "Beet Growers Set Pay for 1942 Season," *Brawley News,* May 4, 1942, pg. 1; "Farm Labor Shortage Problem Brought Before Supervisors; Chairman Graham Takes Action," *Brawley News,* June 30, 1942, pg. 1.

[113] "Sugar Beet Wages For Field Labor Confab on Today," *Brawley News,* September 1, 1942, pg. 1.

permitted the WWI program), or under a border crossing card system, and wrote to the INS with their requests.[114] Some growers and their representatives used other platforms to express their interests. In May 1943, for example, a Brawley delegation of farmers attended a Senate's Military Affairs Committee meeting held in Palm Springs, California. There, Imperial County Supervisor B. M. Graham proposed that "instead of bringing laborers from the vicinity of Mexico City the government should tap the supply of men already at our back door in the vicinity of Mexicali." According to Graham, Mexicali residents and other Mexicans from lower altitudes were "better able to stand Imperial Valley weather and could be imported at a much smaller cost."[115] Imperial Valley growers were particularly interested in employing Mexicali residents because they reduced transportation costs, they could be recruited and assembled more quickly, and because they could significantly reduce growers' housing costs if they lived in Mexico and commuted daily across the border. Southwestern growers had made essentialist claims about Mexicans' suitability for stoop labor for decades, but now Graham was taking the argument one step further and differentiating between Mexicans from lower and higher altitudes to justify growers' economic interests.

Despite growers' dissatisfaction with certain details of the Bracero Program, the Imperial Valley began employing guest workers in small, yet significant, numbers shortly after the program's start. When the first group of 575 braceros arrived in the Imperial Valley in November 1942, 194 of them went to Brawley. One Brawley farmer employed

---

[114] Kang, *The INS on the Line,* 95.
[115] "Valley's War Problems Given Senate Hearing In Palm Springs," *Brawley News,* May 3, 1943, pg. 1.

as many as 44 workers while another received only five.[116] By the end of January 1943, the valley had received 1,800 guest workers, and 1,300 were at work in May.[117] The braceros who labored in the valley during the 1942–1943 season reportedly made up approximately 20 percent of the entire workforce and "made the difference between success and abject failure." They earned 50 cents an hour and some made as much as $60–$80 a week under the piecework system. [118] By July, the Imperial Valley Farmers Association (IVFA), the group that recruited and contracted guest workers for valley growers, was already making plans to import 1,500 Mexican workers the next fall and winter seasons. The IVFA also signed a contract extension for 175 braceros who were to remain in the valley for the remainder of the summer. The association obtained these contract renewals even though the *Brawley News* had recently reported that there was an excess of workers in the north valley who would be forced to leave the region in search of work if growers did not offer them employment.[119]

In an October 1943 article aptly titled "Summary of Employment of Mexican National Farm Workers in Valley," the *Brawley News* concluded that the Bracero Program had been a success and that both growers and braceros were very interested in its continuation. When asked to share his opinion about the program, a representative for American Fruit Growers replied: "'We sure want 'em next year.'" K. K. Sharp, a large farm operator from the Holtville area, described the braceros he employed as "very

---

[116] "Don Robertson Transferred To Local U.S. Employment Office; Mexican Help Sent To Ranches," *Brawley News,* November 21, 1942, pg. 1.
[117] "500 Mexican Farm Workers Reach Valley," *Brawley News*, January 15, 1943, pg. 1; "Mexican Farm Workers Arrive From Mexico City," *Brawley News,* May 5, 1943, pg. 1.
[118] "Summary of Employment of Mexican National Farm Workers in Valley," *Brawley News,* October 14, 1943, pgs. 1, 5.
[119] "Mexicans On Summer Jobs By Contract," *Brawley News,* July 31, pg. 1; "Farmers Asked To Find Jobs For Labor," *Brawley News,* July 16, 1943, pg. 1.

satisfactory." Sharp also argued for continuity of employment and suggested that the War Food Administration "make it possible for men moved out of the valley during the slack season to return to their old employers when they come back to the valley for the next crop season." If growers received different workers every season, he argued, the Imperial Valley would be "acting as a training school for Mexican farm labor only to lose them after the harvest season is ended." To make his point clear, Sharp explained: "The better a man knows me and my farm operations, the more valuable he becomes to me. I would like to have my old employees back, and they have said they would be glad to come back." Indeed, many did come back. By April 1944, some braceros had already completed two or more 6-month contracts.[120] However, this widespread interest in working in the Imperial Valley did not extend to the Mexicali Valley. At the start of the fall season in 1943, as the Imperial Valley assembled lettuce thinners, the Mexicali Valley faced a shortage of cotton pickers. Although Mexican farmers believed Mexicali's cotton pickers had "filtered across the line" to work in the United States, the *Brawley News* claimed that Imperial Valley growers were "cooperating with the officials below the line and are refusing to hire Mexican laborers that do not have a passport."[121]

The Other Braceros

Exactly how well Imperial Valley growers were cooperating with their southern neighbors and refraining from employing unauthorized workers was up for debate. In May 1944, the United Press published a story quoting Paul Scharrenberg, California State

[120] "Over Million Dollars Paid to Mexican Nationals Brought to Imperial Valley," *Brawley News,* April 14, 1944, pgs. 1, 5.
[121] "Experienced Field Labor Now Short," *Brawley News,* October 27, 1943, pg. 1.

Director of Industrial Relations, who asserted that between 2,500 and 3,000 undocumented Mexican migrants were working in the Imperial Valley "under primitive conditions." According to Scharrenberg, many of these unauthorized workers had previously worked in the United States but "were unsuccessful in their applications for reentry." Besides underlining that these workers were earning lower wages than braceros, the state official was strongly critical of the growers who employed them. "Some of the employers who have engaged these Mexicans make no effort to provide a camp. They bunk along a ditch or in brush," Scharrenberg declared, "sleep on the ground or in hay stacks, secure their drinking water from canals." In response to this report, S. W. Garrigues, director of the Imperial County Farm Labor office, contended that "wets" were "for the most part" paid the same wages as braceros. Rather than blame growers for the substandard conditions in which many unauthorized workers lived, Garrigues explained this as the workers' own personal choice: "'There is no doubt that the 'wets' for the most part are not living in regular houses and camps, because if they did it would be too easy to pick them up and send them back, and so by preference many of them live out of doors […] Some board with other families who are here legally and many even have rented houses in the Mexican colony.'" As to the workers' labor history, the *Brawley News* explained that the unauthorized were "all good workers" and that growers preferred them over braceros who required "red tape." Many of the undocumented workers had already worked as braceros, the article reported, and had opted to "return to work here on their own hook and without their government sanction."[122]

[122] "Conditions of Illegal Mexicans Rapped in Report," *Brawley News,* May 24, 1944, pg. 1.

The debates surrounding undocumented workers only augmented as World War II reached its end. As returning servicemen began looking for employment in the valley, Finney and Don Robertson of the USES reproached veterans for not wanting to do heavy farm work but instead preferring non-agricultural jobs for which they allegedly lacked the skills. The USES officials argued that "not a single employer has refused to rehire a returned service man who had previously been in his employ"; instead, they accused returning servicemen of believing "the world owes them a living."[123] These accusations also carried a racial tinge; for example the *Brawley News* told the story of a "19-year-old Negro who was discharged from the Army for illiteracy after serving only a few months. When offered a laboring job at 87½ cents an hour, the Negro said 'No.'" Several weeks later, B. A. Harrigan, the County Agricultural Commissioner and secretary of the IVFA, joined the chorus exclaiming that returning veterans did not want to do stoop labor.[124] In November, as 200 braceros arrived in the valley from Michigan, Finney again reported that former servicemen were rejecting unskilled jobs and were holding out for skilled jobs they were not qualified for.[125] By January 1946, the whole country appeared to be in a state of near-turmoil, fearful that the end of the war would be followed by mass unemployment. In their February meeting with labor leaders and county Farm Bureau representatives, the El Centro American Legion discussed the report "that 'wet' Mexicans [had] displaced a great many veterans" and a "proposal that such labor competition be eliminated."[126]

---

[123] "1,000 Skilled, Semi-Skilled Laborers Needed in County," *Brawley News,* September 7, 1945, pgs. 1, 6.
[124] "Mexican Labor For Valley Looks Bright," *Brawley News,* September 28, 1945, pgs. 1, 6.
[125] "200 Mexicans Are Coming to Valley," *Brawley News,* November 7, 1945, pg. 3; "Job Seekers in Imperial Valley On the Increase," *Brawley News,* November 7, 1945, pgs. 1, 6.
[126] "Labor Leaders Assure Vets Equal Status," *Brawley News,* February 22, 1946, pg. 1.

While the El Centro American Legion set the matter to rest after its February meeting, other groups had just begun their fight against the employment of undocumented workers in the valley. In June, the American Citizens of Brawley sent the INS, the Farm Labor Service, the California Employment Office, and the Department of Agriculture its own set of complaints. The letter, signed by secretary William Martinez, claimed: "Wet Mexicans are depriving American citizens and veterans of employment in the Imperial Valley, and have lowered local living standards by their 'cheap' labor." In response to this formal complaint, Albert Del Guercio, director of the Los Angeles Border Patrol district, acknowledged that "thousands and thousands of aliens [were] illegally residing in the Imperial and Yuma Valleys." According to Del Guercio, over ten thousand Mexicans had been "expelled" from the Imperial and Yuma valleys in the first five months of 1946, but unauthorized migrants continued crossing back into the United States. While Finney declined to provide any comment on the matter, county supervisor B. M. Graham argued braceros had in no way displaced American citizens. Del Guercio did not dispute this claim, but noted that "ranchers declared a preference for wet Mexicans to the legally imported contract laborers." The "lack of labor standard enforcement in hiring of 'wet' Mexicans," asserted Del Guercio, made unauthorized workers "more desirable from the rancher's viewpoint."[127]

With more and more groups discussing the growing presence of undocumented migrants in the Imperial Valley, the *Brawley News* took the opportunity to publish a long article explaining the major features of this growing population. The article stood out for

[127] "Whether Americans Deprived of Jobs by 'Wets' Appears to Be Debatable Issue," *Brawley News,* June 22, 1946, pg. 1.

two reasons: first, the author was identified as Mike Jordan (something unusual for the publication, since most articles had no byline); and second, it was accompanied by two photographs showing Border Patrol officers searching a vehicle on the side of a highway and "questioning suspected illegal entrants into the U.S." as they were about to board a bus (images were rare). The resources and attention that the *Brawley News* assigned this story, in other words, signaled its importance. Quoting INS officials extensively throughout the article, Jordan depicted a sorely understaffed agency facing a "flood" of enormous proportions. The number of unauthorized migrants in the Imperial Valley in August 1946, according to the officials, had been about 10,000. This was a surprisingly high figure considering the fact that August was the slowest month in agricultural production. The winter and spring seasons, moreover, had seen a peak of 15,000 undocumented migrants. As many as 3,000 migrants had been deported in a single month and between 800 and 900 were arriving in Mexicali every week from the Mexican interior. According to Jordan, the valley's prewar labor force had gone to "war-booming factories in the cities" and to "better-paying jobs outside the Valley" and only a few had returned. As natives of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and "the resident Mexican Americans" allegedly moved on to more profitable occupations, the makeup of the Mexican migrant population was also changing. "Where most prewar line-jumpers came from the three or four Mexican states nearest to Mexicali," Jordan reported, "now we finds [*sic*] 'wets' are coming to the Valley from throughout the entire Mexican nation."[128] Mexicali's reserve army of cheap labor was growing.

---

[128] Mike Jordan, "Aliens Flood into Imperial Valley, California," *Brawley News,* September 3, 1946, pgs. 1, 3.

Good Spenders

As the figure of the undocumented immigrant became more prominent in the Imperial Valley, the representations of and narratives about them multiplied. In October 1946, for example, Brawley Police Chief Joe Gabard declared there was a potential for "widespread lawbreaking" with the "'alarming increase in the migration of 'wet' Mexicans.'" Gabard pointed to a "sudden increase in petty thefts and robberies" as a likely result of the increased traffic of unauthorized migrants crossing through the valley on their way to Fresno or Sacramento.[129] This depiction contrasted sharply with the image that INS officials had painted just a month before describing undocumented migrants as "a 'gold rush' of Mexican workers seeking to share in California's agricultural wealth."[130] Unauthorized immigrants in the Imperial Valley were simultaneously cast as potential criminals, as enterprising and hard-working, and as vital members of the local economy.

As discussed at the start of this chapter, braceros, and their undocumented counterparts, were recognized as important consumers. It is natural that Speares of the FSA emphasized braceros' purchasing power, for border communities had depended on cross-border commerce since the first decades of the twentieth century. When the US federal government enacted the first immigration laws restricting the free entry of Mexican citizens in 1917, border chambers of commerce utilized their influence to ensure border crossers would continue entering the United States as before. The creation of the border crossing card, Kang has shown, was one of the many concessions that the INS was

[129] "'Wet' Mexicans Seen Here As Potential Crime Danger," *Brawley News,* October 11, 1946, pgs. 1, 8.
[130] Jordan, "Aliens Flood into Imperial Valley, California."

forced to make for border residents determined to maintain an open, if selective, border. Calexico business owners even petitioned to have the international port of entry moved to a point in the city's northern area so as to allow Mexicali residents to shop freely in the downtown district.[131] Largely isolated from the rest of Mexico, the border residents in Mexico's northwest relied on the United States for most of their everyday necessities. In 1926, for instance, the residents of Nogales and Mexicali spent $26,000 on consumer goods in Mexico and $10.5 million in the United States.[132] Baja California even obtained its electricity from California, while American gas companies like Chevron and Shell provided the state's residents with gasoline.[133] The Mexican government also acknowledged the importance of these cross-border flows and authorized Baja California's status as a free trade zone with the United States in 1937.[134]

Braceros, like border crossers, were good consumers. Reporting on the Bracero Program's first year in the Imperial Valley, the *Brawley News* estimated "that between $250,000 and $300,000 from the payrolls of these Mexicans [braceros] found its way back into community channels through the purchases made by the Mexicans in stores in Imperial Valley towns." For its part, Mexico was eager for more of those funds to find their way south of the border. According to one of the most-publicized objectives of the Bracero Program, guest workers were to save as much of their US earnings as possible so that upon returning to Mexico they would invest their savings in projects that would

---

[131] Kang, *The INS on the Line,* 12, 36.
[132] Kang, *The INS on the Line,* 38.
[133] León Portilla and Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California,* 175.
[134] León Portilla and Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California,* 154. The Mexican government continuously renewed Baja California's free trade zone status until the North American Free Trade Agreement overrode it.

ultimately make Mexico more prosperous. To guarantee this, the US and Mexican governments agreed to withhold ten percent of braceros' earnings, returning the funds to the workers only after they had completed their contracts. Noting this obligatory savings system, the Brawley newspaper indicated that "In addition to the 10 per cent withheld, the Mexican worker sent back voluntarily 30 or 35 per cent of their wages to their families in Mexico. The rest they spent locally, buying substantial luggage, good clothing and bedding. The Mexican is a good spender and willing to pay for what he wants. The nationals cleared many a merchant's shelves of articles he had previously been unable to turn."[135] By April 1944, braceros had earned $1,138,863 in the Imperial Valley.[136]

The racial segregation that characterized the Imperial Valley throughout the early twentieth century ensured that consumption was also segregated. As the director of the Imperial County Farm Labor Office observed in 1944, many undocumented workers "rented houses in the Mexican colony" on the less prosperous side of their towns.[137] Some Mexican Americans in these neighborhoods found new income opportunities renting rooms or small dwellings to the new wave of Mexican immigrants. Others operated boarding houses, cafes, restaurants, and pool halls. As displaced Mexican Americans left the region, new seasonal migrants "replenished" the Imperial Valley's longstanding ethnic Mexican communities.[138]

---

[135] "Summary of Employment of Mexican National Farm Workers in Valley" *Brawley News.*
[136] "Over Million Dollars Paid to Mexican Nationals," *Brawley News.*
[137] "Conditions of Illegal Mexicans Rapped in Report," *Brawley News.*
[138] For more on the concept of "replenish ethnicity," see Tomas Jimenez, *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

As before, the Imperial Valley continued employing migrants to do back-breaking labor.

Whether the Imperial Valley's labor shortage was real or imagined in 1942, braceros went to work in the region's agricultural fields earning hourly wages that were markedly lower than what Americans earned in other industries. The beet growers of California's Central Valley had flexed their political muscles to ensure this. The low wages that growers paid braceros not only depressed overall salaries, but they also contributed to the gradual displacement of domestic workers from farm work. The men and women who returned to the Imperial Valley after doing military service or laboring in the defense industries found a changing labor market where agricultural labor no longer provided a living wage. It would take a larger concerted effort by organized labor in the early 1950s to truly challenge the increasing turn to bracero and undocumented labor. The reports signaling the deplorable conditions in which undocumented migrants lived in the Imperial Valley, moreover, did not bring an end to their employment. Growers were not content with employing cheap migrant labor, they wanted to employ the *same* migrant labor season after season.

The desire to employ the same trained braceros every year illustrated the expanded perceptions about the possibilities of international labor migration that Imperial Valley growers began to hold with the start of the Bracero Program in 1942. The autonomous migration of thousands of Mexicans to northern border states reflects the similar response that the international labor agreement had in Mexico. In their correspondence with their government, internal migrants communicated aspirations to not only work in the US, but in some cases to do this accompanied by their families or to

commute across the border and maintain Mexican residence. Though Mexican authorities attempted to impede internal migration, aspirantes exercised the little agency they had by seeking better opportunities in northern border cities. In Mexicali, as across the border, impoverished immigrants joined a marginalized community. There the New River, rather than the train tracks, is what separated the middle class from the poor.

Chapter 2: "*Que No Vengan Más*:" Nativism, Labor Competition, and the Spatial Organization of Social Reproduction, 1947–1952

On March 27, 1951, the *New York Times* published a photograph of "A Typical 'Wetback' Village Near [the] U.S. Border." The image, its caption explained, depicted "Some of the homes in Mexicali that are made of cardboard, sticks and scrap iron and that house thousands of the illegal Mexican immigrants." A second photo showed "A border patrolman escorting a bus load of 'wetbacks' to the international border, Calexico-Mexicali." The accompanying article reported that US Representative Emanuel Celler had announced plans for an investigation of undocumented migration across the Mexican border, spurred in part by Celler's having just read the first article of a five-part *Times* series discussing the increasing numbers of unauthorized Mexican workers in American agriculture, especially across the Southwest.[139]. Celler told the *New York Times* that he and other congressmen had been aware that "Mexican laborers, or 'wetbacks,' crossed the Rio Grande or the border" but that he was astonished to learn that the number of

[139] The articles in this series were: Gladwin Hill, "Million a Year Flee Mexico Only to Find Peonage Here: Illegal Migration Across 1,600-Mile Border by Seasonal Slave Labor Depresses Latin and U.S. Levels Alike," *New York Times,* March 25, 1951, pg. 1; Gladwin Hill, "Peons Net Farmer A Fabulous Profit: Illegal Migrants From Mexico Working Rich Soil of West a Bonanza to Exploiters: Pay 15 to 25 Cents a Day: And Many Receive Food Alone, While Shelter Is a Hut, a Thatch or the Starts," *New York Times,* March 26, 1941, pg. 25; Gladwin Hill, "Peons in the West Lowering Culture: Illegal Migrants From Mexico Form Vast Unassimilable Block of Population: All Standards Decline: Health, Education, Democracy in Areas Where 'Wetbacks' Work Are Deplorable," *New York Times,* March 27, 1951, pg. 31; Gladwin Hill, "Southwest Winks At 'Wetback' Jobs: Ethics Cast Aside as Growers Accept Peonage Idea and Bridle at Interference: Federal Sanction Noted: Border Patrol Officers Report Pressures From Washington to 'Go Easy' in Raids," *New York Times,* March 28, 1951, pg. 31; and Gladwin Hill, "Interests Conflict On 'Wetback' Cure: Even Border Police Disagree on Measures to Stem Flood of Mexican Laborers: Nation's Pact in Dispute: Unions See a Move to Cut Pay by Farmers, Who Oppose U.S. Rule on Contracts," *New York Times,* March 29, 1951, pg. 27. Together they painted an alarmist image of farmer greed, government corruption, migrant poverty, and intra-racial conflict.

unauthorized crossings at the US-Mexico border was approximately one million per year.[140]

The fact that the *New York Times* selected images from the Calexico-Mexicali border to accompany the news of Celler's plans illustrates the visibility that the region had gained by the early 1950s. The author of the series that prompted Celler into action was Gladwin Hill, the Los Angeles bureau chief for the *New York Times.* Hill and other journalists had turned their eyes to the Imperial Valley when the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) began its efforts to unionize field workers in the region.[141] Blaming braceros and unauthorized workers for displacing domestic workers, the NFLU increased the pressure to stop the migration of undocumented workers. As the photo of a Mexicali "wetback village" made clear, the unauthorized status of Mexican migrants followed them into Mexico. It did not matter to the *New York Times* if the occupants of the homes captured in the photograph were in fact lawfully residing in Mexico, their country of origin, but rather that many of them labored at one time or another as undocumented workers in the United States. This image, like the articles that Hill published on the topic, depicted a population of Mexican migrants mired in poverty and willing to work for wages far lower than what domestic workers would accept.

---

[140] "Celler to Propose House Inquiry On Illegal Migration of Mexicans," *New York Times,* March 27, 1951, pg. 31.

[141] H.L. Mitchell, *Mean Things Happening in This Land: The Life and Times of H.L. Mitchell, Co-founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union* (Montclair, N.J.: Allanheld, Osmun, 1979).

Migrant Social Reproduction in the Borderlands

Although the story of the impoverished Mexican migrant fueling the success of American agribusiness was featured in the newspapers of the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands, most of these publications were preoccupied with other aspects of Mexican migration. Imperial Valley newspapers, for instance, contributed to the criminalization of the Mexican migrant by emphasizing their involvement in the region's vice economies and the intra- and inter-racial conflicts that they had in both public and private spaces. Similarly, Mexicali's publications depicted internal migrants as a social problem for Mexico, a drain on scarce public resources, and a potentially criminal population. As the next pages will show, these depictions often went beyond warnings about the consequences of increasing migration and became a powerful mechanism for influencing, if not managing, the newcomers. Whereas in the Imperial Valley these migrants remained over the years a population to expel or deport at the end of each harvest season, in Mexicali they came to be recognized by the mid-1950s as citizens who could better themselves through "honorable" work done on either side of the border (see chapter 3).

This chapter explores how growers, local governments, the media, organized labor, and business owners responded to the internal and international migration that accompanied the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. The IVFA was at the forefront of grower efforts to make the Bracero Program even more advantageous to agribusiness. The farmer association used its political influence to obtain important concessions in 1947 and 1948 that allowed growers to adjust the status of unauthorized workers at the border and later even recruit new braceros there. Border

regularization and recruitment naturally increased the migration of aspirantes to the region. Mexicali was forced to expand its public services and infrastructure to accommodate an ever-increasing population. As thousands of migrants concentrated in Mexicali, the city's newspapers amplified their nativist calls for an end to internal migration. Meanwhile, although the NFLU led one of the strongest responses against the expansion of the Bracero Program and protested the increasing numbers of unauthorized workers employed in the Imperial Valley, their efforts were unsuccessful—and in fact, served to further cement migrant labor in the region over the long term.

This chapter argues that the responses on both sides of the border to the increased migration of Mexican workers in the late 1940s and early 1950s were crucial in the spatial organization of migrant social reproduction in the region. The "wetback village" that the *New York Times* photographed in Mexicali was a clear example of this. There, deported or unemployed migrants found refuge and built houses made of "cardboard, sticks and scrap iron." Instead of destitute Dust Bowl migrants dotting the California landscape with poverty and misery, "wetback villages" became the sight to pity, disdain, or fear—but they were on the Mexican side of the border. Taking advantage of restrictive immigration laws and the marked difference in the cost of living between Mexico and the United States, Imperial Valley growers began to externalize agribusiness' poverty to Mexicali and contain it there. Although Imperial Valley's agribusiness experienced a boom in the postwar years, it was Mexicali, not Imperial Valley, that welcomed tens of thousands of new residents, and it was Mexicali that faced the resulting challenges of housing, public health, education, and many other public services.

Organized labor, business owners, and the middle-class media each had their own interest in excluding or including the newcomers. These actors advanced their various interests by employing existing stereotypes and creating new narratives about Mexican migrants. Like Mexican Americans across the country, the Imperial Valley's ethnic Mexican population was forced to reckon with the demographic transformation that the Bracero Program was generating. As David Gutiérrez has written, "Feeling the conflicting pressures exerted by their cultural affinities on the one hand and their desire to achieve at least functional political and social integration as American citizens on the other, Mexican American activists often found themselves in an ambiguous moral and existential borderland in which questions of political and cultural identity were muddled in ways most Americans have never had to consider."[142] This desire to achieve social integration as American citizens is what drove the NFLU to repudiate unauthorized migrants in the Imperial Valley. Differentiating themselves from braceros or undocumented workers, the domestic workers behind the NFLU performed a powerful representational practice that cast migrants as undeserving outsiders, further excluding them from the Imperial Valley's imagined community. The coexisting depictions of Mexican migrants as (potential) criminals, yet also as good earners and consumers, that circulated in the region's newspapers, moreover, made the newcomers both unwanted and welcomed. Migrants' presumed criminality made them easy targets for deportation at the end of each harvesting season but their image as good spenders made them an indispensable part of the local economy.

---

[142] Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors,* 06.

A Grower's Dream

Braceros and their undocumented counterparts had certainly become vital members of the Imperial Valley's labor force by the late 1940s. Unauthorized migration increased in 1947 when the Mexican and US governments agreed to the regularization, or as some called it, "drying out," of unauthorized workers already laboring in American fields. This new practice began in February, when growers in the Imperial Valley and Yuma, Arizona acknowledged that "Eighty per cent [*sic*] of the stoop labor" in the two valleys was done by unauthorized migrants "because other workers shun this type of work." The *Brawley News* used this number to explain why the IVFA and the Yuma Producers Cooperative had presented Los Angeles INS officials with a petition to "recruit [braceros] in Mexico, along the border from Baja California and Sonora" in addition to adjusting the status of their undocumented workers. Responding to these plans, Commander Eugene H. Imler of the American Legion declared that valley residents understood the need for "'wets' to save our crops" but that positions such as truck driver, tractor driver, etc. should go to US military veterans.[143] With this statement, Imler confirmed that the veterans he represented were not interested in stoop labor, but rather wanted to obtain guarantees that the higher paying, so-called "skilled jobs" would be reserved for citizens and longtime residents.

In March, the IVFA's secretary and manager traveled to Washington, D.C., where they presented INS Commissioner Ugo Carusi a preliminary plan for the regularization of

[143] In their petition, the IVFA described itself as "made up primarily of vegetable and melon producers, and through its directors, represents practically all of the 5600 farmers who farm about 530,000 acres, all in Imperial county, California." "Worker Importation To Valley Is Nearing: Farm Associations Make Plan to Let Mexican Stoop Laborers Enter U.S.," *Brawley News,* February 8, 1947, pgs. 1, 6.

unauthorized workers.[144] While the IVFA waited for the final approval of its proposal, several Mexican and US officials held an informal meeting in Mexicali at which Baja California's governor Alberto Aldrete (1946–1947) stated his support for the regularization of workers.[145] Aldrete's statement was congruent with the Mexican government's position that sought to reduce undocumented migration and ensure that all Mexican workers entered the United States under the Bracero Program (and allegedly protected by its terms).[146] A few weeks after their initial meeting with Carusi, the IVFA leaders met with him again in El Paso, where grower representatives for El Paso, Phoenix, south Texas, and Las Cruces were also in attendance. The IVFA had requested that 3,500 workers be regularized but was initially authorized to adjust the status of only 2,000, on payment of a $20,000 bond ($10 for each worker).[147] Upon his return to the Imperial Valley, IVFA secretary B. A. Harrigan told the *Brawley News* that "The Imperial Valley Farmers Association was the only farm group along the border to have a definite program drawn up for submission to the four-state meeting, and they were joined in the petition by the Yuma farmers group."[148] Imperial Valley growers, as on many other occasions, were at the vanguard of national labor and migration policymaking.[149]

---

[144] "Four-State Conference Set For 'Showdown' on Recruiting Of Alien Laborers for U.S.," *Brawley News,* March 14, 1947, pgs. 1, 8.
[145] "Mexican Governor in Approval of Permits for Workers Here," *Brawley News,* March 15, 1947, pg. 1.
[146] Kang, *The INS on the Line,* 109.
[147] The INS later waived the $20,000 bond that was first required for the IVFA to regularize 2,000 workers. "U.S. Waives Bonds for Imported Field Men," *Brawley News,* April 16, 1947, pg. 1.
[148] "Valley Plan for Recruiting Workers Awaits Approval Of Mexican Border Officials," *Brawley News,* March 22, 1947, pg. 1.
[149] Alfonso Guerra, assistant director of Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores)*, even praised Imperial Valley growers for "the way they handled the worker program" in comparison to the mistreatment that Mexican nationals received in other border regions. "New Pact for Labor Import Near Approval," *Brawley News,* December 3, 1947 pgs. 1, 6; "Small Group of Nationals To Enter I.V. in Few Days," *Brawley News,* December 5, 1947, pg. 1.

Although the Mexican government had remained reluctant to authorize border recruitment, the new regularization plan was to operate in three Mexican border cities: Mexicali, Ciudad Juarez, and Reynosa (Tamaulipas).[150] Former Mexican Consul Joaquín Terrazas was appointed director of the contracting office in Mexicali.[151] Terrazas had gained a favorable reputation among Imperial Valley growers a decade earlier, when he used his influence to suppress Mexican workers' unionization efforts.[152] When a group of seventy-five aspirantes appeared at the Mexicali office in spring 1947 requesting to be recruited there, Terrazas informed them that his office was only providing bracero contracts to undocumented migrants already working in the United States. Although a smaller number of men went to the recruiting office in Mexicali the following day, the region's aspirantes were realizing that in order to obtain a contract they had to first obtain employment in the Imperial Valley as unauthorized workers.[153] Border residents were not the only ones to realize that it made no sense to wait weeks, or even months, at the contracting centers in the Mexican interior when they could head straight to the border and obtain a contract after finding employment in the United States. Although the reasoning for the regularization plan was to decrease the population of undocumented migrants in the Southwest, and to ensure that all workers were protected under the Bracero Program, the new system had quite the opposite effect. Approximately 142,000

---

[150] "Mexico-U.S. Worker Contracts Approved, Starting Monday," *Brawley News,* April 10, 1947, pgs. 1, 8.
[151] "Alien Workers Get Permits On April 11," *Brawley News,* March 26, 1947, pg. 1.
[152] The *Workman's Bulletin,* published by the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, exposed the egregious corruption with which the 1933 and 1934 strikes were crushed, asserting Terrazas "sells his merchandise (the workers) to the farmers and the farmers state the price." González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing,* 195.
[153] "Labor Plan Is Delayed Temporarily," *Brawley News,* April 14, 1947, pg. 1; "New Delay In Recruiting Of Workers," *Brawley News,* April 15, 1947, pg. 1.

undocumented migrants adjusted their status between 1947 and 1949 while only 74,000 aspirantes obtained contracts under the Bracero Program.[154]

The large numbers of workers who adjusted their status in Mexicali revealed what everyone in the region already knew: that more and more of the agricultural work in the Imperial Valley, and across the larger Southwest, was being done by undocumented workers. The US and Mexican governments began regularizing unauthorized workers in April; by June the IVFA had contracted 4,500 workers processed through Mexicali. In November, when Mexico suspended border contracting because the Mexicali Valley needed cotton pickers, the IVFA's manager affirmed this would not affect the Imperial Valley, as 7,250 men were already employed there under the Bracero Program.[155] According to the *Brawley News,* the Imperial Valley had "the largest pool of stoop-laborers from Mexico in any other section of the U.S." with approximately 8,000 contracted workers.[156] Even the interruptions in the Bracero Program did not affect Imperial Valley growers, for they had been allowed to retain braceros under a "verbal agreement" after the program expired in December 1947.[157]

The new binational agreement of 1948 ushered in a new phase in the Bracero Program. This new agreement made growers responsible for guest workers' transportation and stipulated that work contracts would now be made directly between braceros and their employers. With the US government no longer a contractual partner in

---

[154] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 28; Kang, *The INS on the Line,* 112.
[155] "Additional 1000 Mexicans Come to I.V. for Field Work," *Brawley News,* June 7, 1947, pg. 1; "Worker Importation Shutdown Does Not Inconvenience I.V.," *Brawley News,* November 29, 1947, pg. 1.
[156] "Small Group of Nationals To Enter I.V. in Few Days," *Brawley News.*
[157] "Worker Recruit Okayed: U.S., Mexico Again Agree on National Use," *Brawley News,* February 12, 1948, pgs. 1, 8.

the Bracero Program, and thus no longer accountable for contract violations, the agreement produced what historians have called a "laissez-faire era" of little enforcement. The new transportation terms, moreover, generated an increased grower interest in border recruitment aimed at cutting transportation costs.[158] As worker regularization continued intermittently in Mexicali, California's governor Earl Warren asked the Mexican government to permit citrus growers to recruit up to 6,000 braceros in Mexicali. Reporting that as many as 8,000 Mexican nationals would be recruited in Mexicali for work in California agriculture, the *Brawley News* noted in June that this measure would also benefit between 1,500 and 2,000 aspirantes "who had migrated from the interior of Mexico [and] were caught in Mexicali when recruitment was stopped recently."[159] First through the new agreement, and then with border contracting, California growers obtained incremental concessions that made the Bracero Program more beneficial to them.

Traveling constantly to Washington, D.C. and Mexico City, IVFA officials cultivated a strong relationship with Mexican officials that ultimately yielded large dividends. B. A. Harrigan, the IVFA's secretary, announced in September that his association had received authorization to contract up to 5,400 braceros in Mexicali. Baja California residents remained excluded from the regular pool of aspirantes to be contracted in Mexicali. However, the IVFA had also been permitted to contract "all

---

[158] "Pact's Details Listed: U.S., Mexico Field Worker Plan Changed," *Brawley News,* February 27, 1948, pg. 1, 8; Calavita, *Inside the State,* 28-31; Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 203.

[159] "Warren Requests Worker Import From Mexicali," *Brawley News,* May 19, 1948, pg. 4; "Mexican Nationals Start Over Line at Mexican Station," *Brawley News,* June 7, 1948, pg. 2.

illegal entrants who are returned to the border who have been in the United States for a period of three months.'"[160] Mexicali was, up to this point, the only border city with a reception center.[161] For this reason, even when an incident in Texas seemed to put the future of the Bracero Program in danger, Imperial Valley growers were unaffected. The "El Paso Incident" began when the United States unilaterally permitted the entry of Mexican workers through that border city in mid-October, even though the Mexican government had refused to grant permission until a dispute over braceros' wages had been resolved.[162] To the dismay of the Mexican government, the INS opened the border for a weekend to approximately 4,000 migrants and even transported them to Texan growers in coordination with the Texas Employment Service.[163] Offended by this clear violation of the binational agreement, Mexico suspended contracting in its reception centers. When Mexicali's reception center closed, however, the IVFA had already recruited the 5,400 braceros it had been authorized to contract in Mexicali. Alfonso Guerra, a top official in Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores)* was in Mexicali during the El Paso Incident and assured Imperial Valley growers that "he would present the Valley's labor story to President Miguel Aleman and that he was confident that the Mexicali labor recruiting station would be reopened 'in about 48 hours.'"[164]

---

[160] "Field Labor Pact Okehed [Sic.]," *Brawley News,* September 20, 1948, pg. 6.
[161] Cohen, *Braceros,* 203.
[162] Scruggs, *Braceros, "Wetbacks," and the Farm Labor Problem*, 401.
[163] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 31. According to the *Brawley News,* the migrants "placed under 'technical arrest'" were not only sent to work in Texas, but also in New Mexico, Wyoming, and Colorado. "Mexican Border Is Closed: Worker Ban Is Ordered: High Official Says Reopening May Be Expected in Short Time," *Brawley News,* October 20, 1948, pg. 1.
[164] "Mexican Border is Closed: Worker Ban Is Ordered: High Official Says Reopening May Be Expected in Short Time," *Brawley News,* October 20, 1948, pg. 1.

After winning worker regularization in 1947 and border recruitment in 1948, Harrigan launched the IVFA's next large effort: obtaining border crossing cards. As discussed in chapter 1, many growers had long supported a border crossing card system in which Mexican workers came and went across the border according to the always-changing needs of American employers. B. M. Graham, an Imperial County Supervisor and manager of the IVFA, had declared back in 1943 the association's interest in "tap[ping] the supply of men already at our back door in the vicinity of Mexicali."[165] To achieve this, Harrigan again traveled to Washington D.C. in December 1948 to speak with congressmen about the possibility of establishing crossing cards.[166] The political clout of the Imperial Valley's Republican growers transcended party lines. George Luckey, the vice chairman of the California Democratic Central Committee and a prominent Brawley cattleman, for instance, attended an IVFA meeting in late December, where he promised his support for a crossing card system that "would assure [growers] a free-flowing influx of the workers needed."[167]

Harrigan's political maneuvering paid off. In January 1949, New Mexico Senator Clinton P. Anderson introduced a bill in Congress that would have created a crossing card system for daily commuters who worked in agriculture. According to Harrigan, the bill would "obviate any necessity for a contract with Mexico or any other nation regarding the importation of agricultural labor."[168] The crossing card system was nothing

---

[165] "Valley's War Problems Given Senate Hearing In Palm Springs," *Brawley News,* May 3, 1943, pg. 1.
[166] "Temporary Program Meets Labor Needs: Harrigan Reports on Methods Set To Guarantee Plenty Farm Workers," *Brawley News,* December 15, 1948, pg. 1.
[167] "Luckey To Aid Growers: Pledges Help on Mexican Labor," *Brawley News,* December 31, 1948, pg. 1.
[168] "Harrigan Praises New Worker Act: New Mexico Senator's Bill Would Provide Laborers When Needed," *Brawley News,* January 18, 1949. Additionally, each worker admitted under the bill would be exempt from the payment of a head tax, other admission charges, or from excluding provisions like literacy requirements.

short of a grower's dream.[169] Under the proposed system, Mexican agricultural workers who reached the U.S.-Mexico border could obtain a commuter's visa and then proceed to the United States in search of employment, effectively eliminating the transportation and administrative costs of a guest worker program. With no Bracero Program requiring growers to offer their laborers a contract, employers could hire workers one day and deny them employment the next. It is thus no surprise that the IVFA quickly asserted its support for the bill. "'This is what we've been after,'" declared Harrigan, as he referred to the bill's proposed changes to immigration policy and the Bracero Program. Less than a month after Anderson introduced his bill to Congress, the IVFA passed a resolution stating its preference for crossing cards over a contract system like the Bracero Program.[170] The bill did not pass but growers would again advocate for a border crossing system in August 1950, April 1952, and various other times when it appeared that Congress might finally give free rein to their desires to deregulate the use of foreign labor.[171]

The Army of "Solos"

Although the IVFA did not obtain a crossing card system, the changes introduced to the Bracero Program in 1947 and 1948 gave valley growers a larger pool of cheap labor. This pool was overwhelmingly composed of men traveling alone (known as *solos*)

---

[169] Wayne A. Grove has argued the Bracero Program was a growers' dream by providing certainty in a labor market plagued by uncertainty, lowering average grower labor costs, and providing a highly productive workforce. The program functioned as "a government-administered labor market insurance for farmers. Grove, "The Mexican Farm Labor Program," 303, 312.
[170] "Farmer Unit Names Mets as President," *Brawley News,* February 10, 1949.
[171] "Imperial County Farm Bureau Resolution," April 5, 1952; "Statement by Keith Mets," August 12, 1950. Both in folder 08, box 44, Galarza Papers.

looking for work in the United States' agricultural fields.[172] This gendered migration was largely the consequence of Mexico's refusal to allow family migration to the United States under the Bracero Program.[173] Mexican officials believed that if women and children remained in Mexico, the men who participated in the guest worker program would return to their homes upon completion of their contracts. As Ana E. Rosas has shown, the women and children of bracero families often bore the brunt of this gendered design. Mexico's patriarchal society expected women to obey husbands and fathers, but ironically the Bracero Program forced many females to take on the role and responsibilities of the head of their household. When migrant men failed to send money home, or disappeared altogether, these women had to fend for themselves and their families.[174]

Despite the United States' initial request for guest worker families, American growers were primarily accustomed to employing transient men who travelled in small armies along carefully designed routes connecting them with seasonal employment. One of these groups was made of Filipino males, who migrated as single individuals across the American West during the first decades of the twentieth century. Filipino migrants were, according to Dorothy Fujita-Rony, "ideal workers" because they were "unmarried young men in the prime of their lives unencumbered by nuclear families."[175] Even the American Midwest, considered the heartland of the family farm, had long depended on

---

[172] This does not mean that families did not migrate to the region as well. Women and children followed husbands and fathers to Mexicali in a process that Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo calls "family stage migration." Perrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
[173] Deborah Cohen, "From Peasant to Worker: Migration, Masculinity, and the Making of Mexican Workers in the US," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69 (2006), 83.
[174] Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu.*
[175] Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power,* 91.

the seasonal employment of transient white males. These itinerant men, as Frank T. Higbie has shown, had long been "indispensable outcasts" in many agricultural regions, essential labor at some parts of the year, and undesirable outsiders for the rest.[176]

The regularization program that began in 1947 contributed to a spike in the number of solos passing through the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. In May 1947, for instance, Ignacio Márquez (representing a group of migrants staying in Mexicali) sent the first of several messages directed to Mexican president Miguel Alemán Valdés. Between May 1947 and September 1949, Márquez and the group of aspirantes he was part of sent at least thirteen messages to the Mexican presidency. In a June telegram, he and nine other men explained that they had been transported from the United States to Mexicali to be "legalized" by their employers there. The men had not received the promised help to adjust their legal status, however, and they were stranded in Mexicali with no source of income to support their families.[177] While Márquez and his group had been taken to Mexicali with promises of returning to the United States with official bracero contracts, thousands more arrived in the Mexican border town as deportees. By June 1950 the *Los Angeles Times* reported the INS had returned a record number of 32,000 "line-jumpers" to Baja California during the month of May.[178] These record numbers of deportations no doubt contributed to Baja California's explosive demographic growth, particularly in its two main border cities, Mexicali and Tijuana.

---

[176] Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts.*
[177] Ignacio Márquez to Miguel Alemán Valdés, June 25, 1947, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[178] "Record 32,000 Wetbacks Sent Home in May," *Los Angeles Times,* June 16, 1950, pg. 2.

Border regularization and contracting intensified Mexicali's role as a "receptacle" for unemployed or deported migrants and as a "springboard" for many more making their way north.[179] The group of aspirantes that Terrazas had turned away from Mexicali's contracting office in April 1947 had discovered through their failed attempt that they could obtain a bracero contract if they first found unauthorized employment in the United States. The regularization system thus created a complicated migration process that rewarded the migrants who had access to social networks that helped them find employment in the Imperial Valley or elsewhere. In other words, while some benefitted from the program that gave them an opportunity to adjust their legal status, others found themselves excluded from participation in the Imperial Valley's labor market and the Bracero Program. In September 1947, one such migrant, Blas Hurtado, telegraphed Alemán Valdés explaining he was part of a large group of men waiting in Mexicali for a contract opportunity to work in the United States. He asked the president to give instructions to process applications in the order that the aspirantes presented them, and to not acquiesce to American growers' preference of personally selecting their workers.[180] As this telegram made clear, within five years of the Bracero Program's initiation, those aspirantes with no connections to American foremen, contractors, or growers faced a growing disparity in the employment opportunities in the region. It also showed that certain men were becoming the trusted, reliable workers that Imperial Valley growers procured and who would become Special braceros several years later (see chapter 3).

---

[179] Martinez, *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.*
[180] Blas Hurtado to Miguel Alemán Valdés, September 4, 1947, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.

When aspirantes at last lost hope of becoming contracted, they then solicited assistance to return to their homes. As the number of stranded migrants grew, aspirantes described in their requests a Mexicali in mounting crisis. In an April 1948 telegram, Juventino Hernández stated that one thousand braceros were starving in Mexicali and asked Aleman Valdés to grant them train tickets to Guadalajara.[181] Hernández sent his telegram about a week after a group of three hundred aspirantes staged a protest at the governor's office in Mexicali. The demonstrators demanded money to purchase train tickets to the Mexican interior or that governor Alfonso García González (1947–1953) secure them a train car. García González promised to do what he could to acquire a train car and advised the migrants to stay home instead of going after the "fantastic" US dollars that were often spent there before migrants returned to the fatherland.[182] It is very likely that Hernández's protest was the result of a memorandum that the Mexican ministries overseeing the Bracero Program wrote in March and that Mexicali's *ABC* published on April 8. The memo outlined the details of the 1948 agreement: that the braceros who had worked in the United States since 1947 would receive the first contracts, and that contracting would take place in the interior (not in Mexicali). The memo advised aspirantes to return to their homes and wait there for a contract opportunity.[183]

The problem of penniless aspirantes stranded at the border continued. One group went so far as to send a representative to Mexico City to ensure that Alemán Valdés

---

[181] Juventino Hernández to Miguel Alemán Valdés, April 22, 1948, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[182] "Invaden el Edificio de Palacio Mas de 300 Aspirantes a Braceros," *ABC,* April 16, 1948, pg. 1.
[183] "La Contratación de Braceros comenzara el 1o de Mayo," *ABC,* April 8, 1948, pg. 1.

learned about their situation. The typed letter that Esteban de la Mora Madrigal, the group's representative, carried with him to Mexico City explained that a large number of internal migrants had congregated outside the federal Migration Office (*Oficinas de Población*) in Mexicali on August 17, 1948 and had agreed to pool their resources to send de la Mora Madrigal to Mexico City to plead their case.[184] In an attached handwritten note, de la Mora Madrigal not only requested that his group either receive bracero contracts or be helped to return to their homes, but he also denounced the government of Baja California for not helping aspirantes in any way. Two years later, Fidencio Rodríguez, writing on behalf of 1,500 aspirantes, notified the president that these men had been forced to find refuge in Mexicali after they were unable to obtain a bracero contract. They were trapped in terrible economic conditions and implored Alemán Valdés help them return to their places of origin.[185]

Mexicali's Accelerated Urbanization

Whether they were unable to return to their homes in the Mexican interior or chose to stay at the border, and thus closer to job opportunities in the United States, internal migrants transformed Baja California and Mexicali. Baja California's population rose from 78,907 in 1940 to 226,965 in 1950,[186] This internal migration is what finally supplied Baja California the minimum population of 80,000 residents that were required for the federal territory to obtain statehood, which it did on January 16, 1952.[187]

---

[184] Esteban de la Mora et. al to Miguel Alemán Valdés, August 17, 1948, expediente 546.6/1-2., fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[185] Fidencio Rodríguez to Miguel Alemán Valdés, March 27, 1950, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[186] México, *6 ̊censo de población;* México, *Séptimo censo general de población.*
[187] León Portilla and Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California*, 168.

Mexicali's growth was especially explosive: according to Mexico's 1950 census, the *municipio* (county) of Mexicali had a total population of 124,362 residents.[188] Mexicali's accelerated growth contrasted sharply with the minor demographic gains that Imperial Valley cities made throughout this period. The 1950 US Census calculated Imperial County's population at 62,975, reflecting a gain of only 3,235 residents since 1940.[189] Brawley, according to the *Brawley News,* had the largest population in the county in December 1947 with approximately 13,500 residents.[190]

With more and more internal migrants arriving every day, Mexicali officials began to recognize the pressing need to expand the city's services and infrastructure. In January 1948, when Mexicali's chief of police asked business owners to contribute to a fund to hire more guards, he did so by noting that the city's population of more than 70,000 required a larger police force.[191] Baja California's governor Alberto V. Aldrete reported to president Alemán Valdés in April 1947 that Mexicali was about to start the construction of five new schools expected to serve 4,000 students.[192] When the next governor, Alfonso García González, inaugurated a bridge connecting Pueblo Nuevo with Mexicali, he named the new structure after the president. The president's office archived the telegram containing the news about the Alemán bridge along with photographs of a

---

[188] México, *Séptimo censo general de población*.
[189] Social Explorer Tables (SE), Census 1940 Census Tract, County, State and US, Digitally transcribed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Edited, verified by Michael Haines. Compiled, edited and verified by Social Explorer; Social Explorer Tables (SE), Census 1950 Census Tract, County, State and US, Digitally transcribed by Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Edited, verified by Michael Haines. Compiled, edited and verified by Social Explorer.
[190] The rest of the city populations were as follows: El Centro, 13,000; Calexico, 6,500; Calipatria, 2,200; Imperial, 1,600; and Westmorland, 1,400. "City Governments in Imperial County Employ 323 Workers at Average of $175, Survey Shows," *Brawley News,* December 19, 1947, pgs. 1, 2.
[191] "Editorial: El Tema de Hoy: El Cuerpo de Veladores," *ABC,* January 28, 1948, pg. 3.
[192] Alberto V. Aldrete to Miguel Alemán Valdés, April 21, 1947, expediente 534.3/166, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.

new hospital, a new school, and several state buildings that García González's office must have mailed to Mexico City.[193] These photographs were proof that the territorial government was responding to Baja California's growing needs.

In addition to reports about the latest completed schools, bridges, or hospitals, Baja California's authorities and residents continuously petitioned the central government for funds to start desperately needed projects. *ABC* reported in December 1947 that a group of teachers were planning to petition the Ministry of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) for eighty new schools for the territory, hoping that at least forty would be funded.[194] A few months later García González asked Alemán Valdés for funds to build three schools in rural areas.[195] According to an October 1948 letter that the Mexicali Pro-Education Board (*Patronato Pro-Educación de Mexicali)* sent to Alemán Valdés, the group relied on donations from various industries to provide a monthly subsidy of 1,500 pesos to the normal school and to pay the salaries of sixty-three teachers and eleven service workers. The board wanted to organize raffles to raise additional money and had written to Aléman Valdés seeking his authorization and support.[196] This leadership by the Pro-Education Board was mirrored by other civic organizations that worked to expand Baja California's infrastructure. The Mexicali Valley Pro-Highways Committee (*Comité Pro-Carreteras del Valle de Mexicali*) and the Colonia Progreso

---

[193] Alfonso García González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, December 31, 1949, expediente 609/788, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[194] "Habrá Más Escuelas Para el Año Próximo: Sobre el aumento de salarios," *ABC,* December 31, 1947, pg. 1.
[195] Alfonso García González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, May 28, 1948, expediente 534.3/166, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[196] Patronato Pro-Educación de Mexicali to Miguel Alemán Valdés, October 8, 1948, expediente 564.1/531, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.

Agricultural Association (*Asociación Agrícola de la Colonia Progreso*) raised funds and built roads to improve transportation in the region.[197]

This do-it-yourself attitude was prevalent in many parts of Mexicali and its valley. As discussed in chapter 1, Pueblo Nuevo was characterized by its self-made homes and the canals that delivered water to the neighborhood. Pueblo Nuevo residents had been responsible for the maintenance of these canals ever since they began settling in the neighborhood during World War I, commuting to jobs across the border in the Imperial Valley.[198] General Juan Felipe Rico, the governor of Baja California in 1945, had tried to obtain federal funds to build a sewer system in Pueblo Nuevo without success.[199] As Pueblo Nuevo and the western edge of Mexicali expanded with the arrival of new residents, access to potable water became a problem. The canals fell into disrepair in 1947 and the Department of Public Works began delivering potable water to Pueblo Nuevo using trucks (*tanques regadores*).[200] Despite García González's promises that the problem of potable water would be resolved the following year, he announced in April 1948 that Pueblo Nuevo would have to wait longer for a modern sewage system. In the meantime, the canals would be repaired and connected to the neighborhood lots.[201] Discontented with this slow progress, the Pueblo Nuevo Committee for Structural

---

[197] Asociación Agrícola de la Colonia Progreso to Miguel Alemán Valdés, August 5, 1948, expediente 515.1/11-A, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN; Comité Pro-Carreteras del Valle de Mexicali to Miguel Alemán Valdés, May 14, 1949, expediente 515.1/254, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[198] Orozco Maciel, *De Este Lado del Puente,* 32; *ABC,* "Pueblo Nuevo Pide Agua," November 18, 1947, pg. 3.
[199] Gral. de Div. Juan Felipe Rico to Manuel Avila Camacho, April 19, 1945, expediente 545.22/409, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN; Gral. de Div. Juan Felipe Rico to Juan de Dios Bátiz, April 19, 1945, expediente 545.22/409, fondo Manuel Avila Camacho, AGN.
[200] "Falta Agua en Pueblo Nuevo," *ABC,* November 14, 1947, pg. 6.
[201] "Agua a Pubelo Nuevo," *ABC*, November 16, 1947, pg. 1; "Pueblo Nuevo Pide Agua," *ABC,* November 18, 1947, pg. 3; "Hoy se inician en Pueblo Nuevo las Obras para el Abastecimiento de Agua," *ABC,* April 16, 1948, pg. 1.

Improvement (*Comité de Mejoras Materiales de Pueblo Nuevo*) presented the governor with a list of demands. These included: 1) a speedy resolution to the water problem; 2) the construction of a bridge uniting Pueblo Nuevo with Mexicali; 3) the abolition of prostitution; 4) increased police surveillance (in light of a spike in crimes); 5) that Pueblo Nuevo be assigned its own watering truck [to minimize dust on the unpaved streets] and a garbage truck; and 6) more public lighting.[202] By contrast, Brawley's and El Centro's city planning boards were proposing zoning ordinances to prevent an expansion of the kind of "shacks" that had been seen in Brawley's eastside.[203] Whereas Mexicali residents built their shacks or modest homes and appealed to Mexican officials to improve their neighborhoods, Imperial Valley residents were simply prohibited from setting up similar structures in the United States.

As illustrated by the list of demands that Pueblo Nuevo residents presented to governor García González, prostitution and crime were on the rise.[204] Even when Mexican officials made repeated public appeals for workers' sobriety and decency, male migrants consumed large amounts of alcohol and enjoyed the company of women in

---

[202] Harán Mejoras en Pueblo Nuevo," *ABC,* April 20, 1948, pg. 1.
[203] "Planning Boards Request Supervisors Take Actions," *Brawley News,* February 20, 1948, pg. 1.
[204] As displeased as Mexicali's residents were with the arrival of penniless transients, other Mexican cities witnessed even worse scenarios. Empalme, Sonora, for instance, was the main hub in western Mexico where braceros were screened, contracted, and from there transported to their U.S. destinations. The Mexican government identified Empalme as the ideal location and community to receive and serve a transitory population for its long history as a railroad crossroads. As familiar as were town residents with transient men, they were likely unprepared to see the hunger and suffering of impoverished aspirantes waiting for weeks, or even months, without end for a bracero contract. Those who arrived with money in their pockets, on the other hand, exasperated local residents when they drank excessively and hired sex workers. The Mexican government, moreover, did not even attempt to curb the increasing trend of alcohol consumption and sex commerce. Instead, it divided the town into different sectors designated for different purposes. Empalme's "black" sector remained outside a forty-mile radius from the recruitment center facilities and housed the town's bars, brothels, hotels, and pool halls. Ana E. Rosas, "Flexible Families: Braceros Families' Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries, 1942-1964" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2006), 198-207.

labor camps, restaurants, cafes, pool halls, and bars on both sides of the border. The increasing numbers of solo men and their behavior exposed the deficiencies of a labor system dependent on the separation of families. Pueblo Nuevo, especially its Fourth Street, was notorious for its small red-light district, which was popular among braceros and other migrants.[205] Even before migrant jobseekers began to settle in Pueblo Nuevo in large numbers, this section was already a popular destination among American men stationed in a military base in the Imperial Valley. After the base closed at the end of World War II, the region's braceros became Fourth Street's main clientele.[206] According to Eric Schantz, prostitution increased in Pueblo Nuevo with "the advent of the *lonchería,* a cafeteria that sold beer and female companionship as waitresses worked hustling drinks as *ficheras* (dancers, drinking companions) and, in some cases, also left with customers as traditional prostitutes."[207] He estimates the women who labored as sex workers in Mexicali's Chinatown and Pueblo Nuevo worked out of approximately fifteen *vecindades* (residential buildings), each one with six or seven apartments. Pueblo Nuevo's vecindades, located near the international boundary, were often the only housing available to recently arrived migrants, a fact that further stigmatized the community as a place of vice where only the very poor lived.

---

[205] "Colonia" may be loosely translated to a city's neighborhood or section.

[206] In his memoir *From This Side of the Bridge: The Traditional Barrio of Pueblo Nuevo,* Raúl Orozco Maciel explains that aspirantes waiting in Mexicali for a contract purchased food, beer, and services in the Fourth Street zone. Orozco Maciel, *De Este Lado del Puente,* 39; Güicho Gutiérrez, *Y nació Pueblo Nuevo*, 37.

[207] Eric M. Schantz, "From the 'Mexicali Rose' to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2001), 502. Orozco Maciel also narrates aspiring braceros waiting in Mexicali for a contract purchased food, beer, and services in the Fourth Street zone. Orozco Maciel, *De Este Lado del Puente*, 39.

Given the poverty of Pueblo Nuevo's residents and their constant movement across the border, the neighborhood became particularly vulnerable to communicable diseases.[208] The *Brawley News* reported on December 10 that "An 'outbreak' of meningitis cases among agricultural workers who had recently been employed on Imperial county farms was reported discovered in Mexicali." According to county doctor Burke Schoensee, a bracero was recovering in the county hospital and valley farms would soon receive sulfadiazine as a preventive measure.[209] Despite the preemptive measures that both sides adopted, meningitis continued spreading across the border region. *ABC* reported on January 10 that Mexicali had three more meningitis cases, bringing the total number to thirty-six since the start of the outbreak. One of these new cases was a man who had been working in Westmorland but was later transferred to Mexicali. Then three more people became ill with meningitis in February. Among them was another farm worker who had been laboring in El Centro until he returned to his home in Mexicali after falling ill.[210] When meningitis appeared to be disappearing from the region in April 1948, Mexicali's authorities turned their eyes to the next public health problem: smallpox. Considering that Pueblo Nuevo had had the highest rate of meningitis cases, that many of its residents were from central Mexico, and that most had reportedly never

---

[208] According to *ABC,* Baja California Norte had had the highest tuberculosis rate in Mexico in the last twenty years in 1947. Untitled article, *ABC,* December 15, 1947, pg. 2.

[209] Across the border, Mexican public health officials held a meeting with Mexicali's doctors and leaders that night. There, the Mexican Consul in Calexico, José M. Gutiérrez, promised he would visit the "concentration camps" where undocumented migrants were detained in the Imperial Valley to ensure that they received proper sulfadiazine doses. For his part, Joaquín Terrazas said he would communicate with bracero employers and ask the contracted workers be vaccinated as well. "Meningitis Cases Found in Mexico," *Brawley News,* December 10, 1947, pg. 1 "Todos Los Facultativos de Mexicali Dan su Apoyo Para Combatir la Meningitis: Trascendental Reunion Hubo Anoche Convocada por Salubridad Federal," ; *ABC,* December 11, 1947, pg. 1.

[210] "La Meningitis Sigue Cundiendo: Impónese tomar providencias," *ABC,* January 10, 1948, pg. 1; "Se Registraron Tres Casos Mas de Meningitis," *ABC,* February 11, 1948, pg. 1.

been vaccinated before, public health officials concentrated their vaccination campaign in that neighborhood.[211] The meningitis outbreak in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands illustrated the rapidity with which growers and US officials returned migrants to Mexico when they became ill and unproductive. This practice was not only a health risk to the communities that received returning migrants, but also clearly unethical when the workers did not receive the care they needed.

More than a local phenomenon, the export of disease and responsibility for migrants' healthcare was occurring across the larger US-Mexico borderlands. The repatriation of ill Mexican workers, besides denying them the healthcare they deserved, also contributed to their racialization as a public health threat. Natalia Molina and David Montejano have demonstrated that the racialization of Mexicans as dirty, diseased, and poor during the early decades of the twentieth century served to justify their exclusion from social membership at both local and national levels.[212] The image of the diseased Mexican migrant had become so powerful by the mid-twentieth century that every aspirante had to pass a physical examination in one of Mexico's recruitment centers in order to work as a bracero. Ironically enough, it was this medical requirement that convinced Mexico's leading health officials that braceros were contracting meningitis in the United States and spreading the disease in Mexico. The exam provided proof that the

---

[211] "Continua la Lucha Contra la Viruela," *ABC,* April 18, 1948, pg. 1.
[212] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

braceros who fell ill with meningitis had been healthy when they emigrated to the United States.[213]

"No More Contracting"

Unsurprisingly, the continuous growth of a migrant reserve army of labor, one that was overwhelmingly composed of single men, spurred complaints and nativist cries on both sides of the Imperial Valley-Mexicali border. When the Mexican central government authorized border contracting in Mexicali in September 1948, it specifically excluded border residents from participating in the Bracero Program—even though the city had become one of the places most affected by the internal migration that the program was generating across the country. Mexicali residents must have viewed this policy as a slap on the face. On December 25, 1948, the Mexicali newspaper *El Regional* published an article entitled "*Por Caridad, No Más Contrataciones,"* that implied with its title that the most charitable thing the Mexican government could do was to end bracero contracting in Mexicali. The aspirantes were living outdoors for months, finding refuge in parks and railroad yards. Though it was difficult to acknowledge that fellow Mexicans had reached such desperate straits, the article noted, some aspirantes were stealing because they were hungry, unemployed, or simply unoccupied.[214] This was not the first time the publication had requested a halt to internal migration. The previous year, on January 11, 1947, *El Regional* had featured an article entitled "*Que no vengan mas*" ("That More Do Not Come") that asked Mexican authorities to prevent the migration of

[213] "Intensifican la Lucha en Contra de la Meningitis: Precauciones en Ciudades Fronterizas: Los Braceros Posibles Portadores del Gérmen," *ABC,* February 28, 1948, pg. 1.
[214] "Por Caridad, No Más Contrataciones," *El Regional,* December 25, 1948.

braceros to Baja California.[215] Affirming that millions of men were arriving in Mexicali with the intention of crossing the border, but that only a few succeeded in crossing, or succeeded only to be deported shortly thereafter, the article asked Mexican authorities to prevent these crowds from assembling in the city's public spaces.[216]

ABC, another Mexicali publication, combined local and national debates in its discussions about migration. The newspaper reported in November 1947 that approximately 15,000 migrants had crossed the border without authorization in the last two months in that region alone. The Mexican vice consul in Calexico asked *ABC* to call on Mexicali's campesinos to not expose themselves to the risks associated with undocumented migration.[217] The following day, the newspaper again tackled the issue of immigration with an article titled "Beware. Braceros!" In it, *ABC* described migrants' ongoing struggle to subsist that forced them to migrate unauthorized to the United States and described the journey as an odyssey filled with anxiety. When migrants returned to Mexico as deportees, the article asserted, many found themselves in extremely poor and pitiful conditions, and many became public charges or criminals. If these were not enough reasons for migrants to stay in their homes, *ABC* noted that INS officials shaved deportees' heads before returning them to Mexicali. Walking the streets in Mexicali, deportees carried a visible reminder of the humiliation of deportation and being at the mercy of US immigration officials. The article urged migrants to stay in their places of origin and contribute to Mexico's growth by working in their own country. [218] The

---

[215] In its use of the word "braceros," this article is representative of the common practice of calling any male migrant seeking work in agriculture as a "bracero."
[216] "Que no vengan mas," *El Regional,* January 11, 1947.
[217] "Noticias Diversas: Información," *ABC,* November 14, 1947, pg. 8.
[218] "Ciudado. Braceros!" *ABC,* November 15, 1947, pg. 3.

excessive punitive action that the INS adopted with shaving deportees' heads indeed left an impression in migrants' minds. In July 1948, for instance, Guillermo Félix wrote to Alemán Valdés requesting three train passes for him and his two sons to return to their hometown in the interior. He explained he and his sons had worked "*de contrabando*" (undocumented) in the U.S. but were deported to Mexicali and had had their heads shaved. Now they were in Mexicali, Félix added, roaming around the immigration office like "sheep."[219]

What is striking about many of the articles that *ABC* published regarding migrants' hardships is that these reflected a mix of compassion for the penniless newcomers and a self-interested anxiety about the socioeconomic pressures that they placed on Mexicali. On January 20, 1948, for instance, *ABC* published a story about a group of approximately two hundred braceros who had completed their contracts on December 31, 1947 and were on their way south. Before they could return to their homes in the Mexican interior, the men had to first collect the savings that their employers had withheld from every paycheck and that the Mexican government was supposed to distribute to the workers upon completion of their contracts. Promised that they would receive their money within ten or fifteen days, the group was becoming frustrated with the slow bureaucratic process that kept them in Mexicali. The men, most of them from the states of Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato, were depleting the funds they carried with them and some of them had already returned home without receiving their savings.

---

[219] Unlike most requests that the presidency's office received, Félix's petition in the archive is attached to the negative response he received. The president's secretary, José G. Tamborrell, informed Félix that there was no budget for the kind of request that he had made. Guillermo Félix to Miguel Alemán Valdés, July 30, 1948, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN; José G. Tamborrell to Guillermo Félix, August 3, 1948, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.

For its part, *ABC* noted that this group of men was a handicap (*rémora*) to the city because they were not working but rather just waiting for their money. In an editorial published three days later, *ABC* contended that federal authorities were creating unnecessary problems for Mexicali by not returning braceros their savings. By not giving them what was legitimately theirs, went the argument, the government was turning braceros into public charges, a problem for the local economy, and a danger to the city. Simply put, these returning braceros were "unwelcome in the neighborhood where they [were] forced to live."[220] While acknowledging that the aspirantes who left their homes in the interior were forced to do so by pressing poverty, *ABC* continuously underlined that their emigration hurt the Mexican economy.[221] These editorials reflected the middle-class sensibilities of the newspaper, which expected migrants to uphold a Mexican patriotism above their own wellbeing.

As much as *ABC* championed patriotism and a filial love for the nation, it made clear through its criticisms of the Mexican state that it was not beholden to the government. Notably, it made public some aspirantes' accusations that Joaquín Terrazas had taken their money and not delivered the contracts he had promised them.[222] Then, when the office regularizing undocumented migrants in Mexicali closed in April 1948,

---

[220] "Braceros Que Reclaman Les Devuelvan Su Dinero: Afirman que se les tiene muchos días sin que logren recobrar los ahorros que les han descontado en EE. Unidos: Quieren Cobrar Para Ir a Su Lugar de Origen," *ABC,* January 20, 1948, pg. 1; "Editorial: El Tema de Hoy: El Ilusorio Vellocino de Oro," *ABC,* January 23, 1948, pg. 3.

[221] "Editorial: El Tema de Hoy: Variaciones sobre el mismo Tema: Los Braceros Mexicanos," *ABC,* February 2, 1948, pg. 3.

[222] The newspaper continued reporting on this story even after Terrazas accused *ABC* of spreading false rumors. "Gravísima Acusación Fue Formulada Al Jefe de la Oficina Intersecretarial: Unos Campesinos Se Quejan de que Les Pidió Y No Les Arregló Trabajo," *ABC,* January 23, 1948, pg. 1; "Editorial: El Tema de Hoy: Reafirmando Conceptos," *ABC,* January 26, 1948, pg. 3; "Abonan La Conducta del Sr. Joaquín Terrazas," *ABC,* January 27, 1948, pg. 6.

the newspaper was quick to ask why the central government had ordered the closure when the office's services were indispensable. Unauthorized migrants were at the mercy of their employers in the United States, *ABC* argued, and it was important that these workers adjust their status to gain the protections of the binational agreement. The article included a letter that an unauthorized worker named Edelmiro Pérez had allegedly sent to the editor describing migrant conditions in the Imperial Valley. The letter repeated the (by then) usual story of deceived migrants who were drawn to Mexicali by rumors of opportunity and wealth but who, after spending all the money they carried, were forced to migrate unauthorized to the United States. In reality, the letter affirmed, these migrants were only serving to enrich the Mexican foremen who served as merchants of labor for growers and companies in the Imperial Valley. These Mexican foremen knew well that there was an oversupply of workers. All they had to do was drive their trucks to the street corners where workers congregated each morning and pack them like "cigarettes" on the flat beds of their trucks. The foremen paid each worker 40 cents an hour and charged them 50 cents for transporting them from the towns to the fields. If Mexican undocumented workers were living in these conditions in the United States, Pérez said, how could the Mexican state halt migrant regularization?[223]

If there was any group in Mexicali that welcomed internal migration it was the valley's cotton producers. As Imperial Valley growers increasingly turned to Mexicali for

[223] "Los Braceros Ilegales que Trabajan en EE. UU. están Sufriendo Gran Penalidad," *ABC,* April 4, 1948, pg. 1. The denunciations that Mexican migrants made against Mexican foremen and contractors for cheating them of their wages exposed the scant ethnic solidarity that existed between the middle class and a vulnerable migrant population. A Calexico contractor named Luis Ramírez, for instance, recruited a group of men in a Mexicali park, directed them to cross the border undocumented, employed them for two days, and then abandoned them in El Centro without paying them their due wages. "Siguen Estafando a los Aspirantes a Braceros: Ahora fue un Contratista de Caléxico," *ABC,* April 16, 1948, pg. 6.

their labor needs, cotton producers in the Mexicali Valley continued to see their own labor supply threatened by their neighbors' higher wages. In a September 1948 telegram, Eugenio Elorduy, president of the Mexicali National Chamber of Transformation, petitioned Alemán Valdés for an end to bracero contracting in Mexicali. Elorduy assured the president that the Mexicali Valley had enough employment during the cotton-picking season for the braceros and aspirantes in the region. Wages in the Mexicali Valley, he added, were also higher in Baja California than in other Mexican regions.[224] When Elorduy's exhortation proved insufficient, García González also telegraphed Alemán Valdés, reminding him that he had promised Mexicali's chambers of commerce and industry that he would suspend bracero contracting there.[225] The Baja California governor, it was clear, was concerned about the conflicts that bracero contracting in Mexicali would provoke between the territory's government and the region's leading businessmen, and he was willing to appeal to Alemán Valdés on their behalf.

The NFLU in the Imperial Valley

The NFLU was just as opposed to border recruitment and the employment of Mexican migrants in the Imperial Valley as Mexicali's cotton growers. Before it began organizing workers in the Imperial Valley in 1951, the group had gained key experience by coordinating a series of strikes in the Central Valley. Their efforts started in 1947 when the NFLU targeted the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation in Arvin, California. Two

[224] Eugenio Elorduy to Miguel Alemán Valdés, September 22, 1948, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.
[225] Alfonso García González to Miguel Alemán Valdés, October 15, 1949, expediente 546.6/1-2, fondo Miguel Alemán Valdés, AGN.

weeks into this strike, Harry L. Mitchell, president of the NFLU, told reporters that the end of World War II had produced unemployment in agricultural areas and that "every available job [was] needed by American citizens."[226] As the strike continued, the NFLU accused DiGiorgio of using guest workers as strikebreakers, and the US Department of Agriculture ordered 143 braceros be sent back to Mexico.[227] Despite this initial victory, DiGiorgio continued employing braceros as strikebreakers, arranging for them to enter struck fields escorted by Kern County Sheriff's deputies. The last blow to the union's efforts in the Central Valley came in July 1948 when a federal judge in Los Angeles issued a temporary injunction against secondary boycotting of DiGiorgio farm products.[228] Just as the NFLU began to realize the enormous influence that growers held, especially over the US government, Imperial Valley's growers also learned of the strategies that the union had utilized against their Central Valley counterparts.

Once the NFLU began its campaign in the Imperial Valley it quickly turned its attention to the large presence of undocumented workers laboring there. The large availability of undocumented labor in the Imperial Valley ensured that the prevailing wage in this region remained at seventy cents per hour from 1951 to 1959—and according to one of the NFLU's most prominent leaders, Ernesto Galarza, unauthorized workers were willing to work for as little as 40 cents an hour as late as 1954.[229] The

---

[226] "Farm Workers in San Joaquin Valley Strike," *Brawley News,* October 1, 1947, pg. 1; "AFL Hits Alien Labor, Asks Court Act on Colorado," *Brawley News,* October 17, 1947, pg. 1.
[227] "Mexican Field Crew Ousted," *Brawley News,* November 11, 1947, pg. 1.
[228] "Court Enjoins Farm Union," *Brawley News,* July 15, 1948, pg. 1. Although the NFLU was unsuccessful with its boycott, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers would find much success using this strategy a few decades later.
[229] California paid the highest agricultural wages in the nation in 1950 with an average of eighty-nine cents per hour compared to the national average of seventy cents. Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 30, 71; "Top Ag. Wages Lead Average," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 19, 1950.

NFLU estimated in 1951 that undocumented workers laboring in the Imperial Valley earned an average of $3.00 a week while braceros received $4.80.[230] Given the significant difference in wages that Imperial Valley employers paid to braceros in comparison to undocumented workers, it is no surprise that the latter were a major source of labor in the region. According to Galarza, the valley's small growers hired undocumented workers almost exclusively.[231] The large growers who also hired unauthorized labor most often relied on labor contractors to recruit and supervise them.[232] In May of 1950 the Border Patrol was detaining an average of eight or nine hundred undocumented workers every day, of which three hundred were detained along the border.[233]

The NFLU also opposed the Bracero Program for depressing wages and displacing American citizens and longtime residents from agricultural jobs. When he arrived in the Imperial Valley in 1951, Galarza discovered that many braceros had been working under repeatedly renewed eighteen-month contracts.[234] Ignacio Guzmán, for example, had been working in the region as a bracero for five years when the union leader learned about his case.[235] The growing permanence of contract workers was no secret. Although braceros were prohibited from skilled jobs in the United States, Imperial Valley's dairy farmers made public their desire to renew the contracts of 1,035 workers whose legal tenure in the country was scheduled to expire in June 1951. The farmers

---

[230] "NFLU to Imperial Valley's merchants and businessmen," March 22, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.
[231] Note, "Imperial-notes," no date, folder 01, box 45, Galarza Papers. Although this note contains no date, we can speculate Galarza wrote it in 1950 or 1951 when the NFLU was actively researching labor conditions in the Imperial Valley.
[232] "Galarza to Frank L. Noakes," April 17, 1952, folder 06, box 44, Galarza Papers.
[233] "Report on Alien Roundups in IV Termed 'Inaccurate:' Pickups Average 800-900 Per Day, Declares Officer," *Imperial Valley Press*, May 2, 1950.
[234] "Galarza to Glenn Brockway," April 10, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.
[235] "Internal Memorandum," May 31, 1951, folder 03, box 45, Galarza Papers.

explained they desired to retain these braceros because it allegedly took ninety days to train new workers.[236] Neither the farmers nor the media cared to address the contradictions in the farmers' statement and the official policies of the Bracero Program. The dairy farmers were trying to retain a large body of trained contracted workers, braceros who now possessed key skills that gave them an advantage over other workers with no previous experience in the dairy industry. The braceros that Imperial Valley dairy farmers were trying to retain, in other words, were becoming the "professionals" Galarza believed threatened domestic farmworkers' economic survival. Despite its strong opposition to the Bracero Program, the NFLU did not advocate for its complete termination or for the repatriation of all braceros. In June 1951, the union proclaimed that if there existed a shortage of domestic labor in the Imperial Valley, this was caused by the low wages offered by growers. "The Union's answer is to make working conditions DECENT enough to attract American workers," the NFLU told *Brawley News* readers, while "The growers' answer is not to improve conditions but to IMPORT the lower standards of living of workers of another country." If growers guaranteed decent living and working conditions to all farmworkers and offered enough jobs to domestic workers, their reasoning went, the NFLU would have no problem with the continuation of the Bracero Program.[237]

The "revolving door" that existed between bracero users and the public agencies in charge of the Bracero Program also illustrated the legal and political power that Imperial Valley's large growers enjoyed. In this small network of public officials and

---

[236] "Dairymen Appeal For Workers 'to Save' Industry," *Brawley News,* June 20, 1951.
[237] "Do the Nationals Have to Be Moved?" *Brawley News,* June 4, 1952, pg. 2.

growers, the former chief of the California Farm Placement Service became the manager of the IVFA after the end of his public service. Similarly, the Department of Labor field supervisor for the Imperial Valley left his position to start a second grower association in the region.[238] How growers utilized these political connections in their favor is easy to imagine. IVFA officials repeatedly met with state officials in Washington, D.C., Mexico City, and across the American Southwest.[239] This contrasted sharply with the experience of union leaders, who were denied entry to the meetings and negotiations held in Mexico City during January and February of 1951.[240]

Even as the US government contradicted its own laws and made concessions to convince growers to participate in the Bracero Program, many growers were unwilling to rely solely on bracero labor. The mixed crews of braceros and undocumented workers continued. When the Border Patrol made a surprise raid on the O'Dwyer-Mets ranch in Holtville at the beginning of 1951 and found undocumented workers laboring there, Keith Mets shifted the focus of controversy away from the mixed crew to attack the Bracero Program. According to Mets, bureaucratic red tape and other program limitations forced Imperial Valley growers to resort to undocumented labor.[241] Arguing that farmers were forced to employ undocumented labor when no domestic workers *seemed* available, the *Imperial Valley Press* promoted the growers' stance on the Bracero Program and the

---

[238] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 127.
[239] "I.V. Farmers Ask Simplified Farm Laborer Recruiting," *Imperial Valley Press,* January 26, 1951; "U.S.-Mexico Pact Okayed," *Imperial Valley Press,* February 5, 1951.
[240] "Protest is Made," *Imperial Valley Press,* February 8, 1951. Grower associations even benefitted from the public works that the federal government had constructed in the 1930s. The IVFA, for example, bought the former federal labor camps that housed transient workers in the Imperial Valley to convert them into bracero housing. "Harrigan Cites Labor Camp Purchase Plan," *Brawley News,* January 28, 1949.
[241] "Hearing Set on 'Wets,'" *Imperial Valley Press,* February 14, 1951.

common, though unlawful, practice of hiring undocumented labor.[242] Similarly, the *Brawley News* blamed the NFLU and its "paid, professional organizers" for hurting the local economy with the strike when growers, who "had no spokesman, professional or otherwise," competed with south Texas' lower labor costs.[243] If Imperial Valley growers did not have a spokesman this was because they did not need one. They had the local press.

The NFLU erroneously believed that if they blocked growers' access to undocumented labor, growers would turn to domestic workers. Convinced the rising operational costs of the Bracero Program would likely prohibit an exclusively bracero workforce in the Imperial Valley, the NFLU concentrated much of its energies on what they perceived as "holding the wets at bay." Although the union leaders recognized that "the operations of the Border Patrol [were] spotty," they also believed that the Border Patrol had "a good deal of respect for the pressure the Union [could] generate."[244] The potential effects of this pressure became obvious when the Border Patrol initiated a series of aerial deportations to the interior of Mexico meant to prevent the constant re-entry of undocumented crossers.[245] To achieve this, Galarza and the NFLU issued public

---

[242] "Labor Situation in I.V. Improves," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 5, 1950.
[243] "Editorials: Strike Doesn't Help the Economy," *Brawley News,* June 13, 1951, pg. 2.
[244] As the NFLU strategized during the early months of 1952 for its next strike in the Imperial Valley, its leaders reported that the 1951 strike had forced the region's larger companies to move away from undocumented labor and rely more heavily on bracero labor. "Judging from all accounts and conditions observed," asserted the NFLU report, "two seem to have set in as a result of the strike- a) elimination of the wets on the big ranches and b) substitution of Nationals, which program is becoming more expensive to the growers all the time due to the Union's publicity. The two-pronged campaign of the Union of the last three years against wetbacks and Nationals is thus beginning to shape up in practical results. *If the Nationals can be made expensive enough, and the wets held at bay, a new situation will develop-employment of more locals*" [emphasis added]. Report, "The present situation in the Imperial Valley," February 01, 1952, folder 02, box 45, Galarza Papers.
[245] Reporting the start of this new program, The *Brawley News* explained the new deportations as a direct result of the NFLU's opposition to undocumented labor. "Airlift to Transport Wets Deep Into Mexican Interior," *Brawley News,* June 1, 1951, pgs. 1, 6.

statements denouncing the high traffic of undocumented immigrants across the border and wrote to local, state, and federal officials demanding direct action against this situation. Taking a more proactive approach against the presence of unauthorized workers in Imperial Valley's fields, NFLU members made citizens' arrests of undocumented workers, struck ranches employing undocumented workers, and threatened undocumented pickers to force them out of the fields.[246] In addition to this, the NFLU even appealed to local crew leaders and contractors asking them not to intervene in the upcoming strike, nor to provide undocumented workers or Mexicali commuters to valley growers.[247]

The "National Boundaries of Class"

Even if the NFLU could have managed to stop all unauthorized entries at the border and convince crew leaders and labor contractors to stop employing undocumented labor or daily commuters, they still had to contend with the large problem the Bracero Program posed to union efforts. For instance, when the NFLU denounced the use of undocumented labor in Imperial Valley, IVFA President Keith Mets responded that the unauthorized laborers would only be undocumented for a week while their contracts were being regularized. Regularizing undocumented laborers into braceros, large growers were able to deflect NFLU attacks on the unlawful practices of Imperial Valley employers.[248]

---

[246] Cohen underlines that the 1952 McCarren-Walter Act forbade US citizens from arresting undocumented workers, ending this union tactic, Cohen, *Braceros,* 30; "No Violence as Picketing in Fields Starts: Trucks Reported as Being Stopped; 'Citizen Arrests' of Aliens Made," *Imperial Valley Press,* May 29, 1951; "Pickers Strike for Single Day," *Imperial valley Press,* February 25, 1951.

[247] The fact that this letter was written in Spanish, moreover, signals to the ethnic composition of Imperial Valley's crew leaders and labor contractors, who were predominantly of Mexican origin. "NFLU to Imperial Valley crew leaders and contractors," May 22, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.

[248] "Use of Aliens Protested by Farm Union," *Imperial Valley Press,* February 6, 1951.

Glenn Brockway, Bureau of Employment Security Director, lamented the difficulty his office faced enforcing disciplinary actions against growers when these operated so closely with the state. Remarking on this, Galarza made the relationship between the state and growers more than clear when stating that "merchants of labor could not be disciplinarians as well."[249] Indeed, the Bureau of Employment Security did not become the disciplinarian that the NFLU had hoped for. When the union struck several ranches across the Imperial Valley, local and state officials removed braceros from these ranches, but only until the harvesting season had ended and growers began to return their contracted laborers to the IVFA because they no longer needed them. As much as NFLU leaders condemned government officials for dragging their feet, growers had won the battle.[250]

The NFLU did not foresee the long-term consequences of their campaign against the employment of undocumented workers in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands. As the NFLU pressured large companies to cease employing undocumented laborers, Imperial Valley growers realized the benefits of a legally recognized commuter workforce that was safe from Border Patrol raids. The union, for instance, targeted Joe Maggio, a prominent carrot grower, for his mixed crews of braceros and unauthorized workers. The Border Patrol raided Maggio's ranch at the union's behest and found him violating Bracero Program regulations that prohibited the employment of undocumented workers, causing Maggio's expulsion from the IVFA. When Maggio responded to his expulsion by hiring undocumented labor one day, and then completely shifting to

---

[249] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 169.
[250] "Labor Department Pulls 125 Workers From Valley Fields," *Brawley News,* June 25, 1951.

Mexicali residents with crossing permits the next day, Galarza and the NFLU saw this as a success, a clear symptom of the grower's diminishing power and shaken confidence.[251] Yet Maggio did not ultimately act as the union hoped and seek domestic workers. The union did not anticipate that Imperial Valley growers would increasingly realize that Mexicali commuters provided them with a legally protected workforce that did not require the administrative red tape or costs of the Bracero Program.

Newcomers to the Imperial Valley, Galarza and other NFLU leaders moved quickly to organize the workers they perceived as "domestic," or "local," once a union chapter was founded in the valley in 1950. At the outset, the leaders distributed Spanish-language pamphlets that denounced agricultural laborers' poverty, limited access to education, substandard living conditions, and their necessity to migrate seasonally to other regions, while emphasizing the growing numbers of unauthorized laborers in the valley. Printed in poem form, one of these pamphlets described farmworkers as "*agachados*."[252] In its literal sense, *agachados* means "people who are kneeling down or bending over," a direct reference to the stoop labor that farmworkers performed in the Imperial Valley. Figuratively, the term hinted at the workers' economic, legal, and political subordination to growers. This propaganda reflects the cultural nationalism that Stephen Pitti has demonstrated the NFLU employed in its efforts in the San Jose, California region. "Pitching a masculinist idiom of national pride," Pitti writes, leaders

[251] "Ernesto Galarza to Mitch," May 8, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.
[252] Pamphlet, "El Valle Imperial," c. 1951, folder 03, box 45, Galarza Papers. Note: the pamphlet contains a handwritten note that suggests the time when the pamphlet was published, circa 1951.

like Galarza "contended that good fathers and providers needed to join the union to protect their rights."[253]

The NFLU's challenges in the Imperial Valley were formidable. Opposed to undocumented labor and the further growth of a bracero workforce, the union represented a population that was steadily declining in the region.[254] Brawley's Eastside Businessmen's Association (EBA) tried attracting former eastside residents "of Mexican-American descent" back to the Imperial Valley in the fall of 1947. This was to "assist farmers of the Valley by increasing the supply of experienced domestic labor," the association claimed, and to "aid the community as a whole." To achieve this, they placed newspaper and radio advertisements in the Los Angeles area and in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys. Walter G. Ulloa, president of the EBA, told the *Brawley News* that "Approximately 50 per cent [*sic*], or 3,000, of the entire Eastside population [had] gone elsewhere to make their homes during the past three years." These former residents, Ulloa emphasized, were "American citizens and former property-holders and taxpayers of the community" who could be convinced to return if "sufficient jobs [were] available at a living wage." He contrasted these former eastside residents with the "more than 4,000 Mexican nationals in Imperial Valley who are not citizens and many of whom go to Mexicali to spend their paychecks at the end of a week's work in the fields."[255] In comparison to braceros who earned 60 cents an hour, however, returning eastside

---

[253] Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 140.
[254] One of these displaced ethnic Mexicans told Pitti: "we didn't really want to come here [to San José] in the first place. We were pushed here. And we were mad when we arrived. El Centro and the Imperial Valley were hot and tough places, but they had been home to us. We should have been able to stay there, work there. I wanted to go back." Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 140.
[255] "Attempt to Bring Back 3,000 Former Residents Under Way," *Brawley News,* October 29, 1947, pg. 1.

residents expected to earn between 75 and 80 cents an hour, a "living wage" that few employers were willing to pay.[256]

The union's use of the Spanish language reflects the leadership's knowledge of the complex racial implications of a domestic labor force composed of Mexican and Mexican American workers competing with braceros and undocumented workers.[257] The definition of "local" or "domestic" worker, however, was not especially clear. Neptali Romero, for example, filed a labor complaint against Joe Maggio when a foreman named Lupe Estrada refused to remove braceros from a task, leaving "locals" with half-time work. Although Romero called himself a "local" worker, he provided a Mexicali address in his statement. Romero might have been a regular border crosser, or a US citizen living in Mexicali, but regardless of his residence, he felt entitled to full-time labor.[258] Cognizant of these complexities, the NFLU even attempted to publicize its meetings on a Mexicali radio station to reach the workers living across the border.[259] The lines the NFLU's leadership sought to draw, in other words, were along legal status and an economic investment in the region, indiscriminate of racial or cultural differences. Or as Mae N. Ngai put it in her discussion of Galarza, "Despite his transnational *cultural*

---

[256] "'Come Home' Program Gets Results," *Brawley News,* November 6, 1948, pg. 1.
[257] "Farm Labor Union Organized in EC, Use of Vote Advised: Charter Presented at Meet," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 11, 1950.
[258] "State of California Department of Employment-Report of Complaint Relating to Use of Foreign Labor," March 6, 1959, folder 07, box 45, Galarza Papers. This statement collected by Yellen was in Galarza's possession, which reflects the cooperation and communication between the two activists.
[259] "Radio announcement scripts for XECL," May 1951, folder 02, box 45, Galarza Papers. It appears the NFLU was unable to publicize its meetings on the Mexicali radio station XECL, or faced initial problems convincing the station to air their messages (Galarza wrote to the station's director asking why their announcement had not been approved). "Ernesto Galarza to XECL's Director," May 20, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.

sensibilities, Galarza remained challenged by the *legal* distinctions between 'domestic' and 'foreign' farmworkers."[260]

The NFLU's internal contradictions doomed its efforts from the start. Though union leaders sympathized with the Mexican undocumented workers in the Imperial Valley who lived on ditch banks and earned miserable wages, they nevertheless adopted a nationalist agenda that placed American citizens and longtime residents above migrants.[261] They adhered, as Ngai has observed, to "national boundaries of class" that stressed citizenship over shared economic subordination.[262] Though keenly aware of the precarious conditions in which migrants lived and worked, the NFLU nonetheless reproduced nativist narratives that marked braceros and undocumented workers as foreigners and strangers. Their calls for stronger immigration controls not only further racialized Mexican migrants as "wetbacks" or "illegals," but they also prompted growers to employ border commuters as an alternative to undocumented labor.

"Quality Buyer"

With more and more immigrants becoming a permanent segment of the labor force, the grower-friendly *Brawley News* set out to convince valley residents that everyone benefitted from the booming agricultural production in the region. As discussed in chapter 1, Imperial Valley's business owners became aware of braceros' economic potential almost as soon as the first trains with men arrived at the border. The *Brawley*

---

[260] Ngai, *Impossible Subjects,* 163.
[261] NFLU leader Hank Hasiwar wrote to Imperial County health department authorities to complain about the "hundreds of these people [unauthorized workers], in some instances women and children, living on the banks of canals and drainage ditches in grass huts." Hank Hasiwar to C.R. Kroeger, May 23, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.
[262] For a larger discussion of this conflict of loyalties see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 158-166.

News had called braceros "good spenders" in 1943 for the many purchases that they made at Imperial Valley businesses. Mexican consumers in California's agricultural towns represented a thriving business to those willing to cater to their needs. As migrant workers spent their paychecks in labor camp grocery stores and cafes, Imperial Valley's growers also made large profits housing these men. According to the NFLU, labor camp operators frequently provided braceros with alcohol and women as part of the normal "services" that they offered.[263] These businessmen were clearly less concerned with laborers' morality than with the profits they could generate from their presence. Henry P. Anderson, famous critic of the Bracero Program, concluded that mess hall operators could make a profit as high as a dollar per day per man.[264]

The low labor costs that braceros and unauthorized workers provided had not only "saved the crops" (as many growers liked to point out), but they had also helped the Imperial Valley become one of the most profitable agricultural regions in the country.[265] The *Brawley News* informed readers in October 1947 that, according to state sales taxes collected in Brawley, annual retail sales were approximately $10 million. Brawley's "crop pay roll (growers and packers)," reached $3.5 million in the last produce season. With these figures, the *Brawley News* illustrated that increased agricultural production in the valley translated into more economic activity in the region. A second article reported the valley would plant 10,000 acres of carrots expected to yield a profit of $7 million. "A

---

[263] "The Wetback Strike: A Report on the Strike of Farm Workers in the Imperial Valley of California, May 24-June 25, 1951," folder 03, box 45, Galarza Papers.
[264] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 98-99.
[265] The local media constantly reported the newest price and shipment records that Imperial Valley growers and shippers reached each season. "Lettuce Brings Highest Price In Recorded History for IV," *Brawley News,* February 1, 1947, pg. 1; "Truck Hauling Of Vegetables Sets New Mark," *Brawley News,* February 13, 1947, pg. 3; "'47 Lettuce Crop Sets New Marks: Prices Set Records. Remain High For Six Weeks; Value $17,901,000," *Brawley News,* January 24, 1948, pgs. 1, 6.

big share of the cost of production goes to field labor," the newspaper noted, "and Brawley always has been a major sharer in business that is measured by the worker payroll."[266] Several months later, B. M. Graham, manager of the IVFA, announced that braceros employed in the Imperial Valley between April 1947 and February 1948 had received a total of $4,140,266 in wages (at 60 cents an hour).[267] And this sum included only braceros' earnings. Unauthorized workers usually earned lower wages than contracted workers, but they generally constituted a larger workforce than the bracero population in the valley.

One group that certainly benefitted from the increasing agricultural production in the Imperial Valley were foremen, labor contractors, and business owners who catered to migrants. Because the Imperial Valley was largely racially segregated, this meant that many of these entrepreneurs and mid-level supervisors were ethnic Mexicans. In April 1948, *ABC* published a letter allegedly written by an unauthorized worker that made a note of this, arguing that migrants were helping Mexican foremen become richer because the region had an oversupply of workers.[268] Since many workers lived in isolated labor camps away from town centers, some entrepreneurs even adopted strategic practices to attract migrants' business. Joe Estrada, owner of the Midway café in Brawley, for instance, "provide[d] transportation to and from the fields for most of the men" who patronized his business.[269] Horacio Andrejol described a similar business practice in the

---

[266] "Crop Payroll in Brawley Runs $284,000 Per Month: City Retail Sales 10 Million Dollars, Tax Figures Disclose," *Brawley News,* October 3, 1947, section 2, pg. 1; "Valley Will Have 10,000 Acres of Carrots," *Brawley News,* October 3, 1947, section 3, pg. 2.
[267] Graham added that the number of braceros employed in the region had varied between 3,500 and 7,200. "Mexicans' Pay $4 Million in 11½ Months," *Brawley News,* February 26, 1948, pg. 1.
[268] Los Braceros Ilegales que Trabajan en EE. UU.," *ABC.*
[269] "Field Worker Fatally Stabbed Here in 'Friendly Fracas' at Café: Assailant Being Sought," *Brawley News,* November 28, 1947, pg. 1, 8.

oral history interview he provided to the Bracero History Archive. According to Andrejol, the owner of the *cantina* (bar) he frequented in the valley also owned a restaurant and the taxis that he and his friends took to and from the ranch where they labored. When the workers did not have enough funds to pay for their cab, the owner would even loan them money.[270] The workers who labored in farms near towns often lived in rooming houses or in dilapidated buildings owned by ethnic Mexicans.[271]

The growing economic importance of Mexican agricultural workers in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali region undoubtedly prompted a shift in the local media's attitude. In 1950, J. S. Castillo, editor of *El Regional*, was still decrying the fact that aspirantes were "clutter[ing] the streets, parks, and other public places in Mexicali and pos[ing] welfare and police problems." Instead of calling for an end to internal migration, however, he advocated for the creation of a border crossing card that he claimed would solve the problems of unemployment and unauthorized migration to the United States. This shift in *El Regional's* stance on internal migration indicates that Castillo and his team were well aware that internal migration to Mexicali would not stop as long as Imperial Valley growers continued employing braceros and unauthorized agricultural workers. Castillo's proposal also suggests that Mexicali's leaders were also increasingly cognizant of migrants' economic power as dollar earners and consumers. When he presented this scheme for a local visa system for agricultural workers to Imperial Valley

---

[270] Alejandra Díaz, "Horacio Andrejol," in Bracero History Archive, Item #664, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/664 (accessed March 1, 2016).
[271] "Tenants Quit Five Houses," January 17, 1947, pg. 1; *Brawley News,* "Stabbing Victim Dies After Eastside Battle: Knife Wounds Prove Fatal: 2 Men Held: 1 Worker Confesses Slaying: Says Other Blameless in Killing," *Brawley News,* January 13, 1948, pg. 1, 6; "Police Seeking Assailant Here," *Brawley News,* January 28, 1948, pg. 1.

readers, Castillo appealed to the particular regional interests that connected Mexicali and the Imperial Valley. The editor of the *Imperial Valley Press,* for example, supported Castillo's arguments by stating: "A great amount of crime in this country during recent years has been traced directly to the 'wets.' If [Castillo's] suggested plan is put into effect, it probably would cause a noticeable decrease in the business of police officers and immigration service workers."[272] Castillo and the editor of the *Imperial Valley Press* were united in a strong nativism against what became known as the "alien problem," usually characterized as a threat to the wellbeing of both regions. Nonetheless, both journalists also recognized the economic importance of the Mexican agricultural laborer. While for the Imperial Valley it signified the production of million-dollar crops, for Mexicali it represented a reliable source of dollar wages. The simpler way to compromise these two diverging concerns, then, seemed to lie in the implementation of a controlled crossing system.

Of course, not all border residents were convinced of the benefits of granting agricultural workers increased mobility across the border. If Mexicali merchants benefitted from the dollars that undocumented workers earned in the United States and spent in Mexicali, Imperial Valley's local businesses strongly opposed border-crossing cards. This group likely believed a migration system of daily commuters would drive them to economic ruin. In a May 1950 news article in the *Imperial Valley Press*, a group of Imperial Valley business owners condemned agricultural workers' unsanitary living

[272] "Editorial Comment: The Alien Problem," *Imperial Valley Press,* May 4, 1950. This concern about the seeming criminality of undocumented workers was most visible during the peak of harvesting season. On January 8, 1949, for example, the *Brawley News* reminded readers to lock their cars, observing that crime rates allegedly rose when transient populations increased in the Imperial Valley. "Unlocked Autos Tempt Thieves," *Brawley News,* January 8, 1949.

conditions and the unauthorized entries of approximately seven hundred workers every day[273] Though they attempted to ground their position in a broader context of public health and immigration law, the merchants could not hide the fact that the possibility of a state-sanctioned agricultural workforce resident in Mexico posed a significant threat to their lucrative business with braceros if these men had the freedom to choose where to spend their hard-earned dollars.

Vice, Crime, and Social Membership

In spite of their socioeconomic marginalization—or perhaps because of it—the region's migrants did not cease to seek moments of pleasure and distraction from their harsh lives. Though excluded from the imagined community where they labored, news accounts of crimes committed in Imperial Valley's public spaces have left significant evidence of how braceros and other workers spent their free time on weekends inside the United States. On Monday April 3, 1950, for example, a news article in the *Imperial Valley Press* reported a bracero had been stabbed to death at around 1:30 A.M. the previous day outside a pool hall in Brawley.[274] Four days later, the newspaper clarified that the victim was actually an undocumented worker, as was the man who stabbed him. The latter lived in a room near the pool hall where the crime occurred, and the fight had been over a woman, who was being held as witness.[275] The initial confusion over the legal status of the murdered laborer suggests that though braceros and undocumented workers held different legal statuses in the United States, they nonetheless were seen as

[273] "Illegal Entrants Subject of Hottest Controversy," *Imperial Valley Press,* May 17, 1950.
[274] "Contract Worker Slain in Brawley Knife Fight," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 3, 1950.
[275] "Murder Count Filed Against Farm Worker," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 7, 1950.

part of the same socioeconomic group marked as foreign in the Imperial Valley. Undocumented workers interacted freely with braceros and the domestic labor force of Mexican origin in the region's public spaces, and could thus be easily assumed to be contracted workers.

Almost a year after this incident, on Sunday, January 7, 1951, the *Post Press* (a Brawley newspaper) published the story of the apprehension of Nicolas Aguilar Soto for homicide in the Mexican state of Sonora. According to eyewitnesses, Aguilar Soto had lost all his money to his alleged victim in a card game three days earlier near the small town of Winterhaven, California. Back in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, local police arrested Aguilar Soto after he was heard "boasting… that he had killed [Maurelio] Orozco." While the San Luis police department conducted an investigation to determine what had happened in the Imperial Valley, Orozco was found dead lying next to a tree six miles northeast of Winterhaven with his pockets inside out. Aguilar Soto allegedly confessed to murdering Orozco, but denied robbing him. The article's concluding sentences explained that Aguilar Soto and Orozco were both "in the United States illegally" and that the Imperial County Sherriff's office had placed a "hold" on Aguilar Soto along the international border to prevent his reentry.[276] The international border separating Mexico and the United States came to symbolize in this murder case a barrier protecting the Imperial Valley from dangerous criminals. Aguilar Soto's unauthorized status marked him as doubly criminal; not only was he allegedly guilty of murdering another immigrant, but he had also violated United States immigration law. A striking

[276] "Murder in U.S.; Trial in Mexico" *The Post-Press,* January 7, 1951.

detail about this case is the fact that Imperial County authorities never expressed any interest in trying Aguilar Soto in the United States. Though Orozco died near Winterhaven, the Sheriff's office was content with preventing Aguilar Soto's reentry to the United States. And though it is likely that Imperial County authorities took this approach to avoid the bureaucratic steps necessary to request Aguilar Soto's extradition to the United States, their decision nevertheless sent a clear message to Imperial Valley residents. As unauthorized immigrants, Aguilar Soto and Orozco did not merit even the attention of the United States' criminal justice system.

When Imperial County authorities did intervene to stop the criminal activities braceros and other Mexican migrants were engaged in, they often did so only after the peak in the harvesting season. The raids that Imperial County's law enforcement agencies conducted in the region's largest cities during weekend nights suggest that local authorities knew too well the kinds of leisure activities available to braceros and other agricultural workers. For instance, when Brawley's city police detained 327 undocumented immigrants in April 1950, its chief explained that the raid occurred because "things [were] getting rough over there [Brawley's east side] with stabbings and fights and we decided something had to be done about the situation." While Brawley's police department was likely aware that unauthorized migrants were drinking excessively, gambling, and hiring sex workers in the Mexican part of town, it did not take any strong measures to raid businesses or deport migrants until "things [got] rough" with stabbings and fights. This raid occurred in mid-April, when the loss of a few hundred agricultural workers would no longer put Imperial Valley's agribusiness in danger. With its subtle reference to the city's east side, moreover, Brawley police pointed to the

sociospatial segregation that organized most Imperial Valley cities during the Bracero Program era. Whether they were longtime residents or temporary workers in the region, ethnic Mexicans were confined to the Mexican parts of these towns, which also conveniently housed the cities' pool halls, bars, and similar businesses. Agricultural workers formed such a large presence in Imperial Valley's bars that Galarza reminded NFLU members in 1952 that contracts and other agreements had to be made in the union office, not in *cantinas* (bars).[277]

If Imperial County authorities tolerated alcohol abuse and illegal gambling among Mexican agricultural workers during the harvest season, they also appear to have turned a blind eye to prostitution. The Brawley police chief who conducted the raid that detained more than three hundred unauthorized migrants also remarked that many of the forty-five undocumented women arrested were "weekend visitors," implying they were women who crossed the border every weekend to accompany and/or sell their services to the male patrons of cafes, pool halls, restaurants, and bars. The chief's euphemistic term of "weekend visitors," in other words, underlined the idea that these women were not part of Brawley's community. The article reporting on this incident also noted that the men and women were deported immediately to Mexicali because the Border Patrol did not own any quarters large enough to detain such a large group. "How long they will stay south of the line," the article concluded, "was anybody's guess."[278] The next year, when the Border Patrol and El Centro city police raided businesses for undocumented patrons, they found most deportees working, eating, drinking, or playing cards in cafes.[279] The sweep

[277] "Galarza to Chapter 274 members," June 25, 1952, folder 06, box 44, Galarza Papers.
[278] "327 'Wet' Mexicans Sent to Border From Brawley," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 11, 1950.
[279] "Immigration Police Raid in E.C. Nets 100," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 30, 1951.

occurred a week after the El Centro police detained nine women and seven men under "vagrancy" charges. The *Imperial Valley Press* identified five of the sixteen detainees as Mexicali residents. By the following week, when the local Border Patrol joined El Centro's city police on its "campaign against women 'with no visible means of support,'" they arrested four women and one man for vagrancy.[280]

If the Imperial Valley housed thousands of single men during the harvesting season, this was of course because the Bracero Program was almost exclusively male. As noted above, California agribusiness had long relied on continuous waves of transient single males who formed so-called "bachelor societies" marked by a rugged masculinity and "antisocial" behaviors. These men were the "indispensable outcasts" who participated in the labor markets of the United States' agricultural regions, but not in their communities. As Higbie reminds us, communities and labor markets are physical spaces, social relationships, and ideological constructions that order social relations.[281] Like the so-called "hoboes" who labored across the Midwest, Mexican migrants were often marked as outsiders, yet their physical presence and social relationships with employers and friends contrasted their social exclusion from the communities where they lived and labored. How and where Mexican workers arranged their social reproduction depended on how the communities where these migrants worked and (temporarily) resided imagined themselves, and on how its leaders drew the boundaries of membership. As we will see in chapter 3, many employers in fact encouraged bracero family reunification in Mexicali by sanctioning workers' commuting practices across the border.

---

[280] "16 Arrested in El Centro For Vagrancy," *Imperial Valley Press,* April 23, 1951.
[281] Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts,* 12.

Imperial Valley growers were reminded of the convenience of a transient and ostensibly "foreign" migrant labor force after a winter freeze wiped out the entire pea crop in January 1948 and left 1,000 pickers jobless. When the Red Cross asked valley organizations and county agencies to help the destitute workers, the welfare department responded it could not help them because they were not county residents. The Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors stated the crisis was a state problem. According to the *Brawley News,* of the 2,000 men, women, and children remaining in the pea labor camps a few days after the freeze, only around 800 were workers. Allocating 75 cents a day for each person, the Red Cross ran out of money before all pickers found employment in the region.[282] Although they were not Imperial County residents, the jobless pea pickers were predominantly white and US citizens. As such, they were viewed as legitimate members of an American society that deserved full employment and public relief in times of great need. In contrast, most Imperial Valley residents never considered braceros and unauthorized workers as deserving of these protections. Mexican workers were denied any semblance of social membership as residents or members of families and households. Their unemployment, their poverty, and their families were expected to stay in Mexico, out of sight and out of mind. While the NFLU accused Imperial Valley growers of importing "the lower standards of living of workers of

[282] "Freeze Damage Set at Half Million: All Mid-Winter Peas, Citrus, Most Tomato Plants Said Ruined," *Brawley News,* January 29, 1948," pgs. 1, 8; "1,000 Pea Pickers in Northend Jobless as Crop Wiped Out By Cold: Assistance Sought," *Brawley News,* February 4, 1948, pgs. 1, 6; "Pea Picker Relief Tries Being Made," *Brawley News,* February 5, 1948, pg. 1; "State Employment Chieftain Praises Aid to Pea Pickers," *Brawley News,* February 6, 1948, pg. 1; "Jobs Given Pea Pickers," *Brawley News,* February 9, 1948, pg. 1; "Need for Relief for Pea Pickers Said at End Now As Stranded Men at Work," *Brawley News,* February 10, 1948, pg. 1.

another country," its members' nationalist perspective prevented them from seeing that agribusiness was also exporting its poverty to Mexicali.

An ever-increasing presence in the region, the agricultural workers who drank excessively, gambled in illegal establishments, or paid for sex on either side of the Imperial Valley-Mexicali border exposed the deficiencies of a labor system dependent on the separation of families. Migrating to the United States as single males, the braceros and undocumented workers who labored in the Imperial Valley recreated a bachelor culture that California had previously seen among Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Punjabi immigrants. In the Imperial Valley, the Bracero Program produced, and reproduced, spaces of gendered consumption that marked migrant workers as potentially criminal, and thus deportable, cheap labor. In the midst of this, these migrants created an economic place for themselves in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali region as workers and consumers. They migrated autonomously in search of better lives, they petitioned the Mexican government for help and support, and they made best use of the opportunities that employment in the United States provided them.

The nativism with which Imperial Valley and Mexicali residents responded in the late 1940s to increased internal and international migration reveals the magnitude of the transformations that this migration generated in the region. Although both sides resented the arrival of newcomers, Mexicali did not have a Border Patrol or restrictive immigration laws to minimize its demographic growth. Once migrant social networks matured, and migrants became a larger percentage of the Imperial Valley's labor force, Mexicali's middle class began to view a population of seasonally employed or commuter

residents as far more desirable than a continuous wave of unemployed transients. The penniless migrants requesting pecuniary help, the newly settled residents demanding better living conditions, and the public health problems that plagued migrant communities placed large strains on Mexicali. This is largely why Alfonso García González and other Baja California governors insisted on urging internal migrants to return to their homes in the Mexican interior.

Chapter 3: "*Hermanos del Interior:*" How Imperial Valley Agribusiness Consolidated Its Reserve Army of Labor in Mexicali, 1953-1956

On October 3, 1953, the *Brawley News* introduced readers to Alfonso, an unauthorized worker whose story, the local newspaper asserted, "proved basically representative of most wets." Alfonso had been deported to Mexicali four times during the previous month. He told his interviewers that Border Patrol apprehensions made no difference to him, and he observed that immigration officials were just doing their job, a comment the newspaper described as "indifferent." Alfonso worked in the Imperial Valley "because he could not make an adequate living for his family in Mexico." The caption to Alfonso's picture, showing him sitting down with his hands clasped, emphasized this point further, stating: "Alfonso would like to stay with his wife and children in Mexico, but economic conditions there sent him north to live outside the law in an effort to provide for his family." Work in the Mexicali Valley, where Alfonso lived with his family, was rarely available. When he managed to find employment, Alfonso earned around $2.50 (dollars) working from dawn to dusk. "From his American employer," the article noted, "Alfonso [was] receiving 55 cents per hour and averaging better than five dollars per day." Since work in the Imperial Valley was "comparatively steady," Alfonso sent "enough money back to Mexico to support his wife and two children with 'plenty.'"

Although an unauthorized worker at the time of his interview, Alfonso had previously worked as a guest worker under the Bracero Program. He worked four years as a contract laborer and earned 60 cents per hour, five cents more than what he earned

"as a wet." Before that, Alfonso had "wandered back and forth from Mexico to jobs here" for three years. He was, in other words, no stranger to the Imperial Valley. Asked how his boss treated him, Alfonso replied: "'As well as can be expected. We live in the shack and pay no rent. He leaves us alone.'" To illustrate what Alfonso meant by "shack," the *Brawley News* included a photograph of a small room furnished with nothing more than two dilapidated beds and the blankets its occupiers used as mattresses. The caption described the shack as an "airy bedroom" and suggested that even if farmers wanted to improve conditions it was impossible to do so: "Years of abuse have torn out windows and doors, but farmers have learned that attempts to keep such quarters in good repair are futile. Sometimes boards are torn from floors and walls to be used as firewood." If the purpose of this story remained unclear to readers, the article explained the newspaper was "following farmer suggestions" to interview Mexican unauthorized workers "to get views from the men" who were "causing a furor among the nation's politicians, farmers, and publications."[283]

A father of two who viewed with indifference the threat of deportation, Alfonso was the local example of the unauthorized worker satisfied with wages that doubled his Mexican earnings and an employer who left him alone. Alfonso was content with his rent-free "airy bedroom," a testament to his function in the Imperial Valley as cheap labor—a labor so cheap that growers were spared from having to purchase even windows and doors. A strong advocate of farmers' interests, the *Brawley News* described with sympathy local growers' neglect of their unauthorized workers' living quarters. Stating

[283] "Working Conditions Cause of Wetbacks," *Brawley News,* October 3, 1953, pg. 3.

that replacing doors and windows was "futile," the newspaper failed to consider why the men were removing boards to stay warm in the first place. Unlike the alarmist newspapers proclaiming the dangers associated with increasing flows of unauthorized crossers, whose ranks might be "infiltrated" by communists and drug smugglers, the *Brawley News* set out to explain with this article the circumstances that pushed men like Alfonso to live "outside the law." Despite this publication's efforts in casting unauthorized workers as hard-working individuals content with low wages and deplorable living conditions, undocumented workers did not cease to cause "a furor" in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands in succeeding years. In fact, it was their willingness to accept low wages that kept unauthorized migrants in the spotlight.

Consolidating a Reserve Army of Labor in the Borderlands

The national debate over unauthorized Mexican migration reached a peak in 1954 with the start of Operation Wetback. This series of Border Patrol sweeps and deportations occurred just a few months after the United States unilaterally opened its southern border to recruit Mexican workers after negotiations for the renewal of the Bracero Program with Mexico had failed. Hearing rumors of an open border, thousands of internal migrants arrived in Mexicali throughout the first months of 1954. The supply of Mexican jobseekers, however, was much larger than the demand for braceros. The contradiction of open borders, followed by as many as one million deportations, reflected the conflicting pressures that US Congress faced in the 1950s between addressing increasing calls for heightened immigration restrictions and providing American

agribusiness with cheap labor.[284] In the midst of these competing pressures, growers utilized their power in Washington to ensure that the state provided the latter. In order to reduce unauthorized migration, the INS added features to the Bracero Program that made it "a grower's dream."[285] So committed were the United States and Mexico to supplying agribusiness with cheap immigrant labor that Ernesto Galarza characterized them as "merchants of labor."[286]

Galarza, a labor organizer and scholar, was primarily interested in exposing how the United States acted as a merchant of labor, to the detriment of American citizens and legal residents displaced by increasing numbers of braceros and unauthorized workers. In his writings, as in much of the literature on the Bracero Program, the Mexican state figures as a corrupt bureaucracy or a powerless partner in the labor agreement. Scholars have long interpreted Mexico's participation in the guest worker program as guided by the interest in maintaining an "escape valve" that reduced the pressures of a rapidly growing population and rising unemployment.[287] More recently, Mexican scholars have expanded these interpretations to examine how the Mexican state used the Bracero Program to support its own domestic policies. Diana Irina Córdoba Ramírez, for instance, argues the opening of border contracting centers in Mexico was not just the result of Mexico's weakened bargaining power in the agreement negotiations. If contracting gradually moved to northern Mexico, she argues, this was also because Mexico's

---

[284] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 30.
[285] Grove, "The Mexican Farm Labor Program," 312.
[286] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 169.
[287] This "escape valve" continued with the period of increased unauthorized migration that followed the Bracero Program era. Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 71.

agricultural boom was precisely in its northern states. By channeling aspirantes to cities like Mexicali, Empalme in the state of Sonora, and Chihuahua in the state of Chihuahua, the Mexican state was also directing workers to Mexican agricultural regions in need of labor.[288]

The state of Baja California certainly attempted to utilize the Bracero Program to boost its own agriculture industry. This chapter argues, however, that the demographic and socioeconomic transformations that the guest worker program generated in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands in its first decade made Mexicali increasingly dependent on its function as Imperial Valley's reserve army of labor. The autonomous migration of Mexican jobseekers reached new heights in 1954 with the temporary unilateral program of border contracting. Mexicali's small economy could not possibly absorb the thousands of new residents that the city and valley received each year. The state of Baja California responded to this internal migration by adopting a political economy that prioritized its role as a "merchant of labor," thereby cementing the interdependency that emerged between Mexicali and the Imperial Valley under the Bracero Program. Baja California governor Braulio Maldonado Sandez (1953–1959) envisioned Mexicali as a supplier of labor and the manager of a transborder labor pool. It was the role of merchant of labor, more than the interests of Mexican agribusiness, which shaped Baja California's political economy in the mid-twentieth century. As Don Mitchell has noted, under the Bracero Program "Mexico provided [the United States] an

[288] Diana Irina Córdoba Ramírez, "Las contrataciones de braceros en el estado de Chihuahua," in *Tras los pasos de los braceros: Entre la teoría y la realidad,* ed. Aidé Grijalva and Rafael Arriaga Mártinez (Mexico City: Juan Pablo Editor, 2015), 209.

adjacent, yet separated and colonized, space for the reserve army [of labor] to be housed, drawn on, and returned as economically or politically necessary."[289]

Focusing on this relationship between Mexico and the United States, this chapter investigates what Mitchell and others have left unexamined in studies bound by methodological nationalism.[290] The chapter's transnational lens provides us a wider view into how Imperial Valley growers, situated advantageously close to the Mexican border, used their power to design a border-specific Bracero Program that delivered cheap labor to their doors when needed and maintained it in their backyard for easy assemblage the rest of the year. As discussed in chapter 2, the *New York Times* described in 1951 the "wetback village" that housed unemployed agricultural laborers in Mexicali, a settlement akin to a labor camp that supplied the Imperial Valley and larger California labor markets with cheap, seasonal labor.[291] The Bracero Program spatially segregated migrant social reproduction from the site of bracero labor and drove it to the literal margins of the United States in Mexicali. This spatial organization of migrant workers' social reproduction, moreover, was not a natural consequence of the international labor market. Imperial Valley's growers continuously strove to create a labor regime that took advantage of the US-Mexico border and its differentiating effects.

---

[289] Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 231.
[290] See Wimmer and Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism," for more on methodological nationalism.
[291] "Celler to Propose House Inquiry On Illegal Migration of Mexicans," *The New York Times,* March 27, 1951, pg. 31.

Imperial Valley Farmers' Fight for Border Contracting

Relying on bribes or the sympathy of local government officials, Imperial Valley growers utilized the Bracero Program to obtain a reliable source of experienced migrant workers. In its story on Alfonso (the undocumented worker), for example, the *Brawley News* also reported rumors that some growers were paying bribes to Mexican officials in order to rehire the trained contracted workers that these employers wished to retain.[292] When possible, the IVFA renewed the work contracts of braceros, ensuring its members would not have to employ inexperienced workers. In January 1953, for instance, the association renewed the contracts of 6,000 guest workers who were allowed to continue working in the Imperial Valley without returning to Mexico for a contract renewal.[293] Although the agricultural work that braceros were imported to do in fields across the United States was regarded as unskilled labor, the preoccupation of Imperial Valley growers with securing trained workers demonstrates that bracero labor was indeed highly skilled. In a month like January, when the lettuce harvest reaches its peak in the Imperial Valley, growers were less willing to waste time training inexperienced, or so-called "green" workers.

Braceros skilled in lettuce cutting became even more important for Imperial Valley growers when the lettuce industry shifted from plant-packed wooden crates to field-packed carton boxes. Although growers argued that market demand and lower costs forced them to adopt the new packing system to stay in business, they acknowledged that many workers would lose their jobs as four out of every five lettuce packing sheds would

[292] "Working Conditions," *Brawley News.*
[293] "Association Processes 6,000 Valley Workers," *Brawley News,* January 10, 1953, pg. 1.

probably stop operating during the 1953–54 season. This shift meant not only the displacement of domestic workers, who until this time still worked in the Imperial Valley's packing sheds, but also the increased reliance on skilled lettuce workers in the fields. While a group of prominent shippers recognized the unemployment problems the new packing system would bring to the region, proposing to "'sit down and work things out'" with former shed workers, they also stated their belief that few shed workers would be willing to work in the fields. Although the Imperial Valley had "a force of Filipinos and Americans of Mexican extraction who ha[d] long specialized" in field packing, growers were anticipating this existing labor force would not be sufficient for the season's demand and were thus preparing to employ more braceros than previous seasons.[294]

As braceros and unauthorized workers increasingly replaced domestic workers in Imperial Valley fields, growers utilized their power to shape this growing migrant labor force according to their specific needs. Imperial Valley growers had long advocated for a border crossing system to "tap the supply of men already at [the valley's] back door in the vicinity of Mexicali."[295] The opportunity to achieve this came at the end of 1953 when Mexico and the United States entered discussions for the renewal of the Bracero Program, scheduled to end on December 31, 1953. In October, the US government presented Mexico a 16-point program that proposed the start of border recruitment and to allow growers to "pre-name men they wishe[d] to hire." This proposed program contained crucial input from IVFA secretary B. A. Harrigan and president Keith Mets,

---

[294] "Shippers Indicate Drypack Necessary," *Brawley News,* November 21, 1953, pg. 6.
[295] "Valley's War Problems Given Senate Hearing In Palm Springs," *Brawley News,* May 3, 1943, pg. 1.

who had met with US Labor and Justice Department officials in Washington, D.C. over the course of three days. The IVFA, after all, was the country's "largest single employer" of contract laborers at the time and employed from 3,500 to 9,200 braceros throughout the year.[296] On his return to the Imperial Valley, Harrigan declared: "'We feel very encouraged by the general attitude found in Washington. This is the first time we have been accorded this kind of cooperation since we began plugging for less interference in 1947.'" For the IVFA, "less interference" was a labor system that allowed growers to hire braceros "trained in local fields" and recruited at the border

Perhaps because Harrigan and Mets were so persuasive in their conversations in Washington, the next conferences between US and Mexican officials on the matter of border recruitment were held in El Centro. Reporting on the "labor talks" taking place in El Centro, the *Brawley News* explained these were "in an effort to establish a satisfactory procedure which will enable Mexican laborers who live along the border to commute from their homes to work in American fields."[297] With this provision under consideration, and the already agreed-upon right to name the workers they wished to hire, Imperial Valley growers were closer to obtaining their ideal Bracero Program. Border recruitment alone, for example, would substantially reduce transportation costs, set at eleven dollars per contracted worker in 1953.[298] The progress that the IVFA had made, however, appeared to be lost when Arthur Schoenthal, the US representative at the El Centro

[296] "Recruiting Start Set On Monday," *Brawley News,* January 16, 1954, pg. 1.
[297] "Labor Talks Temporarily End in I.V.," *Brawley News,* October 15, 1953, pg. 1.
[298] "Transport Cost For Laborers Cut $4 Apiece," *Brawley News,* November 9, 1953, pg. 1.

conferences, was called back to Washington in late October and the two governments reached an impasse in the labor agreement negotiations.[299]

Luckily for Imperial Valley growers, the US government was willing to launch a unilateral action that would increase its bargaining power and essentially force Mexico to agree to whatever terms Washington set for a new agreement. The United States had resolutely opposed Mexico's request that its consular officers authorize and sign labor contracts before they became valid. In the meantime, American farmers amplified their calls for a border contracting measure even without Mexican cooperation.[300] Both Washington and the Imperial Valley justified the unilateral measure by touting the benefits of a new labor program that would allegedly remedy the problems of the bilateral agreement. The president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, for instance, blamed the "unworkable" Bracero Program for the high numbers of unauthorized workers employed in agriculture.[301] When the fifteen-day extension to the Bracero Program expired on January 15, 1954, the US departments of State, Labor, and Justice finally

---

[299] "Valley Farm Labor Talks Unsuccessful," *Brawley News,* October 26, 1953, pg. 1

[300] At a western growers' meeting in Coronado, California, for instance, a Texas grower declared bracero recruitment should be conducted in the Mexican border cities of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, and Mexicali. As federal officials considered the possibility of issuing cards that would "temporarily permit Mexican braceros to enter the United States for work on Imperial Valley and San Diego county farms," this was reported under the headline "Border Cards Seen 'Ready.'" If Washington was ready to consider unilateral border contracting, the Imperial Valley's farm leaders were prepared to show they were also "ready" to rid themselves of the Mexican government. "Wetbacks, Melons and Subsidies Occupy Western Growers at Meet," *Brawley News,* November 11, pg. 8; "Mexican Recruitment Agreement Expires Thursday: No New Plan Yet In Sight," *Brawley News,* December 30, pg. 1; "Border Cards Seen 'Ready,'" *Brawley News,* November 6, 1953, pg. 1.

[301] According to George Wilson, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, the Bracero Program was "unworkable" because growers were forced to hire braceros for sixty days when they only needed them for thirty; Mexico required them to pay braceros "'above the scale paid U.S. workers in the same kind of work;'" and because growers were forced to pay $15 for braceros' transportation when twenty percent of them broke their contracts. The overwhelming evidence, however, shows that bracero labor depressed agricultural wages, as employers used inaccurate "prevailing wages" to pay braceros less than what domestic workers generally earned. "CFBF Blames Pact for Wetback Increase," *Brawley News,* December 3, 1953, pg. 12.

announced the upcoming start of unilateral border recruiting. In their joint statement, they blamed the expired labor agreement for the "wetback" problem, pointing out Mexico had insisted that bracero recruitment be done in the Mexican interior when qualified men were available at the border.[302]

As the news broke that bracero recruitment was set to start soon in Calexico, some of the Imperial Valley's leading voices reiterated earlier false predictions that the unilateral program would reduce unauthorized migration across the border. Harrigan "withheld comment on the new recruitment plan" but still managed to tell the local media he hoped the unilateral measure would "'legalize the illegal aliens that are presently gainfully employed in this country.'" The "legalization" of unauthorized workers, he argued, would "stop the 'wets'" by eliminating the work available to them in the Imperial Valley.[303] Asked about his views on the new labor plan, Border Patrol regional chief Ed Parker observed that border recruitment would be of great help to farmers who knew of individual Mexicans they wanted to contract legally. Echoing Harrigan, Parker declared this would end the demand for "wets" at a time when his force of 128 patrolmen was apprehending an average of 1,200 unauthorized crossers per day in the valley.[304] As promising as this seemed, Harrigan and Parker were forgetting that the practice of "drying out" unauthorized workers, first adopted in 1947, had failed to reduce unauthorized migration—and that it actually encouraged Mexican workers to enter the

---

[302] "U.S. Rejects Labor Plan, Orders Opening of Border: Local Hiring Due," *Brawley News,* January 16, 1954, pg. 1.
[303] Recruiting Start Set On Monday," *Brawley News.*
[304] "Wetback Problem Aid in Plan Seen: Border Patrol Chief Views Local Recruitment as Assist to Farmers," *Brawley News,* January 16, 1954, pg. 1-2.

country undocumented when they knew that they could change their legal status while already working unauthorized in the United States.[305]

The Border Spectacles and the State's Carrot and Stick

After the United States rejected Mexico's proposed extension to the Bracero Program and announced its own unilateral measure, the Mexican government was then forced to decide if it would allow its citizens to cross freely into the United States or if it would close its northern border. Despite American assumptions that the Mexican government would not close the border because it could not do it "effectively," Mexico indeed ordered its soldiers and immigration officials to impede the exodus of its citizens.[306] When bracero recruitment began in Calexico on January 22, the *Brawley News* called it a "riotous success" in which approximately seven hundred men "escape[d]" to the United States "eager to work in harvest ripe Imperial Valley fields." It described how "fence leapers, many of whom were not enlisted because they had no crossing papers, ran to the international gate, tagged one foot on the Mexican side and darted back into the United States" to then be "tentatively accepted for hiring out to Valley ranchers."[307] In order to become eligible for participation in the Bracero Program,

---

[305] Scruggs, *Braceros, 'Wetbacks,' and the Farm Labor Problem*, 297. Besides the fact that *aspirantes* were required to travel to one of the Mexican recruiting centers to be considered for participation in the program, they were also required to present a collection of documents that proved their good moral standing and eligibility. It soon became public knowledge that most *aspirantes* had to pay Mexican officials a bribe to be recruited into the program. Given the opportunity to bypass all of these steps and requirements, Mexican males entered the United States unauthorized in increasing numbers to then become braceros while already working in the United States. Also see Calavita, *Inside the State,* 62.

[306] "Line Closing Threat Termed Propaganda: Details on New Labor Recruiting Plan Now Awaited in the Valley," *Brawley News,* January 18, 1954, pg. 1, 6.

[307] "Mexican Workers Jump Line Fence in Bid for Contracts: 700 Escape to U.S.: Some Yanked By Customs Men," *Brawley News,* January 22, 1954, pg. 1, 8.

the US labor department required migrant workers to enter through the official port of entry in Calexico. Those who jumped the fence into the United States, despite their initial undocumented mode of entry, were nevertheless given the opportunity to modify their legal status by setting foot on Mexican soil.[308]

Not only were the dramatic scenes happening at the Calexico-Mexicali border public displays of migrant misery and desperation, these events contributed to what anthropologist Nicholas De Genova called the "legal production of migrant illegality." Observing that immigration law is elusive and relatively invisible in producing migrant "illegality," he posits that this elusiveness requires a spectacle of border enforcement that renders migrants' "illegality" visible and natural. The legal production of Mexican migrant "illegality," De Genova thus argues, "requires the spectacle of enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border for the spatialized difference between the nation-states of the United States and Mexico (and effectively, all of Latin America) to be socially inscribed upon the migrants themselves—embodied in the spatialized (and racialized) status of "illegal alien."[309] This spectacle of fence jumpers stretching one foot across the border to "dry out" was the direct result of the United States' capriciousness in defining migrant "legality." One moment considered unauthorized, the next a bracero candidate, the men who managed to cross the border that first day showed thousands of other aspirantes that the United States was willing to bend its immigration laws for the sake of its million-

[308] "Mexico Strengthens 'Curtain:' 'Wetbacks' Reluctant To Cross," *Brawley News,* January 25, 1954, pg. 1, 6.
[309] Nicholas De Genova, "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality,'" *Latino Studies* 2 no. 2 (2004), 436-437.

dollar crops. The demand for their cheap labor was so great that the United States had defied Mexico and invited migrants to break migration laws.

More than undermining the integrity of its immigration laws, the United States altered a fundamental aspect of labor importation with its unilateral program. Whereas the Bracero Program was premised on the temporary residence of Mexican workers in the United States, the unilateral program no longer required contracted workers to live in the United States. The labor contracts signed under the US program in fact permitted employers to pay braceros "daily [border] commuting" costs when they did not have "suitable living facilities" for their workers.[310] Small growers had insisted for years that they could not afford to employ workers under the Bracero Program because building and operating the required housing facilities was simply too expensive. Some used this same argument to justify their employment of unauthorized workers. One farmer explained to the *Brawley News* in June 1954*,* for instance, that he continued employing the undocumented workers he knew and trusted because he had hurt his shoulder and was unable to build a "block house" to hire "legals." Another grower interviewed for the same story justified the poor condition of the housing he provided his contracted and undocumented workers by underlining their poverty in Mexico. "'The quarters I have for the Mexican aren't too hot,'" he declared, "'but they are a darn sight better than what they live in in Mexico.'"[311] Under the unilateral system, many Imperial Valley growers

[310] "Details of New Labor Program Disclosed," *Brawley News,* January 22, 1954, pg. 2. As a Watsonville farmer interviewed in the El Centro reception center candidly acknowledged, when employers did have "suitable living facilities" these were for single men, not families. "Seek 600 Daily Quota In New Border Recruiting Plan," *Brawley News,* March 17, 1954, pg. 1.
[311] "Farmers Philosophic On Wet Campaign: Small Operators Say Use of Illegal Aliens Simple Matter of Economics," *Brawley News,* June 14, 1954, pg. 1-2.

did not have to worry about providing even the sort of "airy bedroom" that Alfonso (from this chapter's opening story) occupied.

Allowed to employ braceros who lived in Mexicali and crossed every morning to jobs in the Imperial Valley, growers thus found yet another way of reducing operation costs even further. Daily border commuting, more than just freeing employers of the housing obligations stipulated by the Bracero Program, also substantially lowered workers' cost of living. The Imperial Valley farmers who could not (or did not wish to) operate a labor camp that charged workers for room and board likely found it more convenient to employ braceros who had a lower cost of living and were thus willing to take lower wages than a workforce resident in the United States. Ramón Flores González, for instance, worked as a bracero on a ranch located five miles outside of Calexico. Since his employer did not own a camp or homes for workers, Flores González and other contracted workers lived in a hotel in Calexico. Their employer picked them up every morning and transported them to the fields. In his interview with the Bracero History Archive, Flores González noted he and the other men ate and bought meals in Mexicali while they lived in the Calexico hotel because food was cheaper across the border.[312] The option of doing away with worker housing, of course, was largely dependent on a grower's geographical proximity to the border. If employers could get braceros to fields early in the morning and back to the border by evening, they could take advantage of the new labor arrangement that the IVFA had fought so hard for.

[312] Anais Acosta, "Ramón Flores González," in Bracero History Archive, Item #286, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/286 (accessed March 2, 2016).

Despite the international attention it received, the unilateral program of border contracting only lasted two weeks, from January 22 to February 5. During these fifteen days a total of 6,355 braceros were contracted in the El Centro reception center and made their entry—or reentry—through Calexico.[313] Despite its short life, the unilateral program gave Imperial Valley growers a taste of a labor arrangement that truly met their expectations. Hence, when the United States entered into dialogue with Mexico to revive the expired Bracero Program, the IVFA renewed efforts to ensure that the new bilateral agreement reflected the association's latest gains. Imperial Valley growers had finally been able to contract pre-named unauthorized workers who were in high "demand by virtue of past farm experience."[314] For some braceros, their time spent working as unauthorized workers in the Imperial Valley was akin to an apprenticeship. José María Aguilar García, for example, learned to use the *cortito* (the short-handled hoe) to weed lettuce and beets as an undocumented worker before he obtained his first contract.[315] According to Harrigan, the IVFA secretary, the benefits of the new contracting system were so appealing that the association had gained one hundred new members since border contracting began, increasing its membership by a significant 25 percent.[316] Determined to retain these benefits, the IVFA sent representatives to Washington and Mexico City in what they said was "an attempt to draft a contract which [would] give farmers a reasonable deal."[317]

---

[313] "Recruiting Brings Clash in Capital," *Brawley News,* February 9, 1954, pg. 1, 6.
[314] "Pre-Dawn Border Opening," *Brawley News,* February 3, 1954, pg. 1.
[315] Mario Sifuentez, "José María Aguilar García," in Bracero History Archive, Item #335, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/335 (accessed March 2, 2016).
[316] "100 Valley Farmers Abandoned Use of Illegal Labor," *Brawley News,* February 6, 1954, pg. 1.
[317] John Hunter, "Etc. …," *Brawley News,* January 30, 1953, pg. 6; "IV Growers Seeking Role in Labor Meet: Mexico City Talks Set to Begin On Recruiting Program on Monday," *Brawley News,* February 11, pg. 1.

As much as Harrigan and the IVFA wanted to insist that converting unauthorized workers into formally contracted braceros would reduce the number of undocumented migrants in the Imperial Valley, the results were quite the opposite. By early February Parker was reporting that the number of apprehensions in the Imperial, Coachella, and Yuma valleys indicated that the number of unauthorized crossings had "more than doubled" since the end of unilateral border recruitment.[318] Record-high numbers of unauthorized workers continued entering the United States through the Imperial Valley even after bilateral border contracting resumed in mid-March. When the incoming INS Commissioner Joseph Swing began touring the US-Mexico border in April 1954, the Imperial County sheriff informed him and the local press that undocumented migration had actually increased since the start of the Bracero Program on March 16.[319] Contrary to what Harrigan and Parker had predicted, thousands of undocumented men seeking work in Imperial Valley fields had found that work was indeed available for "wetbacks." Despite the concessions they had won in the early months of 1954, Imperial Valley growers were unwavering in their resolve to continue using unauthorized labor. The valley's reliance on undocumented workers was never as clear as it was in April 1954 when Imperial County District Attorney Don Bitler sent Attorney General Herbert Brownell an urgent telegram protesting any legislation that would target agriculture (and no other industries), for its use of unauthorized labor.[320] With the District Attorney on their side, what else could Imperial Valley's growers desire?

---

[318] "IV Growers Seeking Role in Labor Meet" *Brawley News.*
[319] "Role of Braceros In Narcotics Traffic Discussed," *Brawley News,* April 8, 1954, pg. 6.
[320] "Brown in Attack On Wet Hiring," *Brawley News,* April 1, 1954, pg. 1; "DA Wires Protest On Law Proposal," *Brawley News,* April 1, 1954, pg. 2.

Southwestern growers generally enjoyed the cooperation of a Border Patrol that turned a blind eye during busy harvesting seasons and that, for the most part, avoided apprehending migrants working in the fields.[321] The INS even made some of these measures rather publicly, as when it "quietly igno[red] a midnight deadline for the repatriation of some 11,000 Mexican workers" whose contracts had expired in February 1954.[322] This history of cooperation thus set the conditions for the even greater concessions that the INS provided farmers when it implemented Operation Wetback. This operation, which according to the Border Patrol detained and deported more than a million unauthorized migrants, began in the Imperial Valley in June 1954 and continued its way into the rest of the Southwest and parts of the Midwest. Kitty Calavita and Kelly Lytle Hernandez have shown that the Border Patrol utilized a publicity tactic to make the operation appear larger than it was. In fact, Lytle Hernandez found that the one million deportations attributed to Operation Wetback had in fact taken place before the operation began.[323] Operation Wetback was likely more a boon than a problem for Imperial Valley growers. On June 11, six days before the start of the operation, the *Brawley News* reported that unauthorized workers were employed in the cotton, beet, melon, and tomato crops but made sure to note that "the slack period of July [was] fast approaching."[324] With the sugar beet and melon seasons almost over, the Border Patrol appeared to be

---

[321] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, for instance, demonstrates that farmers often appreciated the Border Patrol's policing of Mexican workers "as a new tool of labor control" in the Southwest. Lytle Hernandez, *Migra,* 54-55.
[322] "Braceros' Contracts To Expire," *Brawley News,* February 25, 1954, pg. 1; "Farm Labor Vote Nearing: House Rules Committee Clears Bills for Recruiting Resumption," *Brawley News,* February 26, 1954, pg. 1.
[323] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 54; Lytle Hernandez, *Migra,* 173.
[324] "Wetback Roundup Readied: Half of Patrol To Be in I.V.," *Brawley News,* June 11, 1954, pg. 1, 8.

doing Imperial Valley growers a favor by removing workers who would soon become unemployed.

Aware that Operation Wetback would outrage many growers, especially those who operated near the US-Mexico border, INS Commissioner Swing devised a compromise measure that made the Bracero Program even more advantageous to employers.[325] The day the operation began in the Imperial Valley, the *Brawley News* reported that "Attorney General Brownell—in ordering Operation Wetback—asked that farmers get advance warning so they could replace wetbacks with legally-contracted workers to get harvest work finished without interruption." It thus appeared that if the "carrot" of border contracting and pre-naming workers had not been sufficient to wean growers off unauthorized labor, the "stick" of Operation Wetback prompted increasing numbers of farmers to join the IVFA to employ braceros.[326] The reality is that the new Bracero Program that the INS devised was a carrot few could resist. John Hunter, the staunch advocate of grower interests and farm news reporter for the *Brawley News,* explained part of this deal in one of his columns. According to Hunter, growers had paid Mexican officials $10 to $25 (dollars) in bribes for every trained bracero that returned to their farms. The updated bilateral program now included a provision for pre-naming workers, thereby formalizing the practice and saving growers the substantial cost of retaining trained workers.[327] Imperial Valley growers had become so influential in

---

[325] Operation Wetback even draw complaints that the Border Patrol favored some regions over others. *Brawley News* writer John Hunter, for example, argued the INS allowed Texas to employ unauthorized workers-who kept wages at 25 to 40 cents an hour-while the Imperial Valley was stuck with "housing requirements and processing charges" under the Bracero Program. John Hunter, "Etc. …," *Brawley News,* June 26, 1954, pg. 6.
[326] "Stronger Border Patrol To Follow Wet Drive," *Brawley News,* June 17, 1954, pg. 1, 8.
[327] John Hunter, "Etc.," *Brawley News,* June 19, 1954, pg. 3.

matters of Mexican labor importation that the *Brawley News* described the IVFA as "the actual instigator of the present Mexican labor program," emphasizing the association's success at reducing transportation costs with border recruitment.[328] The IVFA leaders had made sure to speak to everyone who could support their cause, including US Representative John Phillips, who hosted a group of farmers in his house in April. There, Harrigan and Mets utilized the meeting to protest the fact that braceros previously employed in the Imperial Valley were not being "allowed to return to their former employers."[329]

The "Special Program" that began in the Imperial Valley in 1954 and then spread to other regions drove many farmers to turn to contracted labor. Under this program, growers could rate braceros as "special" or "skilled 'key men,'" a rating that was recorded on each worker's I-100 card (a laminated identification card that the INS granted each guest worker at the end of his first contract).[330] With this new bureaucratic system, Imperial Valley's growers retained their preferred unauthorized workers by naming them "Special" braceros, thus regularizing their legal status. The start of Operation Wetback and Commissioner Swing's determination to reduce unauthorized migration by expanding the Bracero Program, in other words, finally gave Imperial Valley growers a labor program with almost all of the attributes they wanted. Since many Specials had worked several seasons in the Imperial Valley as unauthorized and/or contracted laborers, they had also forged strong connections to Mexicali. Over the years many of them settled in Mexicali, becoming border commuter workers. In the long run,

---

[328] "Employer," *Brawley News: Agricultural Edition,* June 25, 1954, pg. 6.
[329] "Farmers, Phillips Talk of Labor Problem," *Brawley News,* April 9, 1954, pg. 2.
[330] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 93-94; Lytle Hernández, *Migra!*, 171-189.

this system created what labor organizer Ernesto Galarza called a class of "bracero professionals," a reliable, permanent, and trained source of labor.[331] One of these workers was Jesús Garnica, who had worked in the Imperial Valley as both a bracero and an unauthorized worker in the late 1940s but who was living and working in Mexicali in 1954. When the Specials Program began, Garnica's former supervisor called him to return to work for him in Blythe (approximately 110 miles north of Mexicali) as a Special bracero.[332]

The braceros who became Specials obtained many perks with their higher status. With their I-100 card in hand, they experienced a much faster and streamlined contract renewal process in Mexican recruitment centers. Whereas most aspirantes waited weeks or months for their names to be called at the recruitment centers, Specials were contracted within a few days and were often even exempted from the humiliating health exam required from all workers. More importantly, many of these braceros created strong ties with Imperial Valley employers and foremen who repeatedly requested these men return to their farms to work under the capacity of Special. Though the Mexican government opposed the Specials system for its unilateral approach to border contracting, the program continued until July 1960.[333] The ability to rate workers as "special" served as a strong disciplinary tool, as growers could threaten braceros with an end to employment if they did not fully satisfy growers' expectations. Alberto Magallón Jiménez, for instance, made sure to always appear very respectful towards his supervisors

---

[331] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 93.
[332] Mireya Loza, "Jesús Garnica," in Bracero History Archive, Item #291, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/291 (accessed March 2, 2016).
[333] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 94-103.

in order to keep his status as a Special bracero. Though other men derided him and other Specials for being "*barberos"* (suck-ups), Magallón Jiménez made sure to avoid coming off as a "*contestón*" (insolent), "*malcriado*" (unmannerly), or "*huevon*" (lazy).[334] This approach, however problematic some found it, gave relative job stability and permanency to Specials and allowed a sizable number of them to form families in Mexicali and settle there.

Organized Labor and Domestic Workers

Considering all the power that Imperial Valley growers exerted in 1954 to obtain a guest worker program even more advantageous to employers than previous agreements, it comes as no surprise that labor unions continued losing their war on the Bracero Program. As discussed in chapter 2, Ernesto Galarza and the NFLU were unable to end the widespread employment of unauthorized and contracted workers in the Imperial Valley. The strikes that the union staged in the valley in 1951 and 1952 had shown Galarza and the rest of the NFLU leadership the enormous influence that the IVFA could muster. Although the NFLU did not attempt to organize another strike in the Imperial Valley after its various defeats in the early 1950s, Galarza continued accusing the California State Employment Service (CSES) of cooperating with growers in "freezing domestic workers out of jobs in favor of Mexican nationals."[335]

In February 1953 the Bracero Program continued strong, with a force of 6,817 men contracted to work in the Imperial Valley. These contracted laborers earned 70 cents

[334] Anais Acosta, "Alberto Magallón Jiménez," in Bracero History Archive, Item #153, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/153 (accessed March 2, 2016).
[335] "I.V. Employment Service Chief Denies Charges," *Brawley News,* May 22, 1953, pgs. 1, 8.

an hour, a wage significantly lower than the $1.30 hourly rate that members of the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers (CIO) earned, but still higher than the 55 cents that unauthorized workers generally received.[336] This sixty-cent difference was not lost on the thousands of shed workers who became unemployed once migrant workers began packing lettuce in the field for approximately half of the wages that domestic workers earned in packing plants. Ben Perry, the local director of the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers, asserted in November 1953 that the Imperial Valley had lost "$12 million" the previous year and would lose much more that year "by using Mexican instead of US labor to field-pack lettuce." He declared that two out of three organized vegetable workers would become jobless with the new packing system and "that the rest of the vital lettuce industry's paychecks would go to imported labor and disappear below the border." Perry argued the union was not opposed to innovation in lettuce packing. What they were against, because it was "hurting the Valley's economy," was using imported labor when there were not enough jobs "to go around for American workers."[337] The union, in other words, made clear that Imperial Valley's businesses would also suffer the consequences of their occupational displacement. Though "good spenders" (see chapter 1), most braceros and unauthorized workers sent significant portions of their earnings to Mexico.

---

[336] Galarza also charged that growers were placing domestic workers in mixed crews with braceros and in this way "'diminishing their earning power.'" Tom Finney, Imperial County manager of the CSES, responded that his office was simply doing its job of bringing employee and employer together. The CSES, according to Finney, could not tell farmers how to organize its work crews. "IV Shed Workers Demand Halt of Labor Importation," *Brawley News,* February 16, 1953, pgs. 1, 6; "Working Conditions," *Brawley News.*

[337] "IV Worker Pay Loss Is Predicted," *Brawley News,* November 17, 1953, pg. 1.

The expansion of field-packed lettuce thus displaced more domestic workers and increased the valley's reliance on braceros. In January 1954, there were reportedly only 799 individuals employed in the local packing sheds, as compared to 1,500 the previous year and 3,200 two years before. The members of Local 73 of the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers continued blaming growers for exacerbating the valley's unemployment and underemployment problems because they hired braceros to drive trucks and buses when domestic workers were available for these jobs.[338] In these later accusations, Local 73 was not protesting the increasing numbers of braceros and undocumented workers employed in fields. Shed workers were classified as industrial workers and eligible for unemployment insurance and other benefits. What Local 73 was mainly condemning was the upward occupational mobility that some braceros were achieving and their entry into so-called "skilled" jobs. As Perry confessed to the *Brawley News,* displaced shed workers were not interested in applying for the jobs "held by nationals."[339] Why would shed workers want to lose their benefits as industrial laborers, and take a fifty-percent pay cut, in order to stoop for eight to ten hours cutting and packing lettuce?

The reluctance of most displaced shed laborers to take lower-paying field jobs gave growers another tool in their campaign against organized labor. In response to Perry's allegation that a large part of the lettuce industry's profits would "disappear below the border," Hunter replied in his farm news column that this would only happen because domestic workers were unwilling to take these jobs in the fields. "After all,"

---

[338] "National Use Hit By Union: Local Members In Complaints," *Brawley News,* January 6, 1954, pgs. 1, 6.
[339] "National Use Hit By Union: Local Members In Complaints" *Brawley News.*

Hunter continued," the produce industry is not moving out of the county. … True, a larger portion of the payrolls will go to field laborers who will spend their money in different places than did the shed workers, but a lot of the money will still be spent right here in the Valley."[340] Not only were domestic workers reluctant to adapt to local labor market changes, growers and their spokespeople argued, but they were also averse to hard work. The exodus of domestic workers to other agricultural regions in late April, for instance, gave Harrigan the perfect opportunity to imply these migrant workers were irresponsible people who fled the valley as soon as the temperature rose. This not only fueled the decades-old argument that Mexican migrants were better suited for agricultural work because they could withstand higher temperatures, but it also helped justify their claims "that a stronger Mexican labor program be available to meet demands."[341]

An "Aggressive" New State

The growers fighting to increase the number of Mexican nationals in the Imperial Valley-found their match in Baja California's first state governor. Baja California became Mexico's twenty-ninth state in 1952 after finally reaching the population of 80,000 required for statehood.[342] The new state held its first gubernatorial elections in October 1953. Braulio Maldonado Sandez, a member of the Mexican House of Representatives, ran as the candidate of the Mexican ruling party, the PRI. In the Imperial Valley, he was described as the "poor man's candidate" and a former San

[340] John Hunter, "Etc. …" *Brawley News,* November 28, 1953, pg. 6.
[341] "Workers' Exit From Hot Valley Fields Brings Labor Shortage for Carrot Deal," *Brawley News,* April 24, pg. 3.
[342] León Portilla and Piñera Ramírez, *Baja California,* 168; Lucero, "Peopling Baja California," 105.

Francisco shipyard worker who was expected to win the votes of farm, labor, and female groups. In his campaign statements, Maldonado Sandez declared he would "see to it that every Baja farmer gets a plot of land" and "press for better relations between Mexico and the United States," and he promised more schools, roads, and tourists. As the PRI candidate, Maldonado Sandez was viewed as running "unopposed" and was assumed to be the next governor long before the elections.[343] The celebration of the governor's inauguration included a visit from Mexican president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and a parade with "organized workers, farmers, and other groups in Mexicali."[344]

An experienced politician who understood Baja California's needs and opportunities, Maldonado Sandez cultivated a close relationship with important figures in the United States. Shortly after his "landslide" victory, the Calexico Chamber of Commerce held a dinner in honor of the new governor, which the *Brawley News* reported was attended by "more than 100 leading officials and citizens from both sides of the border" who strongly applauded Maldonado Sandez's call for a firm friendship between the two countries.[345] Announcing plans to increase the state's cotton production, attract foreign investment, and build an "'aggressive state'" that worked for the "'interests of its people and to raise their economic level,'" Maldonado Sandez soon gained the reputation of being a "dynamic" governor.[346] Well-liked by American officials, the Baja California governor was a regular guest at important public events held in the Imperial Valley and

---

[343] "Incoming Baja Calif. Gov. Promises Program of Work," *Brawley News,* October 21, 1953, pg. 1; "Baja California Votes For First Governor," *Brawley News,* October 24, 1953, pg. 1.
[344] "Ruiz Cortines May Be at Rites In Mexicali," *Brawley News,* November 28, pg. 1-2.
[345] "New Governor of Baja California Asks For Firm Friendship With Imperial Valley," *Brawley News,* October 31, 1953, pg. 1.
[346] "Baja Cal. Governor Reveals Expanded Economy Plans," *Brawley News,* February 11, 1954, pg. 2.

Los Angeles.[347] During the 1954 annual Calexico Cavalcade, for instance, Maldonado Sandez received California Governor Goodwin Knight at the US-Mexico border, where they shook hands and posed for the cameras. This gesture of friendship between the neighboring states extended into Mexicali's bull ring, where Knight "waved the Mexican flag and shouted 'Viva Mexico,' and 'Viva Maldonado'" as part of the Cavalcade festivities held on the Mexican side of the border.[348]

Maldonado Sandez's support for bracero contracting at the border certainly increased his popularity in the Imperial Valley. In October 1953, while still campaigning, Maldonado Sandez forwarded two letters to president Ruiz Cortines's head secretary asking for consideration of a labor recruitment plan to take effect in Tijuana. These two letters, written by the Central Labor Council of San Diego (AFL) and the *Confederación de Agrupaciones Obreras y Campesinas de Tijuana* (Confederation of Workers and Farmers Groups-CROC) underlined the problems of unauthorized migration that forced workers into "bitter exploitation" that was "tantamount in many cases to slavery." According to the Tijuana group's letter, the two unions proposed to set up a contracting system by which the labor groups would process all workers requested for the state of California. California growers would make their labor request to the AFL, who would then forward this to the Tijuana union, the latter making sure that all of the men contracted were Baja California residents. Since the AFL would also sign every work contract made under this arrangement, this would, according to the Tijuana group, guarantee that the AFL had oversight of braceros' wages and working

[347] Maldonado Sandez was one of the invited speakers at the Los Angeles Cinco de Mayo celebrations in 1954. "Maldonado to Speak in L.A. on May 5," *Brawley News,* April 15, 1954, pg. 3.
[348] "Curtain Comes Down On 1954 Cavalcade," *Brawley News,* April 5, 1954, pg. 1.

conditions.[349]Although this proposal never came to fruition, it demonstrates not only that Maldonado Sandez was enthusiastic about supporting a border-contracting plan, but also that Baja California's organized labor (or at least its leadership) sought to ensure the men who obtained work contracts in Tijuana were state residents.

In January 1954, after the Bracero Program expired and the Imperial Valley waited with anticipation to hear how Mexico would respond to the unilateral measure of border contracting, the *Brawley News* made clear the different priorities of the Mexican state and the government of Baja California. The local newspaper reported that while Mexico would likely "not go along" with the US plan, Maldonado Sandez "favored local border recruitment of Mexicali Valley farmhands to ease their economic stress."[350] When president Ruiz Cortines ordered the Mexican border closed, Maldonado Sandez had to follow presidential orders and formulated a plan of action in accordance with the official Mexican position on the matter. However, he did not give up on his plans for border contracting. In late January Maldonado Sandez was again communicating to the American press his preference for creating a labor pool in Mexicali of 10,000 to 20,000 workers for employment in both the United States and Mexico. These workers would "cross the line [border] for work in the day and return to their homes in Mexicali at night."[351]

---

[349] Braulio Maldonado to Enrique Rodriguez Cano, October 7, 1953; José Rubio S. and Elias Gutiérrez to Adolfo Ruiz Cortinez, October 6, 1953; John W. Quimby to Elias Gutiérrez Ovalle, October 6, 1953. All in legajo 6 y 7, expediente 548.1/122, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.

[350] "Mexico May Not Sign Any More Pacts," *Brawley News,* January 16, 1954, pg. 1.

[351] "Baja Calif. Governor Suggests Labor Pool: Maldonado Proposes Establishing Mexicali Office for Registration," *Brawley News,* January 27, 1954, pgs. 1, 8; "Admit 500 Monday: Thousands Hunt U.S. Farm Jobs in Border Towns," *San Diego Union,* January 31, 1954, clipping in legajo 10, expediente 548.1/122, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.

Maldonado Sandez had a clear vision of what Baja California could accomplish by providing a reserve army of labor to the Imperial Valley and the rest of California. He had been in office for less than two months when the border spectacle of unilateral contracting occurred in late January 1954. The persistent efforts of thousands of aspirantes to cross the border, and the US measure to contract these workers independently from Mexico, suggested internal migration to Mexicali would continue whether the Mexican government sanctioned it or not. With its own cotton industry to protect, Baja California could utilize the Bracero Program to the region's advantage and supply workers to both valleys. Balancing the seasonal labor needs of both valleys, however, was easier said than done. Cotton production in the Mexicali Valley expanded rapidly in the 1950s and Baja California was Mexico's top producing state in 1954.[352] With their own labor demand to fill, Mexicali Valley growers telegrammed the *Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería* (Ministry of Agriculture and Ranching) requesting an end to contracting in Mexicali in October 1954. If this were not possible, they asked that each aspirante be required to pick at least 10,000 kilograms of cotton (according to the growers this was generally done in 10 days) in order to become eligible for recruitment in the program.[353] The letter that another group sent to Maldonado Sandez two years later, however, suggests that the state's labor pool was not as efficient as the governor had planned. Emphasizing the need for workers in the Mexicali Valley and

---

[352] Aidé Grijalva, "La bracereada que llegó para quedarse: Mexicali y el programa bracero," in *Tras los pasos de los braceros: Entre la teoría y la realidad,* ed. Aidé Grijalva and Rafael Arriaga Mártinez (Mexico City: Juan Pablo Editor, 2015), 255; *Brawley News,* "Mexicali Cotton Production Seen High This Year With Wide-Open Plantings," April 24, 1954, pg. 3.

[353] Armando Carrasco to Gilberto Flores, October 8, 1954, expediente 548.1/124, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN; Antonio Rodriguez Viedman to Gilberto Flores Muñoz, October 8, 1954, expediente 548.1/124, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines AGN.

along the western coast of Baja California, the *Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado de Baja California* (League of Agrarian Communities and Farmers Syndicates) asked the governor to end the emigration of Baja California residents under the Bracero Program.[354]

For every letter that Mexican growers sent to local, state, and federal officials complaining about a lack of available workers, there were dozens more sent by aspirantes hoping to obtain a bracero contract. Over its twenty-two years of existence, the Bracero Program was constantly in flux. The location of recruitment centers changed, the eligibility requirements were sometimes enforced and other times not, and the method by which workers entered the official contracting lists also differed from time to time. This constant change easily led to confusion and widespread misinformation about the program. Several aspirantes in the Mexican interior, for instance, read in the national press about the availability of agriculture jobs in the Imperial Valley and wrote to Baja California's authorities in 1952 and 1953 asking for information on how to obtain a bracero contract at the border.[355] These men, in other words, viewed the Mexican government, and Baja California more specifically, as a helpful labor agent that could connect them with jobs in the United States. However, these men were the exception. Most aspirantes who sought employment in the Imperial Valley or other parts of California simply migrated autonomously to Mexicali.

---

[354] Esequiel Gómez and José Saldaña to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, October 13, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[355] Efrain Martinez to Presidente Municipal Mexicali, October 5, 1952; Arturo Castillo Tapia to Gobernador del Estado Baja California Norte, October 5, 1952; and Raul Torres Huante to Gobernador, May 5, 1953. All in folder 1, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

A "Socio-Economic Problem"

As the main gateway to the Imperial Valley, Mexicali received thousands of migrants every year. The traffic of thousands of internal migrants arriving daily to Mexicali in January 1954, however, was unprecedented. What perhaps the US departments of State, Labor, and Justice did not consider when they announced a unilateral "stop-gap" measure of border contracting were the long-term effects that this would have on Mexican migration. The unilateral program, and the spectacle that it created at the border, had probably led thousands of Mexican jobseekers to believe there was a much larger demand for their labor than there actually was. On January 30, for example, the *Brawley News* reported that 12,000 "restless braceros roamed crowded Mexicali." A few days later it estimated the number of aspirantes in Mexicali at 9,000, but noted it was difficult to ascertain if the number arriving in Mexicali was higher than the number traveling back to their homes in the interior "on government-furnished trains."[356] The plight of these migrants was well known on both sides of the border. These transient men had spent many "homeless nights and hungry days of waiting," and some even fainted inches away from the border awaiting a contract.[357]

Sleeping on the streets, begging for money, and according to the local press, occasionally engaging in petty theft, internal migrants inevitably stoked the fires of nativism among longtime Mexicali residents. Although frustrated by the pressures that transients placed on the local population, some Mexicali residents who witnessed the

[356] "12,000 Restless Braceros Roam Mexicali Streets," *Brawley News,* January 30, 1954, pg. 1; "Border Charge Repulsed: 7,000 Braceros Seek to Cross," *Brawley News,* February 2, 1954, pgs. 1, 6.
[357] "Braceros Battle For Jobs: 5,000 at Line; One Tenth Hired," *Brawley News,* February 1, 1954, pgs. 1, 8.

indignities that migrants suffered while trying to become contracted wrote to the Mexican president protesting these conditions. In August 1956, for example, Gumaro Moscoso Valdés asked the president to order the installation of showers in Mexicali's railroad yards so the aspirantes would have a place to bathe. He noted it took many of these men up to eight days to get to Mexicali on train. Though Moscoso Valdés made no mention of Mexicali's extreme summer temperatures, which can reach 120 degrees, anyone who had spent time in the Mexican border town would know that August was a particularly miserable time of the year for migrants making their way through the hot desert land. If being dirty was not already a difficulty for the travelers, their delousing at the Calexico-Mexicali border by Mexican "*pochos*" (Americanized ethnic Mexicans) or white Americans was another source of humiliation, one that Moscoso Valdés found reproachable.[358] It is important to note that aspirantes did find lighter moments amid this despair, as when one of the groups congregated at the border burst out in laughter after a few crowd surfers landed on "the laps of waiting border patrolmen" and were returned to the back of the line.[359]

In their internal correspondence, Baja California's officials made clear they regarded the thousands of migrants traveling to Mexicali in the first months of 1954 a "socio-economic problem" for the state.[360] The border separating Mexicali from the Imperial Valley ensured the region's migrants remained Mexicali's problem. This was certainly clear to Walter Francis, manager of the El Centro bracero reception center.

---

[358] Gumaro Moscoso Valdés to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. August 31, 1956, expediente 548.1/124, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.
[359] "Braceros Battle For Jobs: 5,000 at Line; One Tenth Hired," *Brawley News.*
[360] Rafael Moreno Henreiquez to Félix Rodríguez Flores, March 16, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

When Mexico opened its border in late January to allow the United States to contract as many workers as it wished, Francis explained a labor pool was "not being created [in the Imperial Valley, specifically in the reception center] because it would lead to a boarding problem."[361] Mexicali of course also lacked facilities to house the thousands of indigent migrants congregating each day at the border. In late March, for example, Rafael Moreno Henriquez, general secretary of the state of Baja California, assured the *Brawley News* that the state government continued "providing some emergency food and shelter to the stranded workers" described by the newspaper as "jobless hungry braceros jamming Mexicali by the thousands." Moreno Henriquez estimated 5,000 aspirantes had left their homes in the Mexican interior during the month of March seeking entry into the United States.[362] As alarming as these reports were, nothing reflected the enormous scope of this internal migration as clearly as the number of men who placed their names on Baja California's list of aspirantes. Between March 22 and April 9, a period of only nineteen days, a total of 27,114 workers applied for employment under the Bracero Program in Mexicali alone. The 1950 census calculated the male population in the entire *municipio* (county) of Mexicali at 65,362.[363] As the state knew well, the overwhelming majority of the men registered in Baja California's aspirante list were natives of other states in the Mexican interior.[364]

---

[361] "Mexico Abruptly Lifts Its Border Blockade on Workers: Uses Words in Try to Halt Braceros: More Than 300 Men Surge Across Border, U.S. Officials Swamped," *Brawley News,* January 26, 1954, pgs. 1, 6.
[362] "To Recruit 6,000 'Braceros' Soon," *Brawley News,* March 29, 1954, pg. 1.
[363] México, *Séptimo censo general de población*.
[364] Antonio Leo Chávez, "Informe," April 9, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

Mexicali's transient population further increased with Operation Wetback. As discussed above, the Border Patrol launched a large publicity campaign in the run-up to Operation Wetback that gave thousands of unauthorized migrants the chance to return to Mexico voluntarily before being apprehended in the sweeps. This explains why the Border Patrol detained fewer undocumented migrants in the El Centro sector in 1954 than it had the previous year. According to Border Patrol national chief Harlon B. Carter, his agency was not treating this exodus as permanent and was devising a response to the "wets…massing on the border possibly to await let-up of the drive." This "mass exodus of wets" to Mexicali was reflected, the *Brawley News* asserted, in the rise of Mexicali's temporary population to more than 20,000.[365] In their own estimates of the number of transient migrants gathered in Mexicali on June 23, Mexican authorities set this population at 28,000.[366] It is ironic that while the Mexican state devised a plan to transport tens of thousands of migrants back to their homes in the interior, Imperial County worried about "a slight increase in county welfare cases" after a small number of unauthorized migrants left their citizen children with relatives upon their deportation to Mexico. Commenting on this issue, Parker explained the Border Patrol had "a standing policy of transporting such [mixed status] families and their belongings to Mexico as long as the entire family agree[d] to move."[367]

The fact is that the Border Patrol was not equipped to address the unauthorized migration of women and children. The day that Operation Wetback began in the Imperial

---

[365] "2,158 Aliens Rounded up 1st Day of 'Operation Wetback': Results Please Officials: Relatively Small Catch in Valley," *Brawley News,* June 18, 1954, pg. 1.
[366] Aaron Pelaez to Enrique Rodriguez Cano, June 23, 1954, expediente 548.1/124, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.
[367] "Welfare's Load Increase Bit," *Brawley News,* June 23, 1954, pg. 1.

Valley, the *Brawley News* told of an encounter between an El Paso Border Patrol officer (stationed in the valley for the operation) and an unauthorized migrant and his son. After releasing the man and child with a stern warning to return to Mexicali and not come back without proper authorization, the officer told the newspaper reporter: "'We can't send children to Nogales [where undocumented migrants apprehended in the Imperial Valley were sent] or women, either' … 'We don't want to break up families, so I'll just let that man go back across the line.'" In reaction to this, the author concluded the article by stating: "The border patrol has a heart too.'"[368] As Imperial County's concern with a rise in welfare cases suggests, the Border Patrol, more than a heart, had a deep understanding of the economics of the American Southwest.

Mexicali's population would have increased much more had it not been for Baja California's efforts to return as many internal migrants to their home states as possible. Two days after the United States announced its unilateral program of border contracting, Maldonado Sandez held a meeting with local and federal government officials, labor groups, growers, businessmen, and industrialists. In this meeting, the group made a series of resolutions that included aiding federal authorities in their mission to stop the emigration of Mexicans to the United States, launching a media campaign in the Mexican interior to dissuade workers from traveling to the border, and informing the local population of their efforts through the radio and print media. Additionally, they agreed to appeal to people's "patriotic and civic senses" to convince them to abide by the Mexican government's resolution on emigration. The group would do this, according to

---

[368] Howard Seelye, "Like a War: Border Patrol Wetback Hunt Described," *Brawley News,* June 17, 1954, pg. 2.

Maldonado Sandez, seeking all possible means to "cement economically and spiritually" the region's newcomers to Baja California or else supply them with the means to return to their places of origin.[369] On January 26 the *Brawley News* reported on these efforts, noting that while migrants attracted by the news of border contracting were "still pouring" into Baja California, "loud speakers were blasting the 'go home' plea in downtown Mexicali." Another article published the same day quoted Mexican Interior Minister Angel Carvajal's assertion that "Almost all social sectors [were] in solidarity with the government." The reports coming from the Mexican interior nonetheless contradicted Carvajal's statement, as there had allegedly been clashes between police and aspirantes in the Mexican states of Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, and Durango. According to these reports, Mexican "troops and police were screening passengers on trains and buses and 'putting off those who look[ed] like braceros' (farmhands)."[370]

The Mexican government's efforts to deter internal migration were overwhelmingly unsuccessful. How could internal migrants uphold their patriotism, as Mexican authorities asked of them, when the opportunity of higher wages appeared to be awaiting them in the United States? Spending their savings or whatever money they could borrow, thousands continued making their way to the US-Mexico border seeking relief from pressing poverty. Baja California thus began transporting migrants away from the border to Benjamin Hill (a railroad crossroads station in the state of Sonora) in

---

[369] Braulio Maldonado Sandez to Angel Carvajal, January 18, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC; Braulio Maldonado Sandez to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, January 19, 1954, legajo 1 y 2, expediente 548.1/122, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.

[370] "Mexico Abruptly Lifts Its Border Blockade on Workers," *Brawley News;* "Police Clash Story denied By Mexicans," *Brawley News,* January 26, 1954, pg. 1.

January 1954, hoping Mexico's *Secretaría de Gobernación* (Ministry of the Interior) would pay the Sonora-Baja California railroad company for these services.[371] By March, Baja California had spent more than 100,000 pesos on railroad passes, food, medicine, and local transportation for internal migrants. The state's authorities estimated Baja California would process approximately 9,000 returning braceros in the following months and requested aid from *Tránsito Federal* (Federal Transit) to fund the return migration of two or three hundred individuals per day.[372]

The seemingly endless congestion of internal migrants at the US-Mexico border made it clear that transporting migrants away from Mexicali would require a more concerted effort. To streamline this process, two branches of the federal government (the *Secretaría de Gobernación* and the *Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas*) contracted with a private company for the transportation of returning braceros, deported migrants, and aspirantes rejected by US authorities for bracero labor. Based in Guadalajara, Jalisco, the company was appropriately named the Baja California Worker Transportation and Colonization Company. As a representative remarked in one of his letters to Maldonado Sandez, the company provided free transportation to all of Baja California's indigent workers in order to relieve the state of the "grave demographic problem" it confronted.[373]

---

[371] Braulio Maldonado Sandez to Angel Carvajal, January 28, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[372] Rafael Moreno Henriquez and Enrique Villegas Leyva to Javier Campos Ortiz, March 13, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[373] Juan Aguirre to Gobernador de la Baja California, April 6, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

From April to September of 1954, the state of Baja California referred thousands of internal migrants to the Baja California Worker Transportation and Colonization Company for free transportation to the Mexican interior. Between June 30 and July 9, for instance, the state transported 3,903 migrants, averaging 433 per day. In a revelatory statement, Antonio Leo Chavez, a Baja California state employee, called this process the "*repatriation* of our fellow citizens to their places of origin [emphasis added]."[374] While these migrants were not technically being "repatriated" by being returned to the Mexican interior, ethnic and cultural differences among Mexicans from different states had for centuries contributed to Mexicans' strong identification with their home regions, or "*patrias chicas*." Perhaps Chavez had this in mind when he referred to this internal movement as "repatriation"; or maybe he was thinking about the repatriation drives that the US government had conducted since the 1930s and the more recent Operation Wetback that had pushed even more migrants into Mexicali. While the Mexican government "repatriated" its citizens to their home states or to new destinations in an effort to diffuse the problem of unemployment across the country, Imperial County's welfare department requested the creation of a revolving fund that "helped stranded families return home immediately rather than remain as a burden to the county."[375]

The thousands of referrals the state of Baja California made between April and September demonstrate that indeed many of those traveling to the Mexican interior were women and children. Some women traveled alone, others with their sisters or children, while many others traveled with their husbands and children. According to Chavez's

---

[374] Antonio Leo Chavez, "Informe," July 12, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[375] "County Relief Load Far Below Average," *Brawley News,* June 24, 1954, pg. 7.

report, each migrant received five pesos and two *tortas* (sandwiches) before boarding their trains. While many were headed to cities or towns in the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato, the overwhelming majority went to the city of Guadalajara. From there, migrants would have to make their way home with the five pesos they received in Mexicali and whatever other funds they had.

As the name of the Baja California Worker Transportation and Colonization Company indicated, its business was not only transporting workers, but also the colonization of Mexico. The filibuster campaign that William Walker had led in Baja California in the nineteenth century had convinced the Mexican government of the need to increase the peninsula's population in order to protect it from future American invasions. The isolation of the region, however, had made this extremely difficult. The migration of thousands of aspirantes to Mexicali in 1954 thus gave the Mexican government the perfect opportunity to coordinate the transportation of internal migrants to regions that it considered in need of development. One of these regions was Baja California Sur, which remained a federal territory until 1974. In March 1954 Division General Agustín Olachea, stationed in Baja California Sur, wrote to the president informing him that the 220 aspirantes sent there by the state of Baja California Norte had arrived at La Paz from Mexicali and Tijuana. From there these men would be transported to the Santo Domingo Valley, where they would settle as *colonos* (colonizers) and develop the land for agricultural use.[376] Though these mid-twentieth century colonization efforts were for the most part unsuccessful, they reflected the region's long colonial

[376] General de División Agustín Olachea to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, March 6, 1954, expediente 548.1/122, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.

history that began in the sixteenth century and progressed into the mission system stretching across Alta and Baja California.

"Brothers from the Interior"

Just as he did with return migration, governor Maldonado Sandez undertook his other stated objective for relieving Mexicali's "grave demographic problem"— to "cement" newcomers to Baja California—with concerted effort. The Bracero Program had attracted these newcomers to Mexicali, and if Maldonado Sandez were to succeed in his plans, the Bracero Program would also attach these new residents to Baja California, at least economically. Although Baja California's simultaneous efforts of returning migrants to their home states and cementing others in the region might appear contradictory, it in fact reflected a larger national trend. David S. FitzGerald, for example, has shown that the Mexican state abandoned its efforts to restrict emigration in the 1970s and later adopted a policy that encouraged remittances.[377] While Baja California could do very little to prevent Mexicans' internal migration, it could in fact shape the political and social climate in which migrants became incorporated into the region. Eager to capture the dollars male migrants could insert into the local economy, Maldonado Sandez encouraged the reunification of Mexican families separated by the gendered demands of the Bracero Program. With the Border Patrol pressuring undocumented migrant families to stay south of the border to prevent apprehension,

[377] David S. FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migraiton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 38-39.

Mexicali became not only a major staging ground for transients seeking entry into the United States, but also the new home for families who ultimately settled in the region.

The migration experience of the López family illustrates the importance of social networks in the resettlement of bracero families to Mexicali. Margarita and Higinio Lopez were both from the state of Aguascalientes. Higinio had first worked as an unauthorized worker in the Imperial Valley, encouraged by relatives who migrated seasonally to the United States. The couple married in 1950 during one of Higinio's trips back to Aguscalientes. In 1956, when Higinio was laboring as a bracero in the Imperial Valley, Margarita and their two children migrated to Mexicali to be closer to him. During their first years in Mexicali, the López family did not rent a house or room, but instead lived in borrowed homes made of *cachanilla* (a plant native to the region that locals mixed with dirt to use as building material). Higinio's bracero wages were generally sufficient to support the family, except for the times when his contract ended and he became unemployed. It was during these periods that the family's larger social networks became crucial. While Higinio traveled to the Mexican interior to obtain a new bracero contract, often spending more than a month on the journey, Margarita worked washing and ironing clothes for neighbors and received help from a brother and sister who had also migrated to Mexicali. As difficult as these times were, Margarita appreciated the fact that Higinio was beside her during all her pregnancies, for the couple went on to have nine more children in Mexicali. With Higinio coming and going across the border, the

family "never separated." The couple, moreover, was able to purchase land and began building their own house three years after moving to Mexicali.[378]

Migrants like Margarita and Hignio were key to the demographic growth that Mexicali experienced in the mid-twentieth century not only because they established new households, but also because they expanded the translocal social fields that connected their towns in the Mexican interior with the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands.[379] With Margarita and Higinio well established in the region, the López home also became a space for family gatherings and a place away from Imperial Valley's labor camps. When Higinio's brothers and a second cousin worked in the Imperial Valley, for instance, they took advantage of their proximity to Mexicali to visit the family every weekend. It was Higinio, moreover, who transported the men across the border in his own car.[380] This pattern replayed itself in countless families: when employment became scarce in the Imperial Valley, or while workers awaited their next contract, the homes of relatives or close friends offered shelter. Guadalupe García González, originally from the Mexican state of Sinaloa, lived with an aunt in Mexicali for eight months while he waited for a bracero contract. Because García González worked in the afternoons he was able to stand outside the contracting center each morning waiting to hear his name called. This

---

[378] Rochelle Garza, "Margarita López," in Bracero History Archive, Item #410, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/410 (accessed March 2, 2016) and Grisel Murillo, "Higinio López Silva," in Bracero History Archive, Item #397, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/397 (accessed March 2, 2016).

[379] For more on translocality, see Michael P. Smith and Luis E. Guarnizo, *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

[380] Veronica Cortez, "Alejo López Silva," in Bracero History Archive, Item #411, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/411 (accessed March 2, 2016).

arrangement proved effective and García González not only obtained a bracero contract but also eventually became a Special.[381]

The families who could not afford to rent a room or house in Mexicali's existing colonias (neighborhoods) built their own self-help housing and created informal settlements. One of such informal settlements was found along the New River, where, as Maldonado Sandez remarked, its inhabitants were living in "subhuman conditions caused by the river's insalubrity."[382] The New River, which runs across the Imperial Valley into Mexicali, posed a public health problem on both sides of the border. Imperial County health officials regularly complained that Mexicali was dumping sewage into the New River and demanded the Mexican government end this practice and clean the waters.[383] The New River flooded in January 1955, before Mexican authorities solved the river's sewage problem, and displaced 2,000 families.[384] Over the next few days the government rushed to supply flood victims with free antibiotics and milk cans while emptying and fumigating the schools located near the river. More importantly, the state of Baja California supplied 2,686 low-priced lots to displaced flood victims.[385] These lots, which had previously been part of the ejido Orizaba, formed a new colonia named Baja California. By providing this direct help to flood victims, the "poor man's candidate"

---

[381] Mireya Loza, "Guadalupe García González," in Bracero History Archive, Item #263, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/263 (accessed March 2, 2016).
[382] Baja California and Braulio Maldonado Sández, *III Informe de Gobierno: Estado de Baja California* (Mexicali: Gobierno de Baja California, 1956), 24.
[383] "Border Sewage Problem Seen Near Solution," *Brawley News*, April 10, 1954, pg. 6; "First Step Taken On International Sewage Project," *Brawley News,* April 17, 1954, pg. 1; "New River's Abuse Told to Colo. Board," *Brawley News,* June 25, 1954, pgs. 1, 6.
[384] Braulio Maldonado Sandez to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, January 8, 1955, expediente 508.1/663, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.
[385] Cesar Ruiz Moreno to Enrique Rodriguez Cano, January 14, 1955 and Rafael Moreno Henriquez to Secretario de la Presidencia, February 5, 1955. Both in expediente 508.1/663, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.

Maldonado Sandez was fulfilling one of his campaign promises and guaranteeing that Baja California's newest residents settled there permanently.

Pressed by the continuous growth of its population, Baja California's state government became increasingly preoccupied with the expansion of urban services and an infrastructure celebrated as modern. The state's accelerated urbanization during the 1950s is best reflected by the fact that in one year (from October 1954 to October 1955) twenty new working-class colonias emerged in Mexicali, six in Ensenada, four in Tecate, and twelve in Tijuana. Perhaps more telling is the fact that the two new largest colonias in Baja California were planned and established in only three months and already offered schools, water service, and public surveillance by the time Maldonado Sández gave his state of the state address in 1955.[386] These neighborhoods were some of the most visible measures the state government adopted in support of impoverished immigrants. The reality, however, is that most of these new working class neighborhoods lacked basic services such as running water or electricity.

Despite Baja California's earlier efforts to return internal migrants to their home states, and his administration's limited resources to provide new residents with modern urban infrastructure, Maldonado Sández set out to create an image of a welcoming new state. He described newcomers as enterprising individuals who could make Baja California a prosperous land of immigrants. In his 1955 state of the state address, the governor recognized the challenges his administration faced with Mexico's internal migration. Maldonado Sandez argued that despite these difficulties, his government

---

[386] Baja California and Braulio Maldonado Sández, *II informe del Lic. Braulio Maldonado S., Governador Constitucional del Estado de Baja California: 1º octubre de 1954 a 1º de octubre de 1955*, (Mexicali: Gobierno de Baja California, 1955), 11.

provided immigrants with resources that would allow them to become a population of producers and consumers, a role the governor called "the state's most important wealth." Baja California, he declared, "has always offered its open arms to its brothers from the interior who settle here, engage in clean, honest work, and increase our prosperity." Finding benefits where others saw drawbacks, Maldonado Sandez observed the rest of the country was supplying Baja California a "valuable human material" of agricultural workers, technicians, professionals, and artists who would improve and augment the region's economic and cultural development.[387] Baja California's response to the national phenomenon of internal migration, the governor understood well, would shape the fate of the state for decades to come.

Merchant of Labor

As discussed above, 27,114 men placed their names on Baja California's list of aspirantes after the Bracero Program resumed in March 1954 and Mexicali became one of the new border contracting centers. City and state authorities in Mexicali and across Baja California quickly mobilized to compile the lists of aspirantes required for bracero recruitment. Equipped with a truck, sound equipment, five typewriters, five tables, ten chairs, and ten salaried typists, Antonio Leo Chavez and his partner Jose María Medina Gutiérrez had gone to work in a Mexicali school registering aspirantes.[388] Many of the men awaiting registration in Baja California's list were internal migrants, and many were also homeless. Josefina Fajardo, who lived three blocks away from this school when she

[387] Baja California and Maldonado Sández, *II informe*, 02.
[388] Jose María Medina Gutiérrez and Antonio Leo Chávez to Oficial Mayor, March 20, 1954, folder 2, expediente 3, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

was a teenager, witnessed the plight of aspirantes who slept outdoors near the school and begged for money in the neighborhood. So ingrained was the image of destitute aspirantes in her mind that when she met her husband, a bracero, she did not suspect he was a guest worker because he was always well dressed.[389] In spite of the pressures that homeless migrants placed on Mexicali, Maldonado Sandez ordered Chavez and Medina Gutiérrez to give Baja California's unemployed workers preference over the aspirantes from other Mexican states. Spending public resources on aspirantes' registration for bracero labor, the state of Baja California thus attempted to maximize the benefits that could come from border contracting. By April 9 the United States had contracted 6,112 braceros in Mexicali and Chavez reported 85% of these men had resided in Baja California for more than a year.[390]

Despite Chavez's assertion that a majority of braceros contracted in Mexicali were Baja California residents, the permanent residence of these men was not all too certain. Mexicali's contracting center suffered a corruption scandal in March 1954 that made this point clear. According to the *San Diego Union,* Mexican authorities were investigating an alleged "'false credentials' racket" led by electoral office employees in Mexicali, Tijuana, Ensenada, and Tecate. If the reports were true, Baja California's state employees were selling Mexican voter registration cards to aspirantes for one or two hundred pesos each. The men needed these voter registration cards to qualify for recruitment at the border, and in order to obtain one, a migrant had to have lived in Baja

[389] Veronica Cortez, "Josefina Fajardo," in Bracero History Archive, Item #422, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/422 (accessed March 1, 2016).
[390] Antonio Leo Chavez, "Informe."

California for at least six months.[391] A few months after this incident, a Mexicali resident wrote to the Mexican president asserting the staff at the contracting center was using the official seal of the Ministry of the Interior to sell bracero cards for 250 pesos. The aspirantes, according to the informant, paid the bribe in Guadalajara, Jalisco, where the group of corrupt officials operated their main office, and from there traveled to Mexicali where they received their bracero cards.[392] The previous year Mexicali's police had arrested a San Bernardino, California man and his Mexicali accomplice in another corruption scandal. Accused of selling aspirantes false birth certificates and charging between $100 and $300 for their services, the pair had been arrested after deputies found approximately 800 receipts in their Mexicali office.[393] In addition to the never-ending corruption that surrounded the Bracero Program, migrants' constant movement made the task of determining their residence a difficult one. In one year, a bracero or unauthorized worker could split his time across several places, working in the Imperial Valley while living in Mexicali (or visiting there during afternoons and weekends), and then spending the off-season in his home state in the Mexican interior.

Whatever corruption problems bracero contracting brought to the state of Baja California, many of its residents and government officials were just as interested in border contracting as Imperial Valley growers. In November 1955, a commission of working-class colonia organizations asked Maldonado Sandez to request 1,500 special bracero contracts for Tijuana and 1,500 more contracts for Mexicali from the federal

---

[391] "Mexico News: Halt In Work Contracts Due To Inquiry," *San Diego Union,* March 25, 1954. Article clipping in expediente 548.1/122, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.
[392] Pedro Rojano to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. November 5, 1954, expediente 548.1/124, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.
[393] "American Is Under Arrest In Mexicali," *Brawley News,* March 25, 1953, pg. 1.

government. If the Ministry of the Interior could not grant these contracts directly to the colonia associations, the groups asked that authorities order a "special" contracting session in Mexicali instead. Forwarding this message, Rafael Moreno Henriquez, the state's general secretary, indicated he was happy to support the petitioners' plea and emphasized their unemployment and responsibility as heads of households.[394] In January 1956, moreover, a Tijuana man wrote to Maldonado Sandez stating he had held several conversations with grower representatives in San Francisco. The attendees of these meetings, he affirmed, had agreed to recommend that the new labor agreement include a clause requiring California to obtain all its guest workers from Baja California.[395] Like many other proposals, this plan never gained traction. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the large interest that some held in obtaining exclusive rights over the highly-desired bracero contracts for Baja California.

Bracero contracts were indeed so coveted that once contracting resumed in Empalme, Sonora (approximately 523 miles southeast of Mexicali), many Mexicali residents traveled there despite having no guarantees that they would actually obtain employment. A group of twenty-seven men, for instance, sent Maldonado Sandez an urgent letter from Empalme in January 1956 explaining that the authorities there required them to submit forms containing the Baja California state seal and the governor's signature in order to prove their eligibility for the program.[396] These men, in other words,

---

[394] Rafael Moreno Henriquez to Fernando Roman, November 28, 1955, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[395] Atenógenes Medina T. to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, January 4, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[396] José Luz Quijas Reyes to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, January 10, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

had bypassed official channels and with luck, or sufficient money, had convinced the officials in Empalme to add them to the contracting lists. By February the number of Mexicali residents traveling to Empalme had become so high that Horacio Morales Apodaca, Empalme's *presidente municipal* (mayor) wrote to Maldonado Sandez asking that he stop the movement of aspirantes to the contracting center. Morales Apodaca suggested Maldonado Sandez intercede with the head of the Emigrant Workers Office in Mexico City on behalf of one thousand Mexicali residents who were in a "critical situation" and creating "serious problems" for Empalme.[397] To emphasize the "serious problems" that Mexicali's aspirantes were creating in Empalme, the governor of Sonora telegraphed Maldonado Sandez the following day echoing Morales Apodaca's plea. Two days later Minister of the Interior Gustavo Díaz Ordaz joined their efforts by urging the state's general secretary to make sure no more aspirantes left Mexicali for the contracting center. Díaz Ordaz placed the number of Mexicali aspirantes in Empalme at 1,500 and indicated these men would not obtain contracts because there were simply not enough bracero requests from American authorities.[398] History was repeating itself. Less than two years before, Mexican authorities had been unable to stop aspirantes from traveling to Mexicali. In February 1956, the story remained the same, but the setting had changed; Mexicali could not to stop aspirantes from making their way to Empalme.

If in 1954 Baja California faced a "grave demographic problem" caused by the internal migration of thousands of aspirantes, by 1956 the problem was the departure of

[397] Horacio Morales Apodaca to Braulio Maldonado, February 6, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[398] Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to Rafael Moreno Henriquez, February 9, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

these men to the nearest contracting center in Empalme. When aspirantes first arrived in Mexicali they had emigrated from hundreds of towns and villages in central Mexico. As they concentrated in Mexicali, and from there traveled to Empalme, the central government assigned Mexicali the responsibility of regulating aspirantes internal migration. To address the mounting pressure that officials in Sonora and Mexico City placed on Baja California, Gustavo Llorenz, the head of bracero registration in Mexicali, traveled to Empalme in February and oversaw the transportation of aspirantes back to the border. Llorenz wrote to the Emigrant Workers Office in March to say that Baja California wanted to avoid the "acute problems" that arose with the exodus of men "who without control or means of subsistence" were swelling the ranks of aspirantes crowding contracting centers. He remarked these men had "no hope" of obtaining a contract but gave a "sad spectacle of their hardships and misery reflected in the abandoned families" who remained in Mexicali. As Pedro Cantor (a former bracero) observed in an interview, the problem with bracero contracting was that aspirantes could never know how long it would take for them to receive a contract in Empalme or any other contracting center. Although Cantor had been relatively lucky and heard his name called fifteen days after arriving in Empalme, others waited months.[399] As the period of waiting continued and bracero families ran out of savings or spent all the money they borrowed, women like Margarita López entered the informal economy and worked as domestic laborers, washing and ironing clothes, or cooking for others.

[399] Steve Velásquez, "Pedro Cantor," in Bracero History Archive, Item #147, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/147 (accessed March 2, 2016).

Despite Mexico's rhetoric that held them as the primary beneficiaries of the Bracero Program, bracero families were mostly absent from the private communications between government officials. When they did appear in bureaucratic correspondence, bracero families often figured as a "sad spectacle" of hardship and misery, as Llorenz's letter makes clear. The image of destitute "abandoned families" could be a powerful tool in arguing for a larger bracero quota for Baja California, and Llorenz knew this well. In a letter to the Emigrant Workers Office in Mexico City, Llorenz asked whether the state could receive an assigned quota that would allow them to authorize the exit of only the exact number of aspirantes guaranteed a contract. To prove that the region's aspirantes could in fact become contracted in an orderly process, Llorenz mentioned that a group of residents of Mexicali's colonia Baja California had been noticeably "disciplined" in their communications with the state government.[400]

If Baja California would not obtain its own contracting center, Maldonado Sandez and his administration made sure it at least received the quota that its residents had been insistently requesting. In April the state sent the head of the Labor and Social Security Department to Mexico City to attend the labor program renewal talks with the stated goal that he would ensure that Baja California was "taken into account" under the new agreement.[401] A month later Maldonado Sandez finally launched the labor pool he had long proposed. The labor pool promised to introduce an efficient and streamlined way of registering aspirantes and other jobseekers, and to quickly assemble them when

[400] Gustavo Llorenz to José T. Rocha, March 23, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[401] Vitelio Lanz Gutiérrez to Rafael Moreno Henriquez, April 10, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

employment offers became available. To register, applicants were required to supply their personal information, including their number of dependents, and proof of residence.[402] In another instance of their "disciplined" organizing, residents of colonia Baja California created their own registration cards to submit to the labor pool. In these, the men promised to pick cotton in the Mexicali Valley if this would get them a bracero contract—something that Baja California's authorities had not stated was required for registration.[403] The continuous letters, telegrams, and promises to support Mexicali's economy eventually paid off. When the state finally received a quota of 200 weekly bracero contracts in July, it immediately called the group of colonia Baja California residents to be the first men to travel to Empalme.[404]

Mexicali's colonia Baja California reflected many of the ways the Bracero Program had transformed the northern state in the last decade. Its residents were former inhabitants of the informal settlements that had sprung up along the New River when Mexicali expanded faster than the city's existing housing. These residents had migrated to Mexicali, pulled by the Imperial Valley's agricultural jobs, and many formed the labor reserve that made agribusiness so profitable in California. Although colonia organizations were common in Mexico, membership in one of these associations was much more significant in the borderlands region. The men who worked seasonally in the Imperial Valley did not have access to the same kinds of networks that Mexican labor unions

---

[402] Braulio Maldonado Sandez, "Reglamento De La Agencia del Departamento del Trabajo y Previsión Social," May 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[403] "Residentes de la Colonia 'Baja California,'" no date, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[404] Delfino Aguilera to Braulio Maldonado S., July 12, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

enjoyed. As cross-border workers who derived most or all of their income by working in the United States, their residence in Mexicali is what provided them a political identity to utilize in communications with the state. This residence, moreover, reassured Baja California's authorities that the dollars they earned across the border would in fact be spent in Mexicali. The clientelism that connected these colonia residents with Baja California began when the state apportioned them low-cost land plots and continued when it granted them preferential access to bracero contracts.[405] Colonia Baja California, moreover, operated as one of the Imperial Valley's largest labor camps, where cheap labor maintained and reproduced itself at much lower costs and out of sight of newspaper reporters.

As Mexicali's colonias continued expanding throughout the 1950s, the large majority of the Imperial Valley's agriculture jobs became the domain of contracted and undocumented workers. If the NFLU had been unable to stop the expansion of the Bracero Program and the displacement of thousands of "domestic" workers, the CIO never had a chance of saving the lettuce packing jobs that went to the fields. The unilateral program of border contracting that the United States launched in 1954 had made a joke of US immigration laws and triggered a dramatic increase in unauthorized migration. Though short-lived, the program was also crucial for the concessions it made to growers when it formalized the practice of border commuting, allowed growers to pre-name their employees, and underscored the United States' unflinching determination to

[405] Juan Macías Domínguez to Secretaría de Gobernación. November 25, 1955. folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

obtain border contracting. Operation Wetback and the start of the Specials Program further demonstrated that many braceros and undocumented workers had become a permanent labor force in the region.

The relief measures that Baja California had to adopt in 1954 when thousands of aspirantes traveled to Mexicali illustrate how the consequences of the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands were never shared equally. Border contracting and Operation Wetback had inflated the border population on the Mexican side to a degree never seen before. While the Imperial Valley pressured a few mixed status families to voluntarily return to Mexico, Baja California sent trainloads upon trainloads of migrants back to the Mexican interior. Although Baja California's ambitious new governor attempted to manage the Bracero Program by only awarding contracts to state residents, the realities of corruption and seasonal migration made this quite impossible. Nevertheless, the pressure that Mexican authorities placed on Baja California to remove its residents from Empalme's contracting center demonstrates that Mexicali had, after all, become a new home for thousands of migrant workers. The land that Baja California allotted to recent migrants at relatively low prices, and the expansion of basic urban services to new colonias (as slow as this was), were direct subsidies to the Imperial Valley's agriculture industry—subsidies that made possible the maintenance and reproduction of a cheap transborder labor force.

Chapter 4: "If there ever was a Racket, this is it": Institutionalizing Binational Interdependence in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali Borderlands, 1957–1963

On February 13, 1957, C. A. Benítez, the general secretary of the *Comité de la Liga Municipal de Organizaciones Populares* (Committee of the Municipal League of Popular Organizations) wrote to Mexican president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines requesting bracero contracts for 5,000 Mexicali residents. Though the president's office usually forwarded these types of requests to the Ministry of Interior just a few days after receiving them, it took the office more than a month to forward this message, which it did on March 18. Perhaps frustrated by the federal government's slow response, the organizations that made up the *Liga Municipal* sent their own petitions to Ruiz Cortines later that month. Domingo Chavira, the president of the *Unión de Trabajadores Agrícolas Residentes* (Agricultural Workers-Residents Union) sent a telegram to Mexico City on March 23 explaining Mexicali's cotton industry had had a bad year, leaving many of the workers he represented unemployed. Chavira asked Ruiz Cortines to order the Ministry of the Interior to authorize Baja California farm workers to emigrate to the United States as braceros. That same day, Paula Medina de Ruiz, the general secretary of the *Grupo San Luis,* also telegraphed Ruiz Cortines, citing the high unemployment in Mexicali and making the same request for bracero contracts for Baja California's workers. A third organization joined their efforts when Octavio Salinas of the *Liga de Obreros Campesinos* (Farm Workers League) sent a similar telegram two days later. Rafael Alemán López, the general secretary of the *Sindicato Obrero y Campesino Guadalupe*

Victoria (Farm Worker Syndicate), sent the fourth and final request on March 27.[406] These last two organizations doubled their efforts, moreover, as they sent similar messages to Baja California's governor Braulio Maldonado Sandez.[407]

The coordinated efforts by the members of Mexicali's *Liga Municipal* in asking the Mexican government for bracero contracts illustrates how the Bracero Program had institutionalized the politics of labor and migration on the Mexican border. The proliferation of workers' groups pointed to the political importance that these organizations had gained by the late 1950s in connecting jobseekers with highly coveted bracero contracts. Aspirantes continued writing to the president, asking for contracts or for help returning to their homes in the interior, but many more had learned that the best way to communicate with the state was as members of an organization.

Institutionalizing the Lucrative Business of International Labor Migration

This chapter argues that with a reserve army of labor fully consolidated in Mexicali, both sides of the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands proceeded to institutionalize their economic interdependence based on the exchange of cheap labor. Baja California utilized its role as a merchant of labor to build the corporatist state that the ruling party had begun constructing since the 1930s. Imperial Valley growers, on the other hand, used the Special Program, and later the green card, to retain a seasonal,

---

[406] C.A. Benitez to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, February 13, 1957; Sergio L. Benhumea to Secretario de Gobernación, March 18, 1957; Domingo Chavira B. to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, March 23, 1957; Paula Medina de Ruiz to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines; Octavio Salinas to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, March 25, 1957; Rafael Alemán López to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, March 27, 1957. All in expediente 548.1/124, fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, AGN.

[407] Octavio E. Salinas to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, March 26, 1957; Rafael Alemán López to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, March 27, 1957. Both in folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

cheap labor force with residence in Mexicali. While US residents who had once labored in agriculture continued seeing their livelihoods threatened by an expanding Bracero Program, contracted workers and their families eked out a living from the low wages that agribusiness offered them.

The Bracero Program reached its zenith in the late 1950s after the INS created the Special Program to reduce unauthorized migration and boost bracero employment. Baja California responded to this trend by creating a state-managed labor pool to supply workers to both sides of the border. The role of merchant of labor, Baja California quickly realized, was a complicated undertaking. Though state authorities tried to exclude internal migrants from its labor pool, the Mexicali Valley's need for cotton pickers forced Baja California to incorporate transients and newcomers into its growing bureaucratic apparatus of labor and migration control. The state also had to find successful ways of negotiating with Mexico's central government in order to secure bracero contracts for its residents and keep unemployment from skyrocketing among its ever-growing population. Managing the Bracero Program also offered its rewards. Baja California and the Mexican state utilized their control over bracero contracts to increase their power. Aspirantes joined Mexico's corporatist structure in order to obtain a place in the labor pool and possibly emigrate as braceros.

If the political elite was Mexico's main beneficiary under the Bracero Program, American growers gained the most from it in the United States. Warned that the Special Program would end in 1960, Imperial Valley growers moved quickly to retain the Special braceros they employed by helping them obtain green cards granting legal permanent residence. These "good bosses" who aided braceros in changing their legal status were

smart businessmen who utilized their influence and power to continue shaping the region's labor market to their advantage. The large wave of braceros gaining legal permanent residence did not go unnoticed, and organized labor soon began denouncing the employment of former braceros under new legal categories. Calling the widespread employment of green card holders who lived in Mexicali and commuted to work in the Imperial Valley a "racket," Benjamin Yellen attempted to protect the interests of US residents. This proved an impossible feat, however, as braceros and green card commuters had become indispensable members of the local economy as cheap labor and consumers.

Suppliers of Cheap Labor

As discussed in chapter 3, INS Commissioner Joseph Swing devised the Special Program in 1954 to mitigate grower discontent over Operation Wetback and to encourage farmers to employ Mexican guest workers instead of unauthorized workers. The program gave growers the opportunity to retain the undocumented workers they regarded as "special" or "skilled key men" by granting them Special bracero status. After conducting its highly-publicized deportation sweeps across the Southwest, the INS retreated from aggressive border policing and argued that the reduction in apprehensions after 1954 was a sign of fewer unauthorized entries occurring across the border.[408] The *Brawley News* helped spread this idea with regular news stories remarking on the decline in the number of apprehensions. In February 1957, for instance, the newspaper quoted El Centro's chief inspector, who told valley readers that the Border Patrol had arrested 311 undocumented

[408] Lytle Hernández, *Migra,* 191.

workers the previous month, "a decline of 400 from 711 aliens apprehended the same month a year ago." While the number of arrests in the El Centro sector during the 1955 fiscal year had reached 17,428, only 5,528 unauthorized migrants were detained in 1956.[409] At the same time that the Border Patrol reported a "tighter" border, moreover, the El Centro bracero reception center reached new records. The center processed 161,603 workers during 1956, 41,944 more braceros than the previous year.[410]

Seen as a substitute for hiring unauthorized workers, the Bracero Program came to dominate the Imperial Valley's farm labor market by the late 1950s. The region's reliance on bracero labor is best reflected by the fact that during the first half of 1956, 10 percent of California's total bracero allotment worked in the Imperial Valley and 80 percent of the valley's seasonal farm labor was composed of braceros in 1957.[411] When the Imperial Valley's harvesting season reached its peak in 1958, that harvest critically depended on the 14,042 braceros laboring there.[412] The Mexican contracted workers monopolized certain crops in the Imperial Valley. Less than 5 percent of the workers harvesting sugar beets, for example, were domestic US workers.[413] This largely explains why Imperial Valley beet growers were able to lower wages in 1957 through a special beet wage hearing held with the Department of Agriculture.[414] Leaving no room for doubt regarding the importance of the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley, the INS

---

[409] "Wetback Ranks Down During '56," *Brawley News,* January 3, 1957, pg. 4; "Fewer Wetbacks Arrested in '56," *Brawley News,* February 4, 1957, pg. 6; "Alien Arrests Drop Sharply," *Brawley News,* June 5, 1957, pg.3; "Border Much Tighter Than In Past Years," *Brawley News,* July 2, 1957, pg. 4; "Fewer Aliens Caught," *Brawley News,* September 4, 1957, pg. 2; "Arrest of Aliens Continues to Fall," *Brawley News,* October 1, 1957, pg. 1; "Alien Arrest Decline Told," *Brawley News,* December 3, 1957, pg. 2.
[410] "Labor Unit Breaks 1955 High Record," *Brawley News,* January 3, 1957, pg. 7.
[411] Cohen, *Braceros,* 08.
[412] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 80.
[413] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 157.
[414] "IV Beet Workers Get Lower Wages," *Brawley News,* July 18, 1957, pgs, 1, 2.

Information Bulletin asserted in its March 1956 issue: "Imperial Valley's agriculture could not have boomed in the postwar years without a strong labor supply. One of the most significant developments in the decade here since the war has been the steady building of the biggest and most stable farm labor program of its kind in the history of the U.S."[415]

The larger numbers of braceros making their way to US farms meant a larger bureaucratic responsibility for the Mexican states and the federal agencies that oversaw bracero recruitment in Mexico. The braceros who passed through the El Centro reception center were first recruited in Empalme, Sonora. To be recruited in this contracting center, aspirantes were supposed to be first referred there by the governments of their own states (which compiled their lists of aspirantes and referred workers to the contracting centers as authorized by the Ministry of the Interior). Baja California launched its labor pool (*bolsa de trabajo*) in May 1956 to manage the state's bracero quotas. As governor Braulio Maldonado Sandez had indicated as early as 1954, his administration conceived the state's labor pool as a job placement service for the larger transborder region.[416] In September 1957, the new bureaucratic agency suffered the first of many scandals when a national newspaper in Mexico City denounced it for swindling "naïve braceros." Esteban Lozano Becerra, the labor pool's representative in Tijuana, *La Prensa* reported, was leading aspirantes to believe that they could obtain bracero contracts in that border city, outside of official Bracero Program channels. Juan Jiménez Arvizu, the head of the labor pool, had indeed instructed Lozano Becerra to charge "small fees" to those who wished

[415] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 77.
[416] "Baja Calif. Governor Suggests labor pool: Maldonado Proposes Establishing Mexicali Office for Registration," *Brawley News,* January 27, 1954, pgs. 1, 8.

to utilize the agency's services. In October, the Minister of the Interior, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, mailed Maldonado Sandez copies of two receipts showing that aspirantes had paid five pesos to join the labor pool. Although the governor replied that the fees collected were to help cover the agency's operation costs, he ordered Jiménez Arvizu that same day to make sure no worker was ever charged a fee again.[417]

Although Baja California was one of the Mexican states most affected by the Bracero Program, it depended on the central government for the assignment of bracero contracts. This is why public officials in Baja California wanted to ensure that the men who became contracted under the state's quota were bona fide residents and that their dollar earnings would be spent in the state. For instance, Vicente Cervantes García, one of these officials, drafted a proposal in May 1957 outlining eight measures for a more efficient management of the labor pool. The first objective was to "filter" the state's aspirante list of members who were not Baja California residents. To do this, the labor pool would confirm aspirantes' residence using voting ballots, electricity and rent receipts, official certificates, and other documents.[418] At other times, though, it seemed that the labor pool was less concerned with aspirantes' residence than with ensuring cotton growers an ample supply of labor. The following December, Cervantes García asked Mexicali's mayor why the men who worked in the Mexicali Valley were not

---

[417] Juan Jimenez Arvizu to Esteban Lozano Becerra, August 15, 1957; *La Prensa,* September 4, 1957; Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to C. Gobernador Constitucional del Estado, October 29, 1957; Braulio Maldonado Sández and Rafael Morneo Henríquez to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, November 29, 1957; Braulio Maldonado Sández and Rafael Moreno Henríquez to Juan Jiménez Arvizu, November 29, 1957. All in folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[418] The seventh point, or proposal, was to charge each aspirante four pesos in order to set up a fund that the labor pool would use to help impoverished aspirantes get to Empalme or to return to Mexicali if rejected by American authorities at the recruiting center. Vicente Cervantes García to Braulio Maldonado Sández, May 24, 1957, folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

obtaining residence letters. The region's cotton producers had made an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior the previous October wherein the aspirantes who labored in the Mexicali Valley for 30 days would obtain a referral to be later contracted in Empalme. Cervantes García argued the labor pool had been receiving complaints from Mexicali residents who were unable to obtain their residence letters even after paying the normal service fees that the city collected for the issuance of these certificates.[419] Whatever reasons the mayor's office had for denying residence letters to aspirantes, the labor pool wanted to see the agreement between cotton growers and the Ministry of the Interior honored by the city of Mexicali.

Dependent on the Ministry of the Interior for the assignment of contract quotas, the state of Baja California was at times successful in leveraging its influence to obtain special favors from the central government—and at other times it was not. Baja California's authorities, for instance, were able to convince the Ministry of the Interior to limit bracero contracts for work in the Imperial Valley's July and August cotton harvest to state residents only. The Ministry agreed to this request with the condition that it would send its own representative to the state's labor pool to ensure that the aspirantes were in fact Baja California residents.[420] Though willing to support Baja California's interests, the central government thus maintained close oversight of the Bracero Program in the borderlands region. When Eligio Esquivel Méndez replaced Maldonado Sandez as Baja California's governor in October 1959, however, the state confronted many

[419] Vicente Cervantes Garcia to Raul Tiznado Aguilar, December 24, 1957, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[420] Humberto Amaya Hurtado to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, July 7, 1959; Enrique Villegas Leyva to Noé Palomares, July 11, 1959; Humerto Amaya Hurtado to Oficial Mayor del Gobierno del Estado, July 21, 1959. All in folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

problems managing its labor pool and bracero contracting. Rogelio Flores Delgado, the head of the Central Office of Emigrant Workers in Mexico City, sent several queries to Baja California's new administration asking to know who was the new head of the labor pool. Perhaps weary that the new governor ignored how bracero contracting operated at the state level, Flores Delgado explained to Esquivel Méndez that his administration was required to compile the state's aspirante list. It was not until March 1960 that Esquivel Méndez's office officially named Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez the new head of the labor pool. The new administration's delay in naming a new manager for the labor pool hurt the state's aspirantes. Amezcua Rodríguez was forced to insist on several occasions that Baja California had alarming numbers of unemployed workers and urgently needed a large quota of bracero contracts. In March, he proposed in an urgent memorandum either that Esquivel Méndez request 4,000 bracero contracts for Baja California or that Mexicali be granted a recruiting center that would only contract Baja California residents. Mexicali did not open its own contracting center, but the state did receive bracero contracts in May.[421]

If securing contract quotas was not already a large challenge for Baja California's authorities, aspirantes' internal migration to Empalme presented more complications. Upon receiving a new quota from the Ministry of the Interior, the labor pool contacted the number of aspirantes it was authorized to refer for recruitment in

[421] Rogelio Flores Delgado to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, January 7, 1960; Rogelio Flores Delgado to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, February 3, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, February 15, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, March 3, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, March 22, 1960; Francisco Zárate Vidal to Rogelio Flores Delgado, March 30, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Guillermo Coria Villegas, no date [we can infer it was sent in early May 1960]. All in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

Empalme. The selected aspirantes were generally given a few days to travel to the recruitment station and await their turn there. The problem with this system was that aspirantes oftentimes waited weeks to hear their names called, despite the fact that they had been sent there by the labor pool with previous authorization from the central government. As Amezcua Rodríguez noted in a letter to Guillermo Coria Villegas, Baja California's representative at the Empalme recruiting station, many Baja California residents traveling to Empalme had limited funds that quickly ran out during the many days of waiting. Pressed by returning aspirantes who accused Coria Villegas of ineptitude, Amezcua Rodríguez instructed the state representative to demand that the Ministry of the Interior's orders be followed and that the state's aspirantes receive their promised contracts. On May 31, 1960, Amezcua Rodríguez reported that of the 3,300 aspirantes the Ministry of the Interior had authorized to be contracted in Empalme, 1,200 were still awaiting their turn and some of these wanted to return to Mexicali and wait there for their contract opportunity. Amezcua Rodríguez asked that the state negotiate a discount from the Sonora-Baja California and Sud-Pacifico railways to help the men return to their homes. Later that year, in December, Amezcua Rodrgíguez again interceded with Mexican authorities on behalf of stranded aspirantes. He forwarded a letter to the head of the Empalme recruiting center that a group of twenty-two Mexicali residents had sent him. In the letter the men explained they had traveled to Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, to pick cotton under promises that they would be granted bracero contracts upon completing their work assignments. The group was still awaiting their turn in Empalme, however, while their families were starving in Mexicali. Unable to purchase

train passes back to Mexicali, the group asked for Amezcua Rodríguez's help, who then turned to Francisco Gazca in Empalme.[422]

However sympathetic Amezcua Rodríguez was towards the aspirantes stranded in Empalme, he did not hold the same consideration towards those who traveled independently to the recruiting station in hopes of obtaining a contract. The head of the labor pool made this clear in June 1961 when Demesia C. Benitez, an Empalme restaurant owner, wrote to Amezcua Rodríguez informing him that she had given refuge to a group of aspirantes from Mexicali. Benitez appealed to Amezcua Rodríguez on behalf of the group and attached a handwritten list with the names of the stranded men. In his reply, Amezcua Rodríguez explained that while eighty-three of the men listed in Benitez's letter belonged to the state's "Group three" (the group that was next for contracting), forty-seven others belonged to groups with lower priority, and had even less reason for traveling to Empalme. Considering that the men had been warned to stay in Mexicali, Amezcua Rodríguez advised Benitez to tell the group to return to their homes immediately. The labor pool, in other words, would not spend its resources on aspirantes who did not wait for their referral.[423]

Baja California's labor pool also confronted a complicated task in balancing the interests of the Mexicali Valley's cotton growers and the state's dependence on bracero wages. In July 1960, for instance, Amezcua Rodríguez asked cotton planters to retain the

---

[422] Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Guillermo Coria, no date [we can infer it was sent in early May 1960]; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Guillermo Coria Villegas, May 12, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Francisco Gasca, May 16, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Guillermo Coria Villegas, May 26, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, May 31, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Francisco Gazca M., December 16, 1960. All in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[423] Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Demesia C. Benitez, June 15, 1961, folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

workers they had employed during the picking season and to rotate them in order to keep a larger number employed. He was unsure whether the 3,300 braceros who had emigrated to the United States in April and May of that year would return to the region in August or September, creating a worker surplus, or if they would be re-contracted in the United States, leaving the Mexicali Valley with fewer workers from October through December. He urged cotton growers to visit the labor pool's office to inform the agency how many workers each farmer would need, noting that Mexicali had between 5,000 and 6,000 unemployed workers. Like the USES, Baja California's labor pool struggled to distinguish between real labor needs and the exaggerated claims of labor shortages that Mexican growers also liked to make. Supplying cheap labor to agribusiness was no easy task.

Baja California's large number of jobless residents certainly drove the state to become a merchant of labor that supplied workers not only to the United States, but also to cotton growers in the neighboring state of Sonora. Amezcua Rodríguez referred at least 400 workers to cotton picking jobs in Sonora in August 1960. This cooperation with another agricultural region, though, soon brought problems for the labor pool. Before Amezcua Rodríguez could refer more workers, the *Liga Agraria Estatal* (State Agrarian League) sent a complaint to Baja California's General Secretary arguing that a Sonora cotton growers' association had opened an office across from the labor pool headquarters and was siphoning off workers that the Mexicali cotton growers needed. But the employment that these workers found in Sonora was extremely brief, for the pickers who had gone to the Yaqui Valley in August were ready to return to Mexicali in October. This prompted Amezcua Rodríguez to assess the Mexicali Valley's actual need for cotton

pickers. If Mexicali cotton growers were struggling to find workers, Amezcua Rodríguez told an agent of the *Banco Ejidal* (Ejido Bank), this was because their wage rates were too low. In a letter to another farm leader, the labor pool manager said his office calculated the Mexicali Valley had a labor force of 28,700 cotton pickers, a figure that suggested there was no worker shortage in the region. Amezcua Rodríguez warned farm leaders that if this labor force was not put to work or given help to emigrate to the United States, they would then become a problem for the government of Baja California.[424]

Braceros, Party Members, and the Corporatist State

Securing cotton pickers for the Mexicali Valley and reducing unemployment among the city's residents were the two public objectives of Baja California's labor pool. The state, nevertheless, had a third reason for managing labor and migration under the Bracero Program. The guest worker program, Mexico's political elite soon realized, also gave them the opportunity to expand the corporatist state it began building in the 1930s. As Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds have noted, Mexico's ruling party, the PRI, was "organized on a corporatist structure of interest groups: peasants, urban labor, and a more amorphous sector of middle-class organizations."[425] Baja California was no exception to this kind of political organization, but as a new state it did have a different political landscape. The majority of its residents were internal

[424] Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Alberto Flores Valenzuela, July 30, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Alfonso Garzon S., July 30, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Jesús Nieblas, no date, August 15, 1960, August 17, 1960, August 19, 1960, and August 22, 1960; Liga Agraria Estatal to José Luis Noriega, August 30, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Germán Canseco Noriega, October 18, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to J. Maria Martínez Tapia, October 19, 1960. All in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[425] Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 480.

migrants who created new organizations and institutions as they settled in the borderlands. The residents of Mexicali's colonia Baja California, for instance, had developed a close relationship with state authorities in 1955 after they were displaced by a flood and the city and state governments helped them relocate to a new colonia. They then formed an organization that Maldonado Sandez's administration soon recognized for its "disciplined" efforts to emigrate as braceros and promptly received contracts in 1956 (see chapter 3). This clientelism continued and expanded as Baja California institutionalized its role as a merchant of labor.

As the administrators of the Bracero Program, Mexican states and the central government possessed an enormous power that attracted citizens into the fold of the state. Driven by the prospect of bracero contracts, Baja California's labor groups and other types of organizations became actively involved in building a corporatist relationship with the Mexican government at its different levels. They showed, for example, impressive unity and cooperation in an August 1956 letter that a coalition sent to Maldonado Sandez. Eighteen organizations, most of them from Mexicali, came together on behalf of "thousands of Mexicali Valley residents" to ask the governor to intercede with the Mexican president and the Ministry of the Interior to resume bracero contracting for Baja California residents—and that bracero selection and recruitment be done in Mexicali to save thousands of aspirantes the expensive and complicated trip to Empalme. The coalition argued that bracero emigration would not hurt the local economy because Baja California controlled migrants' cross-border mobility through the labor pool. Bracero emigration, they contended, was beneficial to the state because these men would earn wages to support their families, keeping them from becoming public charges. They

assured Maldonado Sandez that upon completing their work contracts these men would "return here, to our Mexico, to our fatherland, where we have our homes, our families, our friends, our habitual occupations interrupted today by unemployment." The coalition concluded the letter calling themselves the governor's "supporters (*partidarios*), partners in struggle, and friends."[426]

The organizations that came together in August 1956 formed the *Liga Municipal de Organizaciones Populares* that began requesting bracero contracts on behalf of Baja California residents in February 1957. The *Liga Municipal* was affiliated with the *Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares* (National Confederation of Popular Organizations, or CNOP). According to John W. Sherman, CNOP was "the most important subsection" of the PRI and helped the ruling party consolidate power in Mexico City and across the country.[427] This affiliation to one of the largest national associations gave the *Liga Municipal* and the organizations it comprised a larger political presence and a direct connection to local and national leaders. By May 1957 the *Liga Municipal* had become an integral part of the labor pool and of the regional management of the Bracero Program, compiling its own lists of aspirantes that it then forwarded to the

---

[426] *Unión de Trabajadores Agrícolas No Asalariados de Baja California; Unión de Residentes de la Colonia Baja California; Grupo San Luis, de La Colonia Santa Clara; Unión de Inquilinos y Colonos del Valle de Mexicali; Junta de Mejoramientos Materiales 'Gabriel Leyva Velázquez' De La Colonia Orizaba; Grupo de Actividades Diversas de la Colonia Wisteria; Federación Estatal de Colonias Proletarias; Sindicato de Obreros y Campesinos 'Guadalupe Victoria' CROM; Liga General de Obreros y Campesinos del Valle de Mexicali CROM; Grupo 'Campeche' Delegación de Cuervos; Asociación Civil de Colonos de Actividades Diversas de la Colonia Cuauhtémoc; Comité Pro-Donadores y Donativos de Sangre; Grupo de la Colonia 'Valdez;' Grupo 'Machi R. López' de Laguna Salada; Grupo 'Francisco Javier Mina' de San Felipe; Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos del Estado; Federación de Trabajadores del Estado de Baja California CTM; Confederación Revolucionaria de Agrupaciones Obreras y Campesinas CROC* to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, August 27, 1956, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[427] John W. Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," in *The Oxford History of Mexico,* ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 577.

labor pool to be contracted in Empalme. Of the 1,200 aspirantes who received contracts through Baja California that May, 600 were affiliated with CNOP.[428] This system continued in later years, as the labor pool called upon its affiliated organizations to submit their lists of aspirantes every new contracting season.[429]

As the Mexican state incorporated labor groups and other political organizations into the process of aspirante registration, it ensured its control over the Bracero Program through the tried and true measure of cooptation. Jiménez Arvizu explained to the Central Office of Emigrant Workers in August 1959 that the labor pool was working exclusively with CTM, CROC, CROM, CNC, *Liga Agraria Estatal*, *Liga de Comunidades Agrarias*, members of the *Partido Popular*, and other organizations affiliated with the PRI.[430] While some groups, such as CTM, were more subservient to the state than the "more belligerent but still coopted" CROC, the range and number of organizations gave the Mexican government public legitimacy and power.[431] In turn, the members of these organizations received small rewards, such as bracero contracts. In addition, as Pedro Amezcua reported to Esquivel Méndez in March 1960, all aspirantes were advised to join the PRI. Of the 6,638 aspirantes who labored in the Mexicali Valley and obtained a place in the state's aspirante list, 523 were affiliated with CTM, 192 with CROM, 2,162 with

---

[428] Benjamín Escandón to Braulio Maldonado Sandez, May 9, 1957; Benjamín Escandón to Juan Jiménez Arvizu, May 23, 1957, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC. Vicente Cervantes García to Mario Tapia Ponce, May 29, 1957, folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[429] Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Liga de Comunidades Agrarias, Unión Agrícola Regiona, CTM, CROC, CROM, and COC, November 21, 1959; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to COC, CROC, CROM, CTM, December 19, 1960. All in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[430] The full names of these unions were: CTM: *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos;* CROC: *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos;* CROM: *Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos*; and CNC: *Confederación Nacional Campesina.* Juan Jiménez Arvizu to Mario Tapia Ponce, August 4, 1959, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

[431] Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," 587.

CNOP, 2,043 with the PRI's Youth Directorate, and 1,718 with the PRI's Municipal Committee. In Tijuana, aspirantes were informed that the two main requirements to be added to the aspirante list were residence in Baja California and affiliation with a union.[432]

When independent groups attempted to gain access to bracero contracts, the state worked quickly to exclude them. In October 1960, for instance, a group calling themselves the *Unión de Trabajadores del Campo del Valle de Mexicali* (Mexicali Valley Agricultural Workers Union) petitioned the state of Baja California for bracero contracts. Amezcua Rodríguez responded that the *Unión de Trabajadores de Baja California,* affiliated with the CNOP, was the only farmworker union registered with the labor pool and that it was this organization that registered aspirantes. The *Unión de Trabajadores del Campo del Valle de Mexicali,* he stated, did not exist.[433] Any individual or organization that threatened the state's monopoly over bracero contracts faced certain prosecution. Paula Medina, the woman who at one point served as the general secretary of the *Grupo San Luis,* became a target of the labor pool once state officials learned she was allegedly recruiting aspirantes outside of the Bracero Program's official channels. Though active in 1956 and 1957, Medina and the San Luis Group disappeared from the

[432] Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, March 3, 1960; Pedro Amezcua to Xicotencalt Leyva Alemán, March 23, 1960. Both in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[433] Francisco Zarate Vidal to Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez, October 14, 1960; Pedro Amezcua Rodríguez to Esteban Avalos and Ernesto Ortega, October 15, 1960. Both in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

official record after she was warned to cease her unlawful activities or face legal prosecution.[434]

Mexico's corporatist structure opened the door for widespread corruption and graft based on the bribe, or *mordida*. After Miguel Alemán Valdés amassed a large fortune during his presidency, the PRI selected Adolfo Ruiz Cortines as the next Mexican president in 1952 in a failed effort to reduce corruption.[435] These national patterns were reflected in Mexicali as well, where the organizations affiliated to the labor pool took advantage of their institutional connections to extract money from aspirantes. The *Unión de Trabajadores del Campo Residentes de Baja California* and the *Unión 'General Lázaro Cárdenas,'* for instance, charged aspirantes elevated fees to join their groups and obtain a place on Baja California's aspirante list. In a gesture that revealed how powerful the PRI had become in the administration of the Bracero Program, Amezcua Rodríguez instructed the *Liga Municipal* to correct these practices because they hurt the party's public image.[436] At other times the problem was not the high fees that these organizations collected, but the fact that they were producing legal documents that only city governments were authorized to distribute. The manager of the labor pool and Mexicali's

[434] Vicente Cervantes García to Rosendo Rodríguez, January 30, 1958; Rosendo Rodríguez to Presidente Municipal, January 31, 1958. Both in folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[435] Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle and Its Collapse," 581; Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History,* 483.
[436] Pedro Amezcua to Comité de la Liga Municipal de Organizaciones Populares, February 6, 1960; Comité de la Liga de Organizaciones Populares to David Vazquez, February 9, 1960. Both in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

mayor were forced to remind labor unions more than once that they were not authorized to provide aspirantes residence letters.[437]

The End of the Special Program

While the PRI utilized the Bracero Program to boost its power in Baja California, Imperial Valley growers made use of the Special Program to generate large profits at the expense of farmworkers. Despite Mexican opposition to the Special Program's disciplinary power, the system continued for several more years, finally ending in 1960. Always a step ahead of the changes occurring in the Bracero Program, the IVFA mailed its members the association's annual report in March 1960. In it, the IVFA warned growers about the end of the Special Program and advised: "we urge all growers to secure domestic workers for their special jobs. Many Mexicans are able to get regular immigration papers and these people together with a few domestic workers will enable growers to avoid serious hardships when specials are discontinued."[438] As labor unions and other groups increased their political pressure to end the Bracero Program, Imperial Valley growers must have seen the end of the Special Program in 1960 as an undeniable signal that the end of the Bracero Program was also inevitable.

As advised by the IVFA, Imperial Valley growers rushed to secure their access to workers they had employed for years under the Special Program. They achieved this by providing braceros the letters of support necessary to become legal permanent

---

[437] Juan Jiménez Arvizu to Benjamín Escandón, May 11, 1957, folder 1, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC; Federico Marínez Manautou to Srio. Gral. del Comitee Ejecutivo Regional del PRI Mexicali, June 10, 1960, folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[438] "Annual Report of the Officers and Directors to the Membership of Imperial Valley Farmers' Association at the Annual Meeting," March 31, 1960, folder 08, box 44, Galarza Papers.

residents. In this way, many of the Mexican males who had labored in the Imperial Valley as Specials, and lived in Mexicali accompanied by their families, continued commuting across the US-Mexico border, but now as green card holders. Alberto Magallón Jiménez, for instance, became a legal permanent resident after working as a Special bracero in the Imperial Valley for several years. His employer, who allowed him to commute daily across the border to live with his family in Mexicali, provided him a support letter guaranteeing that he would have steady employment as a legal permanent resident. Similarly, Higinio López's employer helped him apply for a green card knowing that the Bracero Program was ending soon. Like others, López had worked as a Special in the Imperial Valley and his family had moved to Mexicali in 1956 to be closer to him. He obtained legal permanent residence in 1961 and continued living in Mexicali and commuting to his work in Brawley every day.[439]

When growers became important not only as employers, but also as green card sponsors, the "good boss" became more crucial to a worker's success than ever before. When the Bracero History Archive asked Horacio Andrejol to share his main impressions about the Bracero Program, for instance, he observed that "If you had a very good boss, everything was very good." When he began laboring in the Imperial Valley in the late 1950s, Andrejol quickly obtained the status of Special bracero. By 1961, he had become a permanent resident of the United States with the legal help of his employer and soon after married a woman from his hometown in Sonora. When Andrejol's wife moved to Mexicali, his employer again helped him obtain legal residence for her. She lived in

[439] Murillo, Grisel, "Higinio López Silva," in Bracero History Archive, Item #397, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/397 (accessed October 15, 2015).

Mexicali for nine months while she waited for her green card, and Andrejol visited her every other weekend. His experience in the United States, the former bracero concluded, had been largely positive because he received legal support from his employer at various critical times.[440] Like Andrejol, Leonardo Chavira Carrillo also developed a strong relationship with his employer while working as an unauthorized worker. He achieved this by requesting his transfer to the same employer with every new contract he acquired under the Bracero Program. After several years of long-distance separation, Chavira Carrillo's family relocated to Mexicali from their home in the Mexican state of Jalisco. He visited them every weekend in Mexicali while he worked in Thermal, California. Chavira Carrillo owned a car during these years and was thus able to navigate the eighty miles between Mexicali and Thermal with more ease than those who depended on rides or public transportation. His employer provided Chavira Carrillo the support letter he needed to become a legal permanent resident in 1959. That same year, Chavira Carrillo's family moved to Mexicali, pointing to the importance of his new legal status in the family's decision to resettle to the Mexican north. When his wife and five children also obtained green cards several years later, it was again thanks to Chavira Carrillo's longtime employer.[441]

As the oral histories of former braceros help illustrate, the willingness with which Imperial Valley growers helped braceros obtain green cards was largely the result of the strong social networks that the Bracero Program had generated in the borderlands region.

---

[440] Alejandra Díaz, "Horacio Andrejol," in Bracero History Archive, Item #664, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show /664 (accessed February 15, 2011).
[441] Veronica Cortez, "Leonardo Chavira Carrillo," in Bracero History Archive, Item #350, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/350 (accessed February 15, 2011). The name of Chavira Carrillo's wife is not provided.

The fact that more and more braceros began shifting their legal status around 1960, however, also highlights the large power that growers enjoyed in shaping the workforce they employed. The timing, in other words, reveals how growers' own self-interest is what motivated them to assist their employees with their visa applications. We can see this in the case of Ramón Flores González. He began working as an irrigator in Blythe after his brother's employer requested his transfer from another Imperial Valley farm. After working there for four years, Flores González terminated his bracero contract because the company that employed him offered to help him obtain permanent residence in the United States.[442] What is important to note here is that Flores González began this legal process in July 1960, four months after the IVFA warned its members that the Special Program was scheduled to end that July. Similarly, Josefina Fajardo's husband was working in Mexicali when he received an offer from a previous employer to apply for legal residence with the grower's help. With legal permanent residence, Fajardo's husband commuted daily across the border to his job in Holtville (approximately thirty-two miles northeast of Mexicali).[443]

Migrant farm workers depended on employers for the support letters that assured the INS that they would not become public charges as legal residents. And although many braceros began their application process for a US visa when they were encouraged by employers, others did not wait for an employer to make the offer and began the process on their own. Heriberto Rivas Lugo, for example, worked as a bracero

---

[442] Acosta, Anais, "Ramón Flores González," in Bracero History Archive, Item #286, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/286 (accessed October 15, 2015).
[443] Veronica Cortez, "Josefina Fajardo," in Bracero History Archive, Item #422, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/422 (accessed March 1, 2016).

in the Imperial Valley and often visited Mexicali on Saturday nights. He met a Chinese Mexican man named Mario Chan during one of these outings. Fluent in Spanish and English, Chan ran a small legal services business in Mexicali and offered to help Rivas Lugo obtain legal permanent residence. If Rivas Lugo received a green card, the two parties agreed, he would pay Chan eighty dollars for his help. Since Rivas Lugo was not sure his Imperial Valley employer would support his immigration application, he and Chan wrote to a previous employer in the Sacramento area. Motivated by the prospect of seeing a good worker return to his farm, or by a disinterested desire to help a previous employee, the Sacramento grower agreed to help Rivas Lugo. Thanks to his previous employer and to Chan, Rivas Lugo acquired legal permanent residence in 1958. As he made sure to underscore in his oral history interview, Rivas Lugo was one of the first braceros to gain legal permanent residence, several years before a wave of braceros began receiving green cards in the early 1960s.[444]

Chan was not the only Mexicali entrepreneur to recognize the large profits that the business of green card applications could yield. Fortunato Adrián Parra was the owner of the *Agencia de Negocios 'El Minutito'* (The "Quick Minute" Business Agency) and two other businesses. He found himself the subject of police investigations in 1961 after mailing a letter to dozens of Imperial Valley growers offering the services of workers "such as irrigators, laborers for farm and factories, maide [*sic*], and tractor drivers, chauffers [*sic*], and so on." If the growers were interested in employing the workers that Parra guaranteed would work for them for at least a year, Parra explained, "you will have

[444] Perla Guerrero, "Heriberto Rivas Lugo," in Bracero History Archive, Item #273, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/273 (accessed March 2, 2016).

only to sead [*sic*] them thru [*sic*] me an offer of work. (affidavit of employment)." Upon receiving one of these letters, the manager of Desert Growers Inc. showed it to the manager of the bracero reception center in El Centro, who then forwarded the letter to the Mexican Consul at Calexico, who subsequently informed the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Mexico City about the case. The report about Parra's letter made a full circle when the Ministry mailed Baja California's governor a copy of the letter requesting that the Mexicali police investigate Parra's activity. During his interrogation, Parra argued he was not violating Mexican law recruiting workers outside of the Bracero Program. If Imperial Valley employers agreed to provide employment and support letters to his Mexicali clients, Parra claimed, he would then process their visa applications. He said he charged sixty dollars for completing his clients' green card applications. Federal authorities in Mexicali informed Parra that he could not offer Mexican citizens work in the United States nor find them employment. He could, however, continue completing clients' legal forms for the normal fees. According to the police reports that the governor's office mailed to Mexico City, Parra was warned to desist from contacting Imperial Valley growers but allowed to continue operating his business.[445]

Following the advice of their employers or paying men like Chan or Parra to fill their paperwork (and possibly find them sponsors), more and more migrant workers applied for legal permanent residence in the early 1960s. Kitty Calavita has shown that the State, Labor, and Justice Departments agreed to bar potential braceros from receiving

[445] Rogelio Flores Delgado to Eligio Esquivel Méndez, May 12, 1961; Fortunato Adrian Parra to [blank], no date; José Luis Noriega to Arturo Monges Sánchez, May 23, 1961; Arturo Monges Sánchez to José Luis Noriega, June 27, 1961; and Anselmo Márquez Armenta to Jefe de la Policía Judicial del Estado, June 23, 1961. All in folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.

permanent immigrant status in the 1950s. The end of the Special Program in 1960, however, prompted the INS and State Department to relax the ban on green cards, "allowing a number of former employers of Specials to bring their braceros in through regular immigration channels."[446] On the Mexican side, this caused some bureaucratic confusion. On May 4, 1962, for instance, José Manuel Cortazar Ibero, the head of Baja California's labor pool, reported to the Ministry of the Interior that American authorities were rejecting all individuals who had started a legal migration process. In light of this, Cortazar, explained, his office would investigate which aspirantes had begun this process and cancel their *Constancias* (the letters that certified aspirantes as eligible for participation in the Bracero Program)[447]

The relationship of mutual dependence that some employers developed with their migrant workers also caused misunderstandings and false expectations in some cases. After helping their employees obtain green cards, some employers expected them to continue working for them as a sign of appreciation for the legal help they had provided them. Some former braceros, like Higinio López, did not feel beholden to their green card sponsors.[448] López's employer, a Spaniard named Mariano Sánchez, paid $90 to a Mexicali lawyer to process his visa application. This support, however, had strings attached. López's green card arrived at Sánchez's address and the grower retained the green card knowing that López was no longer happy working for him. Although grateful for the help Sánchez had provided him, López knew that Sánchez underpaid him and

---

[446] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 158-159.
[447] José Manuel Cortazar Ibero to Rogelio Flores Delgado, May 4, 1962, folder 2, expediente 5, caja 328, fondo Gobierno del Estado, AHEBC.
[448] Grisel Murillo, "Higinio López Silva," in Bracero History Archive, Item #397, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/397 (accessed March 2, 2016).

ultimately sought employment with other growers in the Imperial Valley.[449] This reorganization of the labor market also occurred in the Tijuana-San Diego borderlands region. In his ethnographic study of Tijuana's border commuters, Sergio Chávez found that the first critical mass of border commuters in that region were the braceros who labored on San Diego farms. Like their Imperial Valley counterparts, San Diego growers encouraged some of their workers to apply for legal permanent residence. One of these former braceros told Chávez that he was part of a group of twenty-five men who obtained green cards with the help of their employer. Despite their employer's help, the border commuter noted, some of his fellow braceros forgot about the person who had lent them a hand and found employment elsewhere shortly after getting their green cards.[450]

Denouncing the New Racket

One of the individuals who most strongly opposed the employment of border commuters in the Imperial Valley was Benjamin Yellen, a Brawley physician and activist. Yellen became involved in Bracero Program issues in the late 1950s after witnessing the systematic medical malpractices and medical insurance fraud that guest workers were subject to in the Imperial Valley. Ezequiel Arismendi, for instance, received medical treatment from a woman named Elvira Ruiz in March 1958 and spent the following six weeks in the hospital suffering from a "chronic" bladder condition. Upon his release from the hospital, Arismendi sued Harold Collins, who represented the Pan American Underwriters insurance company in El Centro. According to Arismendi's

[449] Murillo, Grisel, "Higinio López Silva," in Bracero History Archive, Item #397, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/397 (accessed October 15, 2015).
[450] Chávez, *Border Lives,* chapter 2.

lawsuit, Collins employed Ruiz knowing that she was not a licensed doctor or nurse and was defrauding braceros of their right to see a doctor of their choice.[451] In another case, Rosalio Coronado Rodriguez was employed by Desert Growers, Inc. and underwent surgery in September 1958 for appendicitis. After spending two weeks in a hospital in Calexico, Coronado Rodriguez went to Mexicali to convalesce and spent the following four months recuperating from his surgery. After this period, however, his "work contract was terminated" and he was "kicked out to Mexicali, Mexico without any money and without any job and not able to work." Noting that the association that employed him had collected $4.00 from his monthly wages to pay for his health and accident insurance, Coronado Rodriguez believed he was owed $230.00 for seventeen weeks of disability insurance.[452] Yellen collected these claims and others, such as that of a widow seeking compensation for the accidental death of her husband, or of a former bracero demanding his owed wages after a sudden termination.[453]

Although initially sympathetic to the plight of Mexican guest workers, Yellen's attitude had shifted by 1962. Whereas before he collected testimonies from aggrieved braceros, the Brawley physician now focused his activism on documenting the complaints of US citizens and longtime residents. Ernest R. Thomas, for instance, stated that he received a California Farm Placement referral to work for the IVFA. The person he spoke with at the IVFA office, who Thomas described as "a young Mexican," took his referral card but did not offer him employment. This occurred, he observed, while the

[451] "Ezequiel Arismendi Arismendi vs. Harold Collins," folder 1, box 05, Yellen Papers.
[452] Statement by Rosalio Coronado Rodriguez, May 12, 1959, folder 19, box 5, Yellen Papers.
[453] Statement by Josefina Cardenas Diaz de Contreras, May 25, 1959; Statement by Jose Manuel Preciado Garcia, October 5, 1959. Both in folder 19, box 5, Yellen Papers.

association employed braceros. In the written statement Thomas provided Yellen, he argued "[He] should have been given work and one of the braceros taken off work."[454] Besides the employment of braceros, farm workers protested the methods that the IVFA utilized to justify their continued use of migrant labor. The IVFA turned Roosevelt Scott away, for example, because the association held records indicating he had quit two jobs in the El Centro area. To dispute his blacklisting, Scott stated he could do many jobs in the lettuce harvest, but that he could not cut lettuce because he had a weak back. To this, the IVFA administrator replied: "You can wait around and maybe the head boss will give you a job." Scott did not "wait around," and instead went to see Yellen to file a claim against the growers' association.

Yellen combined his local efforts collecting testimonies from workers displaced by braceros and border commuters with a larger strategy of bringing national attention to the region's changing labor market. In a letter to the US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Yellen pointed out that the Imperial Valley had a population of 75,000 while the Mexicali Valley had 250,000 residents. He affirmed the Bracero Program was displacing not only those who did stoop labor, but also those who drove tractors and labored in sheds, warehouses, and other work spaces related to agriculture. The Bracero Program was not the only threat that Imperial Valley residents confronted, however, as the region's employers had conceived the "idea to bring Mexicans in as legal immigrants" to further displace US residents and depress wages. "So a flood of legal immigrants were [*sic*] brought in," Yellen noted, "However, they do not live in the U.S. They live in Mexico

[454] Statement by Ernest R. Thomas, December 17, 1962, folder 1, box 05, Yellen Papers.

and cross the border to do every sort of work." The problem was not only that the Mexicali Valley had a population more than three times the size of the Imperial Valley's, and Mexicali residents could "THEORETICALLY … TAKE OVER EVERY JOB IN IMPERIAL VALLEY" (emphasis in original), but also that they were lowering wages for the entire region. While braceros were supposed to earn a minimum hourly wage of $1.00, Yellen observed, "These poor people [border commuters] will work for 50 cents an hour."

The Brawley doctor found another opportunity to expose the Imperial Valley's labor market changes when the Texas AFL-CIO sued the federal government in 1962 to prohibit the employment of green card commuters in south Texas. In his correspondence with the secretary treasurer of the union, Yellen made clear the connections he saw between the Imperial Valley and south Texas: "WE [the Imperial Valley] HAVE THE SAME PROBLEM HERE. IT IS TOUGH ON FARMWORKERS AND ALSO NON FARMWORKERS. MERCHANTS ARE GOING BROKE" (emphasis in original).[455] Even before he contacted the union, Yellen addressed his complaints to the judge presiding over the case and indicated his desire to enter as amicus curiae. "The big farmers of Imperial Valley," Yellen insisted, "have gone into a bigtime operation of offering jobs to Mexicans and paying the money involved in becoming legal immigrants ON THE EXPECTATION THAT THE IMMIGRANT WILL THEN LIVE IN MEXICO AND CROSS THE BORDER TO WORK. There is no such thing as bringing the family of the Mexican into the United States." According to the Brawley doctor, border

[455] Ben Yellen to Roy R. Evans, November 30, 1962, folder 14, box 05, Yellen Papers.

commuters were "unable to move to the United States or to bring [their] famil[ies] in as legal immigrants" because their wages were even lower than what braceros were guaranteed under the international agreement. Adding that "If there ever was a Racket, this [was] it," Yellen pointed to the way employers were misusing immigration law to employ a migrant workforce that was not resident in the United States.[456] These employers were lowering labor costs by externalizing workers' social reproduction to Mexicali.

Neither Yellen nor the Texas AFL-CIO was the first to protest the increasing numbers of legal permanent residents working in agriculture. Like Yellen, who called border commuters "fake" and "so-called" legal immigrants, Frank L. Noakes, co-chairman of the joint United States and Mexico Trade Union Committee, denounced the "legalized wetbacks" who threatened both American and contracted workers. The labor leader made this statement in April 1957 at the Union Committee's fourth conference held in Nogales, Sonora. According to Noakes, who was also the secretary treasurer of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (AFL-CIO), unauthorized workers had "just about dried up" thanks to the INS and its improved border enforcement. "'Today's problem,' [Noakes] said, 'is that of legalized wetbackism, the wholesale issuance of visas, 'special permits' and 'white cards' to Mexican workers not included in the international agreement quota.'"[457] Labor leaders were strongly opposed to the legal migration of former braceros because these workers not only depressed wages, but also undermined unionization efforts. Calavita found that Imperial Valley growers preferred

[456] Ben Yellen to The Judge, November 15, 1962, folder 14, box 05, Yellen Papers.
[457] "'Legalized Wetbacks' Said Labor Problem," *Brawley News,* April 2, 1957, pg. 1.

green card holders because they "'[felt] that this [was] the only way in which they [could] combat efforts to unionize farm laborers in the valley.'"[458]

Imperial Valley growers surely became more interested in employing green card holders after the 1961 lettuce strike. The Agricultural Worker's Organizing Committee (AWOC) and United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) organized a lettuce strike in the Imperial Valley in January 1961. They demanded an hourly minimum wage of $1.25 and protested "the use of 9,000 braceros while thousands of domestic workers and their families [went] hungry." The strikers appealed to the braceros working in the valley, asking them to leave the fields and join their union. Some carried signs in Spanish that read "My family does not eat with 85¢ an hour" and "Braceros do not work for 85¢ an hour." In February, the socialist *People's World* reported that labor organizers had collected 2,000 signatures from Imperial Valley residents in support of their cause. Though the strike was ultimately unsuccessful, the extensive press coverage it received during the first months of 1961 exposed the growing tensions between California agribusiness and the impoverished itinerant farm workers who competed with braceros for low wages. News publications like *People's World* began noting that the Imperial Valley was a region of "big operators." Whereas the number of big farms (1,000 acres or more) in the Imperial Valley had been 65 in 1945, the figure had increased to 122 in 1959 as the land consolidated into fewer hands.[459]

---

[458] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 159.

[459] "Farm Labor Slowdown in Imperial Valley," *California AFL-CIO Labor Federation Weekly News Letter*, January 6, 1961, Vol. 2, No. 50; "Fight Flares Over Lettuce Labor," *Oakland Tribune,* February 9, 1961; "Strike Lettuce Growers for $1.25, Recognition," *The Packinghouse Worker,* February 1961, Vol. 21, No. 2; "Citizens back lettuce strikers," *People's World,* February 16, 1961; "The strategic view from Imperial Valley: Union drive to follow the lettuce crop," *People's World,* March 18, 1961. News clippings in folder 4, box 12, and folder 06, box 13, Draper Papers.

Good Spenders or Captive Consumers?

Farm jobs were not the only reason for disputes about the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley. Some members of the Brawley Chamber of Commerce declared in April 1957 that the Bracero Program was hurting local businesses because guest workers made most of their purchases in company stores. Mike Miranda, a labor contractor, argued that "Hiring of local people for the farm work would give jobs to permanent, tax-paying residents who would shop at local stores, and would be more desirable than import laborers, who are required to send a certain amount of money back to Mexico, and who have little money left after paying their employers for food and lodging." Chester Cook, the chamber president, however, was more "moderate" in his appraisal, observing that "farming [was] the backbone of the Valley and that certain considerations [were] due the industry." Miranda was more than likely interested in terminating the Bracero Program because the international labor agreement had substantially reduced labor contractors' importance as middlemen between growers and farmworkers. Others, like the owner of the Imperial Bargain Store, were perhaps more sincere in their criticisms of the guest worker program's effect on local business.[460]

Just as US residents competed with braceros and green card holders for jobs, business owners also vied for workers' earnings. The competition for braceros' business often turned fierce. When US Representative Dalip Singh Saund proposed a bill in March of 1958 that would have limited the size of labor camp stores and the number of trips braceros were allowed to make to Mexico, the IVFA made public its "strong" opposition.

---

[460] "Criticism Leveled At Labor Import: Company Stores Deprive Business Of Sales Here, C.C. Meet Told," *Brawley News,* April 12, 1957, pgs. 1, 6.

The politician then responded that he simply wanted to help Imperial Valley's local merchants receive more bracero dollars. He also declared he was "amazed" by the association's stance and asked if bracero camp managers were running stores like "company stores." According to Saund, braceros' weekly payroll in the Imperial Valley amounted to $400,000 by 1958.[461] Saund's failed proposal illustrates that growers not only were making large profits managing camp stores, but they had also come to accept, and often encourage, workers' constant mobility across the international border. Like labor camp operators, Imperial Valley businessmen were largely cognizant of the economic advantages of a bracero workforce resident in the Imperial Valley.

Several of the complaints that Yellen collected from guest workers in 1959 revealed how important bracero spending had become in the region. Gregorio Tapia Salas was employed by the Desert Growers Association and was charged one dollar per day for room and board. He argued that the barracks where he lived were hot and overcrowded, and that he was threatened with deportation if he did not eat in the camp. The association was making a huge profit housing large numbers of workers, Tapia Salas contended, while it employed workers only half time. Spending his meager earnings on room and board, he was unable to save money to send to his family. Similarly, a group of four men said in their statement they had worked for the IVFA and lived in the Joe Corona camp in Brawley. Although the braceros had been employed for two weeks, none had earned more than fifty-five dollars. This was due to the fact that the association employed more

[461] "I.V. Farm Assn. Hits Saund Bill: 'Strongly' Opposes Curb on Bracero Stores and Trips," *Imperial Valley Press,* March 3, 1958*;* "Saund 'Amazed' At Farmers Assn.: Asks if Bracero Camp Managers Run Stores Like 'Company Stores,'" *Imperial Valley Press,* March 4, 1958.

braceros than were needed. The workers, however, were still expected to pay one dollar per day for room and board.[462]

Bracero Program critics like Henry Anderson estimated that labor camps could make profits as high as a dollar a day per man.[463] Given the potentially high returns that labor camp operators could reach if their boarders remained in their facilities at all times, it is not too surprising that these businessmen tried to restrict workers' mobility. Gildardo Martínez Díaz and Basilio de la Cruz Ron protested that the manager of the labor camp where they lived strategically held on to their checks until Monday to force them to remain in the labor camp and eat their meals there over the weekend. Besides the unscrupulous strategies that some businessmen employed to maximize their profits, the men's complaint also revealed their expectation that they would be able to go to Mexicali during weekends to visit family or seek entertainment. Bracero mobility across the border was an essential characteristic of the guest worker program by the late 1950s. Their free circulation to and from Mexicali, moreover, was not the only kind of mobility that many braceros expected in the Imperial Valley. With a third bracero joining their complaints, Martínez Díaz and de la Cruz Ron again raised complaints against their labor camp operator. This time it concerned food. In their statement, the men outlined their "desire to eat in the City of Brawley at the cantinas or at the homes of the women who do home cooking. Some of us who live in Mexicali want to eat at home and commute to our work." Although the braceros claimed that one or more of them were Mexicali residents,

---

[462] Statement by Gregorio Tapia Salas, July 19, 1959; Statement by Carlos Desiderio Torres, Marciano Desiderio Torres, Olimpio Desiderio Torres, and Pedro Jiménez Velazco, September 22, 1959, folder 19, box 5, Yellen Papers.
[463] Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 98-99.

the men lived in the IVFA camp on North Imperial Avenue in Brawley.[464] Cognizant of their basic rights, these braceros were not asking anything unusual. Erasmo Gamboa has demonstrated that some of the braceros who labored in the Pacific Northwest exercised their right to eat wherever they pleased, patronizing local restaurants until they grew tired of the menus.[465] What was more unusual, and particular to the border region, was their desire to eat and/or live in Mexicali and commute from there.

By 1963 the future of farm labor in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands was foretold. Mexican authorities and Imperial Valley growers constructed a transborder labor regime that connected both sides of the border through mutual dependence. Baja California relieved the pressures of unemployment by encouraging its residents to work seasonally in the Imperial Valley and spend their dollar earnings in Mexico. Growers, moreover, showed much forethought and vision in preparing their bracero workforce for the end of the guest worker program. As before, braceros, green card holders, and the US residents they displaced continued paying for the price of cheap labor.

---

[464] Statement by Gildardo Martinez Díaz and Basilio de la Cruz Ron, July 20, 1959; Statement by Ramon Lopez Cortez, Gildardo Martínez Díaz, and Basilio de la Cruz Ron, July 18, 1959. Both in folder 19, box 5, Yellen Papers.

[465] Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 102.

Chapter 5: "Stop these green card braceros": The End of the Bracero Program and the Rise of a Border Commuter Labor Regime, 1964–1969

With an article titled "Mexican Workers Still Come to U.S.: Those With Immigrant Cards Harvest California Crops," the *New York Times* explained to its national audience in April 1965 how a small agricultural region on the US-Mexico border was coping with the end of the Bracero Program. When *New York Times* correspondent Paul P. Kennedy visited the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands, he found a region well adjusted to the end of the binational labor program. Green cards, Kennedy argued, had "become the outstanding success symbol of this thriving city on the California border [referring to Mexicali]" where about 5,000 individuals had legal resident status in the United States. As a growing labor force in the region, green card holders were "one of the pivotal factors in the growing controversy between the United States Department of Labor and the large planters" in the Imperial Valley.

Congress had allowed the Bracero Program to expire in December 1964 amid assurances that growers would be able to secure enough domestic workers if hourly wages were increased to $1.40. "Now, in the Imperial and Joaquin Valleys at least," Kennedy asserted, "the green card holders are the farm labor elite." Though considered legal permanent residents of the United States, these green card holders lived in Mexicali and crossed the border into Calexico; there, they congregated in a "staging area" where labor contractors picked them up in school buses. While some commuted every day to fields as far as 125 miles north of the border, others spent the week in California and returned to Mexicali on the weekends. Between 200,000 and 400,000 men had labored

under the Bracero Program every year, remitting around $35 million to their homes in Mexico. Although Mexico "as a whole" was affected by the end of the binational agreement, Mexican border towns like Mexicali were doing better. Gustavo Aubanel, governor of Baja California, "said the termination of the bracero treaty, as much as he regretted it, actually helped his state. The heavy flood of green card holders was bringing in more dollars than the braceros did." While green card holders earned between $1.05 and $1.10 an hour in California's valleys, they earned only about $1.92 (dollars) for a full day's work in the Mexicali Valley.[466]

From Braceros to Green Card Commuters

The labor regime dependent on border commuters that the *New York Times* described in 1965 had been long in the making in the Imperial Valley. Although commuter workers had been part of the Imperial Valley's labor market since the early twentieth century, the Bracero Program generated the conditions for this system to operate at a far larger scale than ever before. The program, first of all, brought an ever-growing population of cheap labor to the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands from central Mexico. The gendered restrictions of the guest worker program, moreover, ensured that all contract workers were men who migrated to the United States without their families. As single men, these workers were an ideal labor force that maintained the costs of its social reproduction in Mexico. When the families of braceros and unauthorized workers began settling in Mexicali, they began building a perfect reserve

[466] Paul P. Kennedy, "Mexican Workers Still Come to U.S.: Those With Immigrant Cards Harvest California Crops," *New York Times,* April 18, 1965, pg. 48.

army of labor for the Imperial Valley. First as braceros and then as green card commuters, the men (and later women) who planted and harvested Imperial Valley's crops were cheap labor because they remained Mexican residents despite their permanence in the US labor market.

The end of the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley was a self-evident fact in 1964. The program had become a highly-contested topic across the country, making its continuation politically impractical. Mexican American organizations, organized labor, and religious groups had amplified their criticisms of the guest worker program. Moreover, the CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame,* broadcast the day after Thanksgiving in 1960, had given millions of Americans a glimpse of farm poverty, prompting more Americans to support an end to the importation program. More importantly, the end of the Special Program in 1960 had encouraged many Imperial Valley growers to change the legal status of their workers to legal permanent residents, or green card holders. Imperial Valley agribusiness, this chapter argues, no longer needed the state as a merchant of labor because the region's growers had found in border commuters the perfect cheap labor force. Green card workers did not enjoy any of the legal protections that the Bracero Program was supposed to offer its participants and their recruitment did not require participation in a state-managed bureaucracy. But like braceros, border commuters were Mexican residents working to sustain a Mexican (and thus much lower) cost of living. Rather than a last-minute attempt at saving the guest worker program, the arguments that Imperial Valley growers and their spokesmen made for the continued employment of Mexican immigrants were a veiled justification for the new labor regime reliant on border commuters.

This turn to border commuters naturally provoked strong opposition from those who viewed themselves as victims of the ongoing changes in the region's labor market. Like before, Mexican American workers protested the employment of Mexican immigrants in the Imperial Valley. The Bracero Program—an agricultural program—had limited guest workers to jobs within the realm of farm work. Green card holders, however, could work in almost any occupation and were not bound to an employer or grower association through a work contract. While the lines between "domestic" and "immigrant" workers had been blurry before, the growing population of legal permanent residents in the region made this distinction even less clear. The legal status of border commuters and their eventual domination of the borderlands farm labor market, moreover, forced the next generation of labor leaders to include border commuters into their struggle for higher wages and better working and living conditions.

Baja California also reflected the changes that the end of the Bracero Program produced. As governor Gustavo Aubanel told the *New York Times* in April 1965, Baja California had not suffered as predicted because many former braceros continued working in California as legal permanent residents of the United States. However, the new legal status of thousands of Baja California residents brought its own set of problems for state and federal authorities. Green card holders remained Mexican citizens until they naturalized as US citizens. Though their legal status provided them the right to reside in the United States, border commuters waived this right and continued living in Mexico. Were they to be treated as "foreigners," as some border commuters insisted? The economic importance of these dollar earners in the Mexican borderlands underscored the role that Baja California and all of Mexico had come to play as a supplier of cheap labor

for the United States. A reticent partner in a binational guest worker program two decades earlier, Mexico became a worldwide merchant of labor in 1965 with the start of the Border Industrialization Program.

The End of the Bracero Program

The end of the Bracero Program in 1964 revealed many of the problems and injustices that had long plagued farm labor. In October 1964, less than three months before the end of the program, US Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz observed in a news conference that California alone had a population of 400,000 unemployed workers. The Department of Labor planned to assess whether higher wages attracted more domestic workers to farms and was also considering using provisions from the "new anti-poverty bill and the Manpower Training Act" to recruit workers.[467] President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty program, specifically the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, equipped Mexican Americans with a recognizable language to frame their grievances. Dionicio Morales, a member of the National Citizens Committee for Community Relations, for example, told New York Representative Adam Clayton Powell in a November conference that "One half of all farm workers [were] Mexican-Americans who [were] pitted against the Mexican nationals."[468] The coalition of Mexican American groups clamoring for an end to the Bracero Program made clear the interethnic tensions that the program and increased unauthorized migration had generated since the 1940s. As these problems gained national visibility, Lori Flores has pointed out, Mexican American

[467] "Domestic Help: Seek Labor To Replace Braceros," *Brawley News,* October 12, 1964, pg. 1.
[468] "Roosevelt, Powell Vow Opposition: Bracero Substitutes To Be Fought," *Brawley News,* November 16, 1964, pg. 1.

civil rights leaders joined the "anti-Bracero Program bandwagon" for the increased recognition that their organizations could receive.[469]

In late 1964, when the Labor Department held a nationwide series of hearings on farm labor problems across the country, approximately two hundred individuals testified at the San Francisco hearing held in December. On the third day of the meeting, Phil H. Grice, human relations director for the city of San Jose, California, and a former Methodist minister, went before examiner Clifford P. Grant. Grice told officials that agricultural wages did "not apply to the law of supply and demand" because the Labor Department "fixe[d] wages on the basis of information supplied by growers—often months before harvest." (Perhaps Grice knew this particularly well because San Jose had been a main destination among the occupationally-displaced ethnic Mexicans who left the Imperial Valley during the Bracero Program era.)[470] Ethnic Mexican workers shot back with accounts of their exploitation and the methods that growers utilized to push them out of agricultural jobs. In her statement, Maria Morena, of Visalia, California, "said she recently was paid only 45 cents an hour for chopping cotton in Texas." Fred Orlando, "an elderly farm worker" from Carpenteria, California, stated that "growers discourage[d] domestic workers by expecting inexperienced workers to develop speed within three days. He said that if they failed, their hourly wage was waived and they went on piece-work."[471]

---

[469] Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016),156.
[470] Pitti, *The Devil in the Silicon Valley,* 140.
[471] The other hearings were held in Washington, D.C, Miami, and Dallas. "Bracero Hearings Stormily Continue: Witnesses Differ On Every Aspect: '1-Day' Session Stretched As 200 Appear To Testify," *Brawley News,* December 9, 1964, pg. 1.

As the debates intensified, growers and their representatives disputed the statements about high unemployment and low wages. When a University of California Los Angeles report suggested growers employ persons collecting unemployment insurance to replace braceros, a southern California ranch manager called the report "absolutely useless." Cecil Marks of the Orange County Farm Bureau responded: "'These people think they can do this work, but it's a different matter when they go out into the field.'"[472] Although agricultural work had long been the domain of immigrant workers, Marks seemed to have forgotten that white workers from the Midwest had done this same type of labor throughout California only three decades before. Palmer C. Mendleson, described by the United Press as a "San Francisco agricultural expert," testified at the Labor Department's San Francisco hearing about the efforts that California growers had allegedly made to employ domestic workers. Coachella Valley growers, Mendleson said, had spent several thousand dollars recruiting workers from Alabama but received less than thirty. A Salinas, California company had "imported 46 lettuce pickers from Mississippi and had only 12 left after three months." The "agricultural expert" did not explain why these growers had recruited workers from the South when thousands remained unemployed in California. Nevertheless, Mendleson "guaranteed" that 50 percent of certain important crops would not be harvested in 1966 if braceros did not return to the United States in 1965. "The return of the bracero, he said, is as 'necessary as blood is to the human heart, and the stoppage of which can be just as fatal.'"[473]

---

[472] "Plan for Unemployed: Use As Braceros Criticized," *Brawley News,* October 28, 1964, pg. 7.
[473] "Bracero Hearings Stormily Continue" *Brawley News.*

Throughout that fall, Imperial Valley growers also made themselves heard through old and new proxies. In October, Virgil Pinkley, the editor of the *Brawley News,* blamed California governor Edmund G. Brown for siding with "the labor bosses" and not doing enough to guarantee that California fields would have sufficient workers the following year. He argued Brown was more interested in votes than in the wellbeing of the state economy or the reality of farm labor. According to Pinkley, the end of the Bracero Program was "the work of those who march when labor bosses pipe the tune. Brown always marches at the head of this parade."[474] To Pinkley, like to most Imperial Valley growers, a good governor was one who acted as a merchant of labor for agribusiness. In another editorial published a month later, Pinkley contended that the "fight for a dependable supply of agricultural labor concern[ed] not only the farmers, but all segments of our economy as well." Asserting that the effects of lost crops would be felt throughout the entire valley, the newspaper editor called "the farm dollar" one of the region's "basic economic factors."[475] Like many other times before, the *Brawley News* took the line that what was good for agribusiness was good for the valley. On December 31, the day when the Bracero Program officially expired, Pinkley again cast growers as victims of national politics and ill-advised Southern preachers who believed unemployed workers would find labor in Western farms. The binational labor program, Pinkley made sure to underline, had cost the "taxpayers not a cent."[476]

---

[474] Virgil Pinkley, "Editorials… Opinions: California—Real Test Tube," *Brawley News,* October 12, 1964, pg. 7.
[475] "Editorials… Opinions: Farm Labor Plan Needed Sonn," *Brawley News,* November 13, 1964, pg. 5.
[476] "Editorials… Opinions: Politics And Farm Labor," *Brawley News,* December 31, 1964, pg. 5.

Victor V. Veysey, a farmer and a member of the California State Assembly representing Imperial County, also testified at the San Francisco labor hearing. In his statement, Veysey described those claiming that the United States had enough farm workers as "whistling in the dark." The assemblyman cited the seasonal nature of farm labor that required thousands of harvesters during short periods of time and the competition that California faced with Arizona, Texas, and Mexico as reasons why California growers required a continued source of Mexican labor. In true grower fashion, Veysey stated that "'Artificial restriction of the labor supply and artificial elevation of labor costs [would] result in loss of our [California's] competitive position and loss of our markets.'" By condemning the "artificial restriction of the labor supply" he was likely not advocating for an open border with Mexico, but rather for a border-crossing system like the one Imperial Valley growers had proposed for decades (see chapters 1 and 2). If the state interfered in farm employment, Veysey argued, it should be to narrow the wage gap between states by means of a national minimum wage. Veysey failed to note that farmers had not opposed the artificial depression of wages that the Bracero Program had produced when the Department of Labor set "prevailing wages" according to grower reports. Just as in 1942, when California growers had spoken simultaneously about the importance of a free market and an urgent need for state intervention, Veysey was calling for economic liberalism *and* state socialism—as long as both favored agribusiness. In regards to the thousands of unemployed California residents, the assembly member argued many of these were "misfits" who would not stay in school or any other job, including farm work. "'Unfortunately, because of their schooling or lack of it, because of their lack of motivation, because of their warped social outlook, because of the relative

attractiveness of idleness, under present welfare procedures,'" Veysey asserted, "'many of this group of unemployed are as useless and as unavailable to agriculture as they have proven to be to every other industry and profession.'"[477] In this assessment of unemployed workers, Veysey conveniently forgot that many had been regularly employed in agriculture until they were displaced by braceros and unauthorized workers.

In the fourth and final day of the Labor Department's San Francisco hearing on farm labor problems, the discussion turned to Governor Brown's farm work proposal, which had been presented to Labor Secretary Wirtz the previous month. Citing University of California and state Department of Employment studies, the governor affirmed that "'under the existing wages and working conditions,'" California would face a serious labor shortage without braceros. Nonetheless, he "'firmly believe[d] that among the 355,000 currently unemployed Californians, [state growers] could find the necessary farm workers should wages and working conditions be reasonably improved.'" To achieve this, the governor was formulating a plan that would use War on Poverty funds to improve conditions and provide "housing, day care centers, health programs, compensatory education, sanitation, training programs, migrant service centers, and rest stops for traveling workers."[478] In the interim, Brown proposed using Public Law 414 (the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952) to continue importing Mexican workers until 1969, decreasing the number imported every year while simultaneously increasing

---

[477] "Whistling in the Dark: Domestic Farm Labor Plans Hit: Veysey Cites Fact Record Proving Ideas Impractical," *Brawley News,* December 8, 1964, pg. 1.
[478] "State Has Anti-Poverty Plan For Farm Labor: Brown Asks 414 As Stopgap Only: Governor Admits Shortage 'Under Existing Conditions,'" *Brawley News,* December 7, 1964, pg. 1.

wages.[479] Brown stated he viewed labor importation under Public Law 414 only as a "stopgap measure" until conditions were such that Californian workers could step into those jobs.[480]

Even if Brown's promising plan had been implemented, it would have not driven citizens and longtime residents to the fields. As such, it illuminates one of the crucial failings of the War on Poverty, as described by Alyosha Goldstein. Goldstein argues that "From the liberal perspective, destitution appeared to be external to—rather than a consequence of—market forces, a result of exclusion from the opportunities of the market and not the outcome of the imperative for unequal economic interdependency."[481] Mexican Americans were certainly fighting for inclusion in the agricultural labor market, but they were also calling attention to the poverty that agribusiness produced. By employing immigrant labor, California growers could continue reproducing an image of farm worker poverty as something foreign, imported from Mexico, and not intrinsic to capitalist accumulation. A return to domestic labor would complicate the perpetuation of this façade. If Americans could be convinced that they did not want to do farm labor, immigrant workers could be employed with even more ease under a national political climate friendly to agribusiness. As the next sections will show, braceros would continue

---

[479] Brown proposed to increase the minimum wage by 170 percent of the 1964 rates by 1969. Since the California minimum wage in 1964 was $1.00, Brown was proposing a minimum wage of $1.70 by 1969. "Brown Urges Dual Farm Work Plan: Would Hike Pay, Cut Labor Import: Proposal to Wirtz Asks Temporary Use of PL 414," *Brawley News,* November 14-15, 1964, pg. 1.

[480] Both organized labor and growers criticized Brown's proposal. The California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, "said the government was attempting to avoid the intent of Congress" and that growers would let their lettuce rot in the fields the following spring as a "publicity stunt." "Labor, Growers: Both Sides Attack 'Phase-Out' Plan: AFL-CIO Says Brown Seeks to Evade Congress' Intent," *Brawley News,* December 8, 1964, pg.1.

[481] Alyosha Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action During the American Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

laboring in California fields as unauthorized workers or as green card holders with the implicit sanction of an INS that preferred to look the other way.

The 1965 Immigration Act and the Undocumented Era

Less than a year after the end of the Bracero Program, the US Congress announced amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act that eliminated the national origins quotas enacted in the 1920s. The annual ceiling of 120,000 visas that the new legislation placed on the entire Western Hemisphere was a radical change from the 450,000 guest worker visas that braceros received on an average year and the 50,000 resident visas that Mexicans obtained annually. The new cap on the Western Hemisphere went into effect in 1968, the same year that the Bracero Program was phased out completely.[482] The changes to immigration policy left "no legal way to accommodate the long-established flows" that the Bracero Program had animated for more than two decades.[483] Facing reduced opportunities for legal migration, hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers opted to continue migrating to the United States as undocumented migrants, knowing American employers were eager to employ cheap, flexible labor, regardless of workers' legal status. As Douglas Massey and his colleagues have argued, it is very likely that the flow of Mexican migrants who had once worked as braceros would have continued migrating to the United States as resident aliens if the 1965 Immigration

[482] The Bracero Program ended in 1968 when the Salinas California Rural Legal Assistance office represented a group of nine farm workers in a series of lawsuits that gave agricultural workers the protected right to unionize and ended labor importation. Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming,* 177.

[483] The number of residence visas for any single country was then limited to 20,000 per year in 1976. A 1978 amendment placed the hemispheric cap under a worldwide ceiling of 290,000 visas, and then reduced to 270,000 in 1980. These quotas did not apply to spouses, parents, and children of US citizens. Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America," *Population and Development Review* Vol.38, no. 1 (2012): 1-29.

Act had not substantially reduced their chances of obtaining a visa.[484] With no Bracero Program providing them cheap labor, growers across the southwest turned to an unauthorized labor force that remained cheap under the threat of deportabilty. The state, as Nicholas De Genova has demonstrated, constructs migrant "illegality" in order to maintain an underclass of easily exploited, disposable, cheap labor.[485]

Imperial Valley was somewhat insulated from the widespread turn to undocumented labor. In 1965 when many southwestern growers were desperate to guarantee a cheap source of labor once the Bracero Program had ended, Imperial Valley growers were relatively secure, as they had been steadily designing a labor force that in many ways proved to be more beneficial than the defunct guest worker program. Perhaps Imperial Valley growers would also have turned to undocumented labor rather than border commuters if the region had not been on the US-Mexico border and an easy target for Border Patrol raids and alarmist news articles denouncing its employment practices. As it was, Imperial Valley growers adopted the new labor regime of border commuters to avoid the legal and political problems they confronted when they hired unauthorized workers. Ernesto Galarza and the NFLU wrongly assumed in 1951 that if growers lost bracero labor they would employ domestic workers to take their place.[486] Instead of hiring members of the NFLU, however, growers like Joe Maggio employed unauthorized workers and Mexicali residents with border crossing permits.[487] The NFLU thus not only

---

[484] To make this argument, Massey et al. point out that growers began petitioning for "an adjustment of status" of their former braceros once they realized the program was nearing its end. Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 24-43.
[485] Nicholas De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality.'"
[486] This assumption was based on a Bracero Program rule that prohibited growers from employing unauthorized workers. If a farmer was found to be employing the so-called "mixed crews" of braceros and undocumented workers they were to be denied further participation in the binational labor program.
[487] "Ernesto Galarza to Mitch," May 8, 1951, folder 05, box 44, Galarza Papers.

failed in its immediate efforts to stop the Bracero Program and its parallel stream of unauthorized workers from working in the Imperial Valley, but it also pushed growers on a track towards commuter workers. Another important moment that contributed to the growth of a large commuter labor force came in 1954 with the Special Program. INS Commissioner Joseph Swing developed the Special Program to mitigate growers' discontent over Operation Wetback. The program allowed growers to name their favorite unauthorized workers as Special braceros and regularize their legal status. The Special braceros or (as Galarza called them) "bracero professionals" who gained this preferential legal status became a permanent labor force in the region.[488] Enjoying larger employment security and strong social networks on both sides of the border, many of these Special braceros settled in the region. Alberto Magallón Jiménez and Horacio Andrejol, for instance, became Specials in the 1950s and settled their families in Mexicali where they could be in close proximity while the men labored in the Imperial Valley.[489] Men like Magallón Jiménez and Andrejol were among the first braceros to obtain legal permanent residence when the Special Program ended in 1960 (see chapter 4).

Imperial Valley growers are not the only ones who turned to green card holders. Richard Mines and Ricardo Anzaldúa have studied the transition from the end of the Bracero Program and the start of the 1965 Immigration Act in Ventura County, California. They found that the harvesting associations that had before contracted braceros increasingly gained importance as recruiters and "legalizers" of agricultural

---

[488] Lytle Hernández, *Migra*, 171-189; Galarza, *Merchants of Labor,* 93; Calavita, *Inside the State,* 94-103.
[489] Anais Acosta, "Alberto Magallón Jiménez," in Bracero History Archive, Item #153, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/153 (accessed February 23, 2012). Alejandra Díaz, "Horacio Andrejol," in Bracero History Archive, Item #664, http://braceroarchive.org/items/show /664 (accessed February 15, 2011).

workers starting in 1965. An official of the Ventura County Citrus Growers Committee, they found, even paid for advertisements on the radio and in newspapers of traditional migrant-sending regions in central Mexico. The personnel manager of the famed Limoneira Ranch also visited villages and small towns in Michoacan in 1966.[490] The citrus growers' course of action, combined with former braceros' oral histories, make it clear how crucial interpersonal relationships between employers and workers were to the continuation of international migration during moments of changing laws and policies. Just as the success of the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley had depended on interpersonal relationships between guest workers and their supervisors, the success of agribusiness across the Southwest depended on the complex social networks that connected rural Mexican towns with agricultural centers in the United States.[491]

Labor contractors also became crucial in the transition from the Bracero Program era to the undocumented era. Farmer associations like the IVFA had supplied growers with sufficient contract workers, but once the guest worker program ended labor contractors again became the main labor suppliers.[492] The Imperial Valley Farm Labor Contractors Association, for instance, announced in November 1964 that "a pool of 3,000 green card farm workers" were ready to replace the braceros who were then working in the region. Green card workers, the *Brawley News* explained, were "men and women who

---

[490] Richard Mines and Ricardo Anzaldúa, *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants: Alternative Labor Market Structures in the California Citrus Industry* (La Jolla: Program in US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982), 26, 37.

[491] As Douglas Massey and his colleagues have argued, if the 1965 Immigration Act had not passed, it is very likely that the Mexican immigrants who had once migrated as braceros would have continued migrating to the United States as resident aliens. Massey et al. point out that growers began petitioning for "an adjustment of status" of their former braceros once they realized the program was nearing its end. Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 24-43.

[492] The Imperial Valley relied on labor contractors in the first decades of the 20th century. See González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 162-163.

have been legally immigrated into the United States but who are permitted to live in Mexico while working in this country." According to the association, an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 green card holders lived in Mexicali (a higher figure than the 5,000 individuals the *New York Times* cited in its April 1965 story). Representatives of the Labor Contractors Association had stated at a congressional subcommittee hearing in 1963 that "'before World War II, farm labor contractors provided most of the farm workers used in Imperial County. Work was done on a piece rate basis.'" Indeed, labor contractors had functioned as middlemen between labor and growers in the prewar period. Many of these contractors had been unscrupulous employers who retained workers' earnings until the end of the season to guarantee workers would continue working for them under precarious conditions.[493] But as the *Brawley News* noted, the subcommittee concluded that the contractors had not presented sufficient evidence that the present pool of green card workers "could be augmented to play an effective role in replacing the thousands of braceros used annually in other sections of the country." If the rest of the Southwest could not be guaranteed a reliable pool of green card workers, the Imperial Valley Farm Labor Contractors Association was working to guarantee this at least in its own region. (Other regions, of course, turned to undocumented labor.) In a guarded endorsement, the *Brawley News* stated: "The farm labor contractor system is interesting, to say the least." As if green card commuters were not already an attractive option for growers, the newspaper further noted that labor contractors provided worker transportation, paid the

[493] González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing,* 146.

required taxes and handled all bookkeeping, "relieving the farmer of these record-keeping problems."[494]

Accustomed to operating as a merchant of labor for agribusiness, the Labor Department assured growers that the state would ensure their prosperity in the absence of a guest worker program. In preparation for the end of the program, four teams of federal and state employees traveled the state of California "canvassing" for 10,000 workers to replace braceros. Meanwhile, in the Imperial Valley, the El Centro Farm Labor office held extended business hours to help stave off labor shortages.[495] As Labor Secretary Wirtz prepared to announce new minimum wages for agriculture, a spokesman for the California-Arizona Farm Labor Association predicted "the wage increase might draw a few domestic workers into the fields, but they would probably leave the jobs before too long."[496] Several days later, on December 23, the Imperial Valley Growers and Shippers Association "agreed to the $1.25 minimum wage" after between sixty and seventy of its members attended a meeting at the IVFA office. The growers agreed at the meeting to place an order for 1,800 domestic workers through the state Employment Department. Edward Hayes, manager of the IVFA, explained the request was to replace 1,800 braceros who would return to Mexico at the end of the year and that another 1,000 workers would be needed by mid-January. He also expressed skepticism that the state and federal recruitment teams would be able to provide the Imperial Valley with workers.

---

[494] John A. Ryan, "Contractors Charge: Braceros Replacing Green Card Workers," *Brawley News,* November 14 & 15, 1964, pg. 4.
[495] "Replacing Braceros: Teams Seek 10,000 Workers For Farmers In This Region," *Brawley News,* December 17, 1964, pg. 1.
[496] "Race Starts For Farm Labor At New Criteria: Growers Doubt $1.25 Will Help: U.S. Insists Domestic Help Be Sought Before Foreign," *Brawley News,* December 21, 1964, pg. 1.

Implying that a new minimum wage was unnecessary, Hayes underlined that "lettuce harvesters made on the average of $1.37 an hour" the previous year while working at a piece rate of 24 cents per carton.[497] (Hayes failed to mention, however, that lettuce cutters were the farm labor elite and their wages were not representative of the earnings that other workers received tending to and harvesting other crops.)

Imperial Valley growers' predictions that domestic workers would not stay long in field jobs had become a self-fulfilling prophecy by the time the Bracero Program expired on December 31. The *Brawley News* reported that day that lettuce growers had cancelled their order for 1,800 workers, having "decided they would rather operate at this time short-handed, with experienced workers, than [with] supposedly full crews heavily unbalanced by unskilled personnel." Herbert A. Lee, president of the IVFA, justified the cancellation by claiming that a "'deluge' of unqualified workers" had descended on the region, and that lettuce growers had been forced to hire them in order to continue employing braceros.[498] The inclusion of untrained workers quickly generated tensions in the fields when the highly skilled braceros began complaining that the new lettuce cutters were slowing the pace of their crews and decreasing their wages. Lettuce cutters were the farm labor elite because they worked under a piece rate system where the pay of the entire crew was based on the number of cartons they collectively cut and packed in an hour. For the crew to earn the highest possible wages, every member of the crew had to work at the same fast pace. To maintain the productivity of their lettuce crews, Lee

---

[497] "Valley Orders 1,800 Farm Workers: Growers Accept $1.25 Wage Rate: Lettuce Harvest To Need 1,000 More By Jan. 10," *Brawley News,* December 24, 1964, pg. 1.

[498] One of the conditions of the Bracero Program was that growers were to employ domestic workers whenever these were available.

reported, some growers had ordered untrained workers to "go sit somewhere out of the way" while braceros did all the work. Such a situation was untenable, Lee said, and growers were better off sticking with experienced labor: "lettuce growers for some time past [had] been endeavoring to build up their own crews, with screened and trained farm workers, and [would] continue those efforts." By cancelling their order, the Imperial Valley lettuce growers disqualified themselves from participation in any stopgap or transitional labor importation program that the Department of Labor could organize under Public Law 414. This was not a problem for the growers, the *Brawley News* made clear to its readers, for the number of braceros in the region was the lowest seen since 1952 because "the growers had been gradually eliminating the Mexican nationals in anticipation of the expiration of the program."[499]

Unable to claim a labor shortage, Imperial Valley growers justified their rejection of domestic farm workers by couching their preference for immigrant labor in terms of worker efficiency and skill. Unaware that the IVFA had cancelled its order, workers from across California and as far away as Wyoming made their way to the Imperial Valley during the first days of January, hoping to obtain employment in the lettuce harvest. The manager of the association, however, was not impressed by the newcomers, calling most of them "unqualified." The association manager was conveniently forgetting the fact that the Bracero Program had been conceived and promoted as a program that imported "unskilled" workers. Growers had continuously insisted that braceros were restricted to unskilled positions that domestic workers refused to fill. Confronted with growing pools

[499] "Growers Cancel Order For Labor: 'Deluge' Of Untrained Domestic Workers Feared," *Brawley News,* December 31, 1964, pg.1.

of American workers willing to do stoop labor, however, Imperial Valley farmers now described braceros as "trained," "experienced," and "qualified.[500]" They rejected domestic workers from other regions, moreover, because an ample supply of cheap labor was already available in the valley. Gary Harney, office manager of the Salinas Valley Vegetable Exchange, told the *Brawley News* that the company's "ability to get workers for harvests [had] been 'strictly on a day-to-day basis'" that depended on "'who [got] to Calexico first.'" The Salinas-based company was recruiting workers from the "labor pool of domestic and green card workers who gather[ed] just west of the main border entrance."[501] The key distinction between the domestic workers who arrived in the Imperial Valley from other parts of the country and the domestic workers who congregated in Calexico's downtown area was likely their different wage expectations. The domestic workers who labored alongside border commuters were well aware that local growers employed transborder workers to depress wages and working conditions. If these domestic workers continued laboring in agriculture, it was likely because they had no occupational alternatives.

Just as they did during the Bracero Program, Imperial Valley growers leveraged their power in the early months of 1965 to drive US residents away from farm jobs. These farmers, moreover, were also prepared to deflect whatever accusations organized labor and community organizations made against them. Leaders of the Emergency Committee to Aid Farm Workers (ECAFW) and the County Labor Federation of Los

---

[500] The caption to a photograph of a lettuce packer, for instance, explained that packing lettuce was "a job which requires experience and skill, in order to earn high wages and at the same time pass the standards required by inspectors." "Monthly Desert Valley Farm News," *Brawley News,* January 5, 1965, pg. 3.
[501] "'Unqualified' Workers Still Seek Farm Jobs," *Brawley News,* January 5, 1965, pg. 1.

Angeles, for instance, declared in a news conference that Imperial and Coachella valley growers were "'sabotaging labor recruitment programs" by "harassing domestic workers so they would 'quit.'" Dan Lund, secretary of the ECAFW, argued that housing facilities for farm workers had "deteriorated during their occupation by braceros." Housing facilities had not only deteriorated during the Bracero Program era, but the entire housing landscape had changed during this period to house individual workers instead of entire families. The Farm Placement Service, a branch of the USES, Don Mitchell has illustrated, helped growers remake housing "such that braceros would henceforth be *necessary* form farm work in California and favored over domestic workers."[502] In response to these mounting accusations, the manager of the IVFA responded that he was "getting tired" of the constant attacks by people who knew "nothing about the [farm] work." The end of the program, Hayes, remarked, had "'brought many new people to [the Imperial Valley] but few workers.'"[503] This characterization of unemployed laborers as lazy or poor workers echoed the criticisms leveled against itinerant white men during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries across the West. In Los Angeles, for instance, as Kelly Lytle Hernández has demonstrated, white male migrants were vilified as "vicious tramps" and "worthless hobos" for their "failure to find social stability and economic security." These representations conveniently ignored the fact that these men had been displaced from farm life and artisan careers as national markets and corporate capitalism expanded.[504] Casting the jobseekers as people, but not workers, the manager of

[502] Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops,* 68.
[503] "Angry Blast: IV Growers Deny Labor 'Sabotage,'" *Brawley News,* January 13, 1965, pg. 3.
[504] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), chapter 2.

the IVFA relied on an old practice of blaming the victims of structural transformations for their own unemployment.

Same Tensions, New Legal Distinctions

Like the housing landscape they transformed to fit a predominantly male bracero workforce, Imperial Valley growers also became actively involved in changing the legal status of the workers they employed. Whether they continued working for the same employers or not (see chapter 4), the former braceros who became green card commuters enlarged a growing pool of workers ready to continue doing the country's low-wage labor. As growers, labor representatives, and state and federal officials debated the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, Imperial Valley residents also joined the discussion. In a letter to the editor of the *Brawley News*, El Centro resident Sal Juarez shared his views on the upcoming November election. He pointed to a statement Congressman Pat Martin had recently made proposing to hold a public debate with opponent John Tunney on the subject of civil rights. Juarez, however, wanted "to hear [about] problems that affects [*sic*] the Imperial County." Unemployment in particular, argued Juarez, affected everyone, including the future generations. "Let him [Martin] fight for his beloved braceros," Juarez proposed, "But give us [valley residents] and our children a fighting chance, void all the green card crossers that are working in stores, hotels, welders, Holly sugar, Plaster City, gins, painters, etc." Expressing a sentiment that had become increasingly common among valley residents, Juarez added: "Let us protect ourselves and our children and stop these green card braceros that have invaded every phase of means of living. Yes, we locals will not do stoop labor because we are too lazy, too educated,

too dependent on welfare laws; then, let the braceros come in, but cut out this farce of green cards as mechanics, painters, etc."[505] Juarez, in other words, was not opposed to a Bracero Program that matched guest workers with the stoop labor that the so-called "locals" refused to do. What he did oppose was migrant workers taking over the kinds of "skilled jobs" that paid higher wages.

Juarez's letter also illustrated the new social distinctions that continued pitting migrants against a long-established population of ethnically Mexican US citizens. Although more and more braceros enjoyed an improved legal status, they continued serving employers as a convenient labor force that kept wages low across the region. If most of these men and their families remained Mexicali residents, this was because the low wages they earned in agriculture and other occupations did not support living in the United States. Yet they were far from newcomers to the region; many of the former braceros and unauthorized workers who obtained green cards in the early 1960s had been living and working in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands for many years. The new key distinction in the Imperial Valley labor force between was shifting away from domestics vs. migrants—it was becoming residents vs. commuters.

The long-simmering tensions between US residents and border commuters resurfaced in national news in May 1969 when the *New York Times* published another story on green card holders. The article's author, Homer Bigart, indicated that border commuting was "welcomed by farmers, ranchers and fruit growers, by gringo housewives and by service industries and by Chambers of Commerce and the new

[505] "Editorials… Opinions: Voice of the People," *Brawley News,* October 23, 1964, pg. 7.

factories that have been lured south to the border by the promise of an endless supply of cheap labor." The five million Mexican Americans who lived in the Southwest, on the other hand, "deplored" the influx of commuters. But according to Bigart, nowhere were border commuters resented more than in the Coachella Valley, where they served as strikebreakers the previous year when the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) led by Cesar Chávez organized a grape strike. A year later, the UFWOC was now planning to revive the strike and "voted unanimously to begin an eight-day march to Calexico on May 10 to try to dissuade the aliens from breaking the strike." Noting that the Justice Department had recently declared that border commuters were not obligated to live in the United States or seek naturalization, Bigart cited a Commission on Civil Rights staff report that calculated that between 40,000 and 150,000 green card holders commuted across the entire US-Mexico border. The report also concluded that "most" of the 684,533 Mexicans who held these permanent resident cards actually resided in the country. As the UFWOC and Coachella growers prepared for the upcoming strike, each side organized its own "propaganda campaign" in Mexicali and Calexico. "Through paid commercials on two Mexican radio stations," the article reported, "UFWOC is asking Mexicans to stay away from Coachella" even as the growers were urging commuters to come and work. The growers and the UFWOC alike knew that border commuters could tip the balance in favor of organized labor or agribusiness.

The UFWOC was not the only group opposed to commuter workers. Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy, a member of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, introduced a bill that would require commuter workers to undergo a clearance process every six months to demonstrate they were not depressing wages or

working conditions. Senator Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota, who was chairman of the subcommittee, even visited the US-Mexico border near McAllen, Texas. “Disguised in a battered pair of khaki trousers and an old sweater,” Bigart remarked, “Senator Mondale reported seeing hundreds of Mexicans streaming into the United States waving green cards he suspected might be counterfeit.” Intent on stopping the “‘hemorrhage of people’” he believed was “inflicting a permanent economic depression on south Texas,” Mondale asked Arnulfo Guerra, a prominent Mexican American lawyer, to draft a bill requiring all green card holders to live in the United States. In a rare acknowledgement of the transnational living arrangements common in border regions, Mondale “noted that many commuters were United States citizens who apparently found the cost of living cheaper on the Mexican side.”

Like their California counterparts, labor organizations in Texas were bringing the issue of commuter workers into the national spotlight. James D. Givens, secretary-treasurer of the El Paso Central Labor Union and vice president of the Texas AFL-CIO, argued commuters were the union’s largest problem. He estimated that 25,000 individuals commuted from Ciudad Juarez. William L. Kircher, the Director of Organization for the AFL-CIO, moreover, accused the INS of turning “a blind eye to wholesale violations of the green card.” Not to be misinterpreted, Kircher observed the green card was “a demonstration of the United States Open Door policy on immigration,” something the AFL-CIO supported. “‘But in practice,’” the labor leader affirmed, “‘the green card has been used as a commuter ticket to cheap jobs, strike-breaking, scabbing,

substandard wages, all the things that undermine the United States economic base.'"[506] Kircher averred that the AFL-CIO did not oppose Mexican migration as long as Mexican immigrants lived in the United States and earned a living wage based on a US cost of living.

However, this was not what was happening in reality. Labor leaders and occupationally displaced ethnic Mexicans across the US-Mexico borderlands were cognizant of the fact that border commuters had replaced braceros as a cheap labor force because the costs of their social reproduction remained externalized to Mexico, and the reality of immigration law in 1969 was such that this population was likely to be self-sustaining. Border commuters had become such a key part of the Imperial Valley's agricultural labor force that in 1969 they were estimated to represent 85% of the region's farm workers.[507] And although Mexicans saw their chances of obtaining a visa radically reduced starting in July 1968, hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrants had been able to obtain legal permanent residence before the gates closed. Those who became permanent residents during the 1960s would make it possible for their families to eventually become legal residents as well and replenish the ranks of the Southwest's cheap labor force. The UFWOC realized that if they wanted to succeed in their efforts to improve wages and working conditions, they would have to reckon with a significant population of border commuters. Reaching out to Mexicali residents through paid radio commercials was just the first step.

---

[506] Homer Bigart, "Unions Deplore Influx of Mexican Laborers Along the Border," *New York Times,* May 4, 1969, pg. 78.
[507] Calavita, *Inside the State,* 167.

This represented a significant change in union strategy. As David G. Gutiérrez demonstrated in his seminal work on ethnic Mexicans' interethnic relations, the UFWOC (later renamed the United Farm Workers of America and commonly abbreviated as UFW), was staunchly opposed to unauthorized migration for almost a decade. Ernesto Galarza and the NFLU had organized Imperial Valley workers at the height of Mexican American opposition to Mexican immigration when few organizations would have disagreed with the union's anti-immigrant stance. The times, however, had changed. By the time the UFWOC began appealing to border commuters in 1969, labor leaders like Kircher were blaming agribusiness and the state, not migrants, for depressing wages and conditions in the United States. More importantly, by the 1970s, Mexican American organizations were reversing their position on undocumented migration. Formerly anti-immigrant organizations like the American G.I. Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens began to publicly chastise Chávez and the UFW on the union's anti-immigrant stance. It was then, when Chávez saw his urban base of support threatened, that he altered his position.[508] The union's inclusion of border commuters, just like its support of unauthorized workers would later be, was largely a practical decision.

The times had also changed for Mexican officials hoping to exert influence over ethnic Mexicans in the United States. In the 1930s, Calexico Consul Joaquín Terrazas infamously used his power to thwart ethnic Mexicans' unionization efforts in the Imperial Valley. During the following decades, many Mexican officials lectured braceros upon arrival in the United States about their disposability as deportable labor that could be

[508] Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors,* chapter 6.

quickly replaced the second they caused problems.[509] Continuing this tradition, Octavio Conde Quiroga, a Mexicali labor adviser, wrote to Mexican President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in September 1970 suggesting that the federal government send a representative to the Mexican Independence Day celebration the UFW was coordinating in Delano, California. Underlining that 10,000 ethnic Mexicans were expected at the celebration, Conde Quiroga advised sending a representative who could call upon the attendees to honor the *patria* (homeland), to respect the laws of the United States as citizens, permanent residents, or contract workers, and to refrain from agitating. This representative, Conde Quiroga further suggested, could advise the union members that their problems would be solved through dialogue, meetings, documents, and agreements—not through direct action.[510] What the Mexicali labor adviser failed to recognize is that the orientation of ethnic Mexican organizations had changed. Mexican citizens or not, the ethnic Mexican leaders of the UFW did not see an ally in the Mexican government. The American consumer, the US courts, and prominent congressmen were the crucial allies that the union needed on its side.[511]

---

[509] González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, chapter 5; Ronald L. Mize and Alicia C. S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 32.
[510] Octavio Conde Quiroga to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. September 7, 1970, caja 6, fondo Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, AGN.
[511] For more on the history of the UFW see Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming;* Miriam Pawell, *The Union of their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010); and Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

"Emigrados," the New Transborder Workers

While the Mexican government was incapable of swaying the UFW to adopt a more complaisant stance, it also struggled to govern green card holders residing on Mexican soil. With one foot in Mexico and the other in the United States, border commuters were a distinct population who used their legal status to enjoy the benefits of both worlds. An organization calling itself the *Grupo de Emigrados a Estados Unidos* (Group of Emigrants to the United States), for instance, sent Díaz Ordaz and other top Mexican officials an open letter in June 1969. In the letter, which was published in the Tijuana newspaper *El Mexicano,* the group accused Mexico's National Automobile Registry of unconstitutional arbitrariness in stopping emigrants in Mexico and impounding their US-registered cars. Instead of being placed on the registry of foreign drivers, the group complained, green card holders were being included in the registry of Mexican residents and their cars were confiscated for not having Mexican registration. While the administrators of the National Automobile Registry were calling on all emigrants to carry Mexican car registration documents when driving in Mexico, the group argued it was impossible for them to do this because as emigrants they could not legally import their vehicles.

In their letter, the *Grupo de Emigrados* emphasized their dual status, Mexican patriotism, and economic importance. Explaining that the INS recognized them as legal permanent residents as long as they worked in the United States for a minimum of six months every year, the group indicated that they used this policy to their advantage by not emigrating with their wives and children and instead building their homes in Mexico.

They were building Mexican homes, they emphasized, through "sacrifices and [in spite] of the harassment of bad Mexicans and Americans" who condemned them for working in the United States but returning to Mexico. The disapproving Americans were right, the letter writers suggested in an aside, implying that they were fully aware of their controversial place in the American labor market. At the same time, the group was cognizant of their importance in border economies, noting that the automobile policy affected 47,000 individuals on Mexican soil. If the Mexican government decided to hold these emigrants accountable for their financial responsibilities as Mexican residents, they implied, they would take their families—and their dollar earnings—across the border.

The *Grupo de Emigrados* was right that both Mexicans and Americans objected to their work and living arrangements. An inflamed Tijuana resident named Antonio Valle Beyart wrote to Díaz Ordaz after reading the group's letter in *El Mexicano.* Valle Beyart argued that emigrants should not enjoy more benefits than the Mexicans who lived and worked in the country. He pointed out that border commuters earned wages that fluctuated between three and five dollars per hour. By contrast, Mexican workers earned four or five dollars for eight hours' work and with this money supported their families, purchased automobiles, and paid their taxes. If border commuters were earning wages significantly higher working from six in the morning to five in the afternoon, asked Valle Beyart, how could these emigrants not be able to afford paying their car registration fees? The argument that emigrants chose to live in Mexico to contribute to the local economy, added the Tijuana resident, was false. If they lived in Mexico, it was because they saved large percentages of their earnings by doing so. These border commuters, Valle Beyart affirmed, were opening savings accounts in Mexican and US banks, investing their

savings in real estate, and building apartments that yielded monthly profits of twenty or thirty dollars per unit. While an *albañil* (bricklayer) earned between two and two-and-a-half dollars a day in Mexico, his counterpart in the United States earned an average of forty or fifty dollars a day, and was driving Tijuana's streets in a new car. Although Valle Beyart grossly inflated the earnings that border commuters were receiving (the minimum wage in California in 1969 was under two dollars an hour), his letter illustrates what many border residents must have thought upon reading the *Grupo de Emigrados'* letter.[512] The border commuters who wrote this letter wanted to have their cake and eat it too.

If Valle Beyart viewed border commuters as taking a lucrative advantage from their legal status, he understood this was because the United States was also benefitting from the arrangement. He mentioned in his letter, for example, that it was publicly known in Tijuana, as in Mexicali and other border areas, that a US senator had tried forcing green card holders to live in the United States. The bill did not pass, according to Valle Beyart, because the congressmen knew that the United States would then be forced to provide legal permanent residence and expensive social services to the families of these border commuters, many of which had eight or nine members. The United States wanted a cheap labor force of border commuters, but it did not want those workers' families. Valle Beyart reproached border commuters, moreover, for wanting to be treated as

[512] The California minimum wage between Febraury 1, 1968 and March 4, 1974 was $1. 65. "History of California Minimum Wage," State of California Department of Industrial Relations, accessed June 14, 2017, https://www.dir.ca.gov/iwc/MinimumWageHistory.htm.

tourists—not as Mexicans. These emigrants had a responsibility of supporting their homeland, the land where they were born and that provided them with an education.[513]

The tensions between border commuters and Mexican residents were for the most part more quotidian, expressed in criticisms of the "*español apochado*" (Americanized Spanish) that commuters and immigrants spoke upon returning from the United States or about the flashy new cars and other consumer goods that they purchased with their higher earnings. Although many of Mexicali's green card holders worked in agriculture and had little education, their high wages often exceeded those of the Mexican middle class. This certainly unsettled Mexicali's socioeconomic hierarchy, likely causing envy among Mexicali's professionals who witnessed the economic rise of a population that had arrived completely destitute only a few years or decades before. By asking to be exempted from paying car registration fees, the *Grupo de Emigrados* thus appeared to have gone too far in trying to use their transborder legal status to their advantage.

Across the border, in Calexico, border commuters and tourist visa holders also represented a crucial group of consumers. One of these cross-border shoppers was Dominga Estrada de Rodriguez. The story of her crossing on December 24, 1965 made national news when an INS agent ordered her to "Wait" at the Calexico port of entry after passing through the routine inspection. "Mrs. de Rodriguez Halted [*sic*.], frightened, fearing she had broken some immigration rule at the crossing between Mexico and Calexico in California." Instead of receiving a reprimand, however, Estrada de Rodriguez was congratulated for being the "12 millionth person to pass" the Calexico port of entry.

---

[513] Antonio Valle Beyart to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. June 9, 1969, caja 6, fondo Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, AGN.

According to the Associated Press article that retold her story, Estrada de Rodriguez had earlier "told her [five] children … that there was not enough money for much of a Christmas celebration in their tiny house in Mexicali." Surprised by her strike of good luck, "She sent for her children as a committee of Mexicali merchants presented her with gifts: a 21-pound turkey, a Christmas tree, food, clothing and toys."[514] The INS had long recognized the importance of Mexican shoppers to border cities like Calexico. Chambers of Commerce continuously insisted since the 1920s that the border needed to remain open enough for commerce to continue.[515] It seems incongruous, however, that a committee of Mexicali merchants presented Estrada de Rodriguez with gifts as she was on her way to spend her money in the United States. Did the Associated Press perhaps make a mistake, identifying them as Mexicali merchants when they were from Calexico? Or were the Mexicali businessmen simply making a friendly gesture of Christmastime generosity? Whatever side of the border the group of businessmen were, what is clear is that the INS utilized the occasion to boost its national image as a federal bureaucracy friendly to local business interests.

From the Bracero Program to the Border Industrialization Program

Although the Bracero Program had ended, thousands of Mexicali residents thus continued shopping and working across the border in the Imperial Valley. The interdependence between Mexicali and the Imperial Valley that the Bracero Program amplified and institutionalized throughout more than two decades had another large

[514] "Border Guards Are Santa To a Crosser From Mexico," *New York Times,* December 25, 1965, pg. 9.
[515] Kang, *The INS on the Line,* chapter 2.

consequence: it accelerated the start of neoliberalism in the borderlands region. Mexico created the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in 1965 to alleviate the unemployment that the end of the Bracero Program was expected to generate in Mexican border cities. Under this program, the Mexican government invited multinational corporations to set up export manufacturing plants along its northern border with the United States. The consumer products assembled in Mexican border towns, and exempt from export duties on their way to international markets, would place Mexico in competition with Hong Kong, Japan, and Puerto Rico. By reducing unemployment and underemployment, particularly among males formerly employed in American agriculture under the Bracero Program, these assembly plants, or *maquiladoras*, were expected to also prevent undocumented migration.[516]

The BIP, a predecessor to the North American Free Trade Agreement by almost three decades, illustrates the discrepancies between the purported objectives and the reality of trade policies.[517] As María Patricia Fernández-Kelly remarked in her analysis of the BIP, the maquiladora industry did not reduce unemployment among former braceros. Employing mostly young women, a population even more vulnerable than braceros, maquiladoras did "not provide jobs for the majority of males who need[ed] them, but also because of their somewhat temporary nature, maquiladoras [were] probably insufficient as a tool for retaining laborers in Mexico." Nor did the maquiladoras deter unauthorized migration. When Fernández-Kelly interviewed maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juarez in

[516] Fernández-Kelly, "Mexican Border Industrialization," 209; Bustamante, "Maquiladoras," 233.
[517] For more on the North American Free Trade Agreement, see María Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Douglas Massey, "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 610, no. 1 (2007): 98-118.

the late 1970s, for instance, she found that more than half of her interviewees had one or more male relatives living in the United States as undocumented migrants. The BIP not only failed to reduce unauthorized migration to the United States, but it also produced more internal migration, as the export plants attracted internal migrants to border cities. If employed, internal migrants entered the growing service sector along Mexico's northern border, an even more unstable job market than agriculture.[518]

Despite the program's failings in employing a former bracero workforce, it is clear that the BIP was a replacement for the Bracero Program. Mexico had become a merchant of labor under the Bracero Program, supplying the United States with a cheap and convenient reserve army of labor. The guest worker program had produced a massive internal migration to border cities, supplying these regions with the population they needed for an economic project of such magnitude as the BIP. Baja California's population, for instance, had ballooned from 78,907 in 1940 to 870,421 by 1970.[519] The political economy that Mexican leaders like Braulio Maldonado Sandez adopted in the mid-twentieth century, moreover, reflected the increased economic integration between US and Mexican border regions. Maldonado Sandez viewed Baja California as a supplier of labor, the administrator of an international labor pool that would fill the labor needs of the entire borderlands region (see chapter 3). The Bracero Program, in other words, functioned as a first rehearsal for the larger neoliberal reforms that would come in subsequent decades. It served as an example of an international arrangement that imported workers without their families, thus outsourcing most labor costs to Mexico.

---

[518] Fernández-Kelly, "Mexican Border Industrialization," 205-223; Bustamante, "Maquiladoras," 224-256.
[519] México, *6 ̊censo de población, 1940*; México, *IX censo general de población, 1970: 28 de enero de 1970* (México: Dirección general de estadística, 1971).

The BIP was the logical continuation to the Bracero Program, with the added feature that cheap wages were now outsourced to Mexico as well.

What is especially important to the history of agricultural workers in the Imperial Valley in the post-1965 era is how the transition from the Bracero Program to a new immigration regime took shape. Imperial Valley residents like Sal Juarez went so far as to suggest an occupational hierarchy based on legal status. One of the key provisions of the 1965 Immigration Act was its emphasis on family reunification, thus allowing Imperial Valley growers to secure future generations of cheap labor by relying on a first generation of braceros-turned-commuters. When braceros began obtaining permanent resident cards in the early 1960s, they did so as individuals, and as workers, *not* as families. As some of the men interviewed by the Bracero History Archive explained, their families eventually obtained permanent resident cards years later. In the meantime, many of the braceros whose families settled in Mexicali were forced to live transnational lives, working in the Imperial Valley or other parts of the Southwest, but supporting their families in Mexico. More importantly, the wages border commuters earned in the Imperial Valley, or elsewhere in California, were only sufficient to support a living in Mexico, ensuring that these workers remained transborder workers out of necessity. From the Bracero Program era to the present times, Imperial Valley's agribusiness has maintained low labor costs by externalizing workers' social reproduction to Mexicali.

Epilogue: Priority for Whom?

The history of the Bracero Program in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali borderlands, and its mutation into a labor regime reliant on commuter workers, is an example of the United States' centuries-old dependence on immigrants' "cheap labor." Mexicali's dramatic growth during the mid-twentieth century illustrates how U.S. employers desire cheap labor but do not want to incur the social reproduction costs of this labor—nor of the families that come with it. Imperial Valley growers began to call for a less regulated border crossing system since the very first days of the Bracero Program. They envisioned a border that opened and closed according to the region's seasonal labor needs and that took advantage of the reserve army of cheap labor that Mexicali offered in what was literally the Imperial Valley's back door. Growers' enormous political clout in agricultural regions gave them the crucial power to set the so-called "prevailing wages" that the Department of Labor then utilized to determine guest workers' wages. This turned braceros into the cheapest labor in the land. When the NFLU attempted to increase wages and oust braceros and unauthorized workers from the Imperial Valley, Galarza came upon the realization that the state had become a "merchant of labor" for agribusiness. Now in the business of supplying growers with cheap labor, the INS made important concessions to agribusiness that made the Bracero Program even more advantageous to employers. The Special Program gave permanence to veteran braceros and unauthorized workers, many who resettled with their families in Mexicali and became border commuters. The thousands of internal migrants who settled in Mexicali during the Bracero Program era made it possible for Imperial Valley agribusiness to

continue employing a transborder labor force desired for its economic contributions but denied social membership north of the border.

The end of the Bracero Program did not alter the employment practices of American agribusiness nor the seasonal migration of Mexican workers across the larger Southwest. With reduced opportunities for legal migration, former braceros continued migrating to the U.S. as unauthorized workers. Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone have argued that the seasonal migration of undocumented workers in the post-bracero period "worked well to select highly motivated workers at little cost to the government, ensure their arrival at U.S. work sites at their own expense, and then encourage their relatively prompt return, once again at their own expense."[520] The undocumented era, in other words, worked well for agribusiness and the state by continuing the same labor patterns that had operated during the Bracero Program era but under no government oversight or regulation. Unauthorized workers continued working for low wages under the threat of deportability and sustained transborder lives supporting families in Mexico but earning most, or all, of their wages in the United States. For its part, the Border Patrol continued removing unauthorized migrants through the voluntary departure complex. This gave undocumented migrants the option of leaving the US voluntarily and without a formal deportation process, which enabled them to re-cross the border more quickly. This created what some critics called a "revolving door" of unauthorized migrants that did nothing to stop the employment of Mexicans in the United States. What this illusion of border enforcement did accomplish, however, was to

[520] Massey, *Smoke and Mirrors,* 46.

continue racializing Mexican migrants as "illegal" and unfit for permanent residence in the United States. Although contributing to the US economy, sojourner migrants made no claims of social membership in the places where they labored and maintained their base of social reproduction in Mexico.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was the first of several legislative measures that ultimately disrupted the "stable system" of unauthorized migration that had operated as "a de facto guest-worker program" since 1965.[521] IRCA did not end the widespread employment of Mexican migrants in agribusiness and a growing service sector, but it did contribute to a shift in workers' migration and settlement practices. While it ultimately provided legal permanent residence to more than three million people, IRCA also expanded the Border Patrol and funded workplace inspections for unauthorized migrants. The Immigration Act of 1990 further increased border surveillance and expanded the state's deportation apparatus. These incremental measures made seasonal international migration more difficult and Mexican migrants began to settle in the United States in larger numbers.[522] The ethnic Mexican population in California rose steeply, moreover, as those who obtained legal permanent residence under IRCA became US citizens and sponsored the migration of their immediate family members.[523] Many US communities long accustomed to seeing a male labor force of Mexican migrants became alarmed when entire migrant families became more visible in their neighborhoods.

---

[521] Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Smoke and Mirrors,* 45, 52.
[522] Massey, Durand, and Malone, *Smoke and Mirrors,* 90-91, 105.
[523] Massey and Pren, "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy," 19.

California's growing xenophobia reached an apex in 1994 when voters approved Proposition 187, a measure to deny public school education, healthcare, and other public services to undocumented immigrants. The California Superior Court and the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles ultimately blocked most of the Proposition's measures in a legal battle that lasted more than four years. Despite its eventual failure, Proposition 187, as Daniel Martinez HoSang has shown, placed the "restrictionist claim that unauthorized immigrants—constructed in racialized terms as underserving, criminal, and degenerate—lacked any claims-making authority" at the center of California politics. The Proposition propagated the idea that migrants, particularly women and children, were heavily dependent on welfare and draining the state's public resources. California taxpayers, according to the Proposition's campaign, were subsidizing a migrant population that had entered the country unlawfully and was overrunning the state's public institutions. Its critics argued that the Proposition, though framed in terms of fiscal responsibility, was implicitly racist and driven by a clear anxiety about the state's demographic changes.[524]

Another underlying issue in the public debates about Proposition 187 was Mexican and Latina/o migrants' key economic function as a source of cheap labor. Sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that Proposition 187 was "a muted acknowledgment" that Mexican migration had transformed from a predominantly sojourner, or cyclical, pattern into permanent settlement throughout California. She observes this shift was crucial in understanding the Proposition's success because sojourner migration "allow[s] for the maximum exploitation of immigrant workers, who

[524] Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), chapter 6.

receive the resources necessary for their daily maintenance in the country of destination, but the costs of sustaining and bringing up new generations of workers (or reproduction costs) are borne in their country of origin."[525] The transborder arrangement of sojourner migration and the separation of Mexican families that the Bracero Program institutionalized in the mid-twentieth century rapidly declined in the 1990s under increased border enforcement and migration control. The objective of Proposition 187, Hondagneu-Sotelo thus concludes, was to "reinstate a more coercive system of labor" that permitted individual migrants to live in the US only during periods of employment and completely excluded Mexican and Latina/o families.[526] California voters, in other words, understood that Mexican migrants would cease to be a perfect source of cheap labor if they settled with their families in the United States. A higher cost of living, many reasoned, would force migrant families to depend on public resources to supplement their low wages.

The same kinds of anti-immigrant backlash that California experienced in the 1990s have surfaced in other parts of the country as Mexican and Central American migrants have chosen "new destinations" across the US South and Midwest in the last decades.[527] Geographers Barbara Ellen Smith and Jamie Winders have examined these responses in the South, where the contrasting demands of production and social reproduction create tensions between migrants and longtime residents. Latina/o migrants are desirable as flexible, disposable, cheap labor that is "free of social reproduction's

---

[525] Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Women and Children First, 177-178.
[526] Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Women and Children First, 182.
[527] For more on the recent migration of Mexicans and Central Americans to the U.S. South and Midwest, see Víctor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León, *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).

requirements." When they settle in Southern communities and make material and social investments in their new homes, however, migrants lose some of the traits that make them ideal workers under neoliberal globalization. No longer migrant or itinerant workers, settled Latina/o families not only lose some of the flexibility that initially made them attractive workers, but they must also find housing, education, healthcare, and meet their consumption needs in their new place of residence. While Southerners—like Californians before them—tolerate the presence of male "hyper*flexible* producing bodies" in their neighborhoods and communities, they become alarmed by the prospect of increasing female "hyper*visible* reproducing bodies."[528] Latina's visibility as reproducers has made them particularly vulnerable to public displays of racism and xenophobia in recent years. In Kentucky and Arkansas department stores, for instance, white women have been recorded shouting at Latinas to "go back to" Mexico or "where they belong." In the Kentucky case the woman also told witnesses that the two Latinas she was harassing were "Probably on welfare."[529]

Nativism and racism have also increased in Baja California in recent years. Mexicali and Tijuana have continued operating as "receptacles" of deported migrants and "springboards" for those hoping to cross the border into the United States.[530] Whereas

---

[528] Smith and Winders, "'We're here to stay,'" 66.

[529] Lindsey Bever, "'Tell them to go back where they belong': J.C. Penney customer's racist tirade caught on video," *The Washington Post,* December 22, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/12/22/tell-them-to-go-back-where-they-belong-j-c-penney-customers-racist-tirade-caught-on-video/?utm_term=.518601e24933; Donie O'Sullivan, "Walmart to ban woman who told customer to 'go back to Mexico,' called another the N-word," *CNN,* May 25, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/24/us/walmart-racial-outburst/index.html.

[530] Mexicali, according to the city manager Jose Arango, had obtained "a reputation as a place full of deportees" after it received the largest number of deportees and repatriated migrants than any other Mexican border city in 2013. Although Mexico offered these migrants discounted bus tickets to the Mexican interior, many began to settle in Mexicali in order to be closer to their families who remained in the United States. Nick Miroff, "Mexicali has become Mexico's city of the deported as U.S. dumps more

Asian and a few eastern European migrants made their way to these cities in the early decades of the twentieth century, Central Americans and Haitians have now brought racial and ethnic diversity to Baja California. Like Chinese and Japanese migrants before them, Haitian migrants have experienced xenophobia and racism in particular. They began arriving in Tijuana and Mexicali in May 2016 hoping to enter the US under a Temporary Protected Status. Many Haitians had labored in Brazil helping construct stadiums and other infrastructure for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics and saved money to make the long trip north. As the number of Haitian migrants arriving in Tijuana began to exceed the number that US immigration authorities could receive and process, however, a "migrant crisis" soon developed. Haitians awaiting an appointment at the US port of entry found refuge in Tijuana's migrant shelters after the US Customs and Border Protection asked Mexico's National Institute of Migration to find temporary housing for the homeless migrants. Once Tijuana's migrant shelters became overcrowded many Haitians then traveled to Mexicali upon hearing reports that there was still space in the nearby border city. Like the aspirantes who traveled to Baja California in the mid-twentieth century, Haitian migrants became a visible population of transients walking around city streets, waiting for the opportunity to migrate to the United States.

---

people there," *The Washington Post,* January 16, 2014," https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/mexicali-has-become-mexicos-city-of-the-deported-as-us-dumps-more-people-there/2014/01/16/c5f037ba-68fa-11e3-997b-9213b17dac97_story.html?utm_term=.b5ba6566553f; Kelly McEvers, "Deportees to Mexicali Wait For Another Chance To Cross Into U.S.," *NPR,* March 27, 2014, http://www.npr.org/2014/03/27/295144710/deportees-to-mexicali-wait-for-another-chance-to-cross-into-u-s.

The arrival of Haitians, like internal migrants' arrival half a century before, spurred alarmist news reports about the possible threats the newcomers posed to Baja California. In a visit to Tijuana, Mexican human rights advocate Alejandro Solalinde warned that if the Mexican government did not properly assist them, the stranded migrants would then turn on Mexican society and join organized crime. Though Solalinde remarked that Haitians were not "bad people," but that desperate individuals recur to whatever options they have, the Catholic priest and activist likely stoked the flames of nativism in Baja California. A group organized through a social media page that publicly opposed Haitian migration and called itself Priority for MEXICANS! (*Prioridad para los MEXICANOS!)* reached a membership of more than 700 members by October 2016. A misogynist and racist comment posted in the group's page, for instance, warned about the degeneration of the Mexican race if impressionable Mexican women procreated with Haitian men. Meanwhile, a few Mexican deportees expressed resentment over the help that Haitians were receiving and several clashes occurred between Mexicans and Haitians in migrant shelters. Baja California senator Marco Antonio Blásquez Salinas also contributed to the wave of hostility against Haitians by stating that Mexico had to enforce control over its borders and remove them.[531]

Though Haitian migrants' experience in Baja California was largely colored by racism, their arrival generated many responses that closely resembled those seen during the Bracero Program era. When some of the highest-ranking officials in the federal

[531] Manuel Ayala, "Miles de haitianos varados en Tijuana: la crisis migratoria que recae en Estados Unidos," *VICE,* October 13, 2016, https://www.vice.com/es_mx/article/qbqxpw/miles-de-haitianos-varados-en-tijuana-la-crisis-migratoria-que-recae-en-estados-unidos; Laura Sánchez, "Deportados dan cobijo a haitianos en Mexicali," *El Universal,* November 28, 2016, http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2016/11/28/deportados-dan-cobijo-haitianos-en-mexicali.

government visited Baja California in October 2016 to learn more about the Haitian migrants stranded there, for instance, the director of the Mexican Interior Minister, Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, called the situation a "grave problem."[532] History was repeating itself. The "grave problem" this time were not aspirantes, however, but Haitian migrants. Despite the large attention that the homeless migrants received in the international media, their conditions did not improve in the subsequent months. *VICE* reported in February 2017 that although the Mexican central government had coordinated with the US to temporarily receive Haitian migrants, the "burden" of providing them housing, food, and supplies had fallen on municipal and state offices, non-governmental organizations, churches, and private donations.[533] The following month the Mexican federal government finally announced that the organizations helping Haitians would be able to apply for small grants administered by the National Institute for Social Development (*Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social*). The government would also offer free transportation to the Haitians who could legally return to Brazil.[534] By July, when it became clear that the remaining Haitians in Baja California would be unable to enter the US, local, state, and federal authorities began to advise the new residents to regularize their legal status in Mexico. Juan Manuel Gastélum, the mayor of Tijuana, told reporters that business and consumption had increased in the areas where Haitians had settled. Noting that some Haitians had found Mexican partners, Gastélum predicted the

---

[532] "Son un grave problema migrantes haitianos en Tijuana y Mexicali: Osorio. Con López Dóriga," *GrupoFórmula*, October 24, 2016, http://www.radioformula.com.mx/notas.asp?Idn=635691&idFC=2016.
[533] Hans-Maximo Musielik, "Retratos íntimos de los miles de refugiados haitianos atrapados en Tijuana," *VICE,* February 9, 2017, https://www.vice.com/es_mx/article/9ag9wp/retratos-intimos-de-los-miles-de-refugiados-haitianos-atrapados-en-tijuana.
[534] Mireya Cuéllar, "Gobierno de México ofrece a haitianos 'retorno asistido' a Brasil," *La Jornada Baja California*, March 2, 2017, http://jornadabc.mx/tijuana/03-03-2017/gobierno-de-mexico-ofrece-haitianos-retorno-asistido-brasil.

city would have many "dark tijuanenses."[535] The Haitian migrant "crisis" of 2016 and 2017, in other words, held many parallels with the uncontrolled migration of aspirantes to Mexicali in 1954. Local residents criticized the federal government for being partially responsible for these migrations, yet providing little or no support to Baja California's authorities and civil society. As in 1954, Mexico attempted to "assist" homeless migrants with their "return" to another region. Many Haitians, like aspirantes before them, ultimately settled in Baja California and formed new communities such as Tijuana's "New Haiti."

The Mexican government's poor response to Haitian migration came only a year after local and state authorities faced severe scrutiny for the substandard living and working conditions that farmworkers endured in Baja California's San Quintin Valley. Located approximately 200 miles south of Tijuana, the San Quintin Valley is one of Mexico's largest agricultural centers. Though the valley began to steadily grow in the 1960s under the ejido system, San Quintin experienced its largest expansion in the 1990s with the signing of NAFTA and an intensification of export production.[536] Recent innovations in agricultural production have allowed companies such as BerryMex, the largest producer in the San Quintin Valley, to supply Driscoll's, the world's largest berry distributor, with fresh shipments all year long. This has encouraged indigenous agricultural workers from southern Mexico, who in previous decades migrated seasonally

---

[535] Francisco Garfias, "Migración haitiana: 'Vamos a tener muchos tijuanenses morenitos…'" *Excelsior*, July 11, 2017, http://www.excelsior.com.mx/opinion/francisco-garfias/2017/07/11/1174866; Ariadna García, "Regularizará México cerca de 4 mil caribeños en la entidad," *El Universal,* July 9, 2017, http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2017/07/9/regularizara-mexico-cerca-de-4-mil-caribenos-en-la-entidad.

[536] Charles Hillinger, "Mexico's Great Frontier Set for Arrival of Homesteaders," *Los Angeles Times,* May 21, 1967, pg. B.

to San Quintin, to settle permanently in the region. The workers' first collective efforts centered on improving living conditions in the houses they built themselves in colonias with no public services. They formed the *Alianza de Organizaciones Nacional, Estatal y Municipal por la Justicia Social* (Alliance of National, State, and Municipal Organizations for Social Justice) to fight for adequate water and garbage services.

Once settled in the region, San Quintin's farmworkers turned their focus to labor issues and began a two-month strike in March 2015.[537] They demanded higher wages, government benefits, overtime pay, and an end to sexual abuse against female workers. Earning about $9 (dollars) a day, berry pickers were unable to purchase many food items that Americans would consider basic staples. A kilogram of meat, for instance, cost about $8 (dollars) and an egg carton about $4. Veteran pickers pointed to the fact that their wages had not increased in more than a decade. Though initially steadfast in their objection to a pay increase, San Quintin's growers began to negotiate with the strikers when threats of an international boycott threatened the international industry. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in May 2015 that "In an unprecedented move, Mexico's federal government [had] agreed to pay part of the workers' wages in order to meet their demands for a minimum daily wage of 200 pesos, or about $13." This occurred after the strikers had already lowered their daily wage demands from 300 to 200 pesos. In addition to the wage contributions, the Mexican government agreed to provide social security

[537] As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, some of the strike leaders had previously worked in the U.S. and participated in strikes in Florida, Oregon, and California. Richard Marosi, "Baja labor leaders learned tactics from their efforts in U.S.," *Los Angeles Times,* March 28, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-me-baja-labor-leaders-20150329-story.html; David Bacon, "The Pacific Coast Farm-Worker Rebellion," *The Nation,* August 28, 2015, https://www.thenation.com/article/the-pacific-coast-farm-worker-rebellion/.

benefits (pensions and healthcare) to the farmworkers.[538] If the strike achieved these modest gains, the *Los Angeles Times* later concluded, this was because strike organizers had strategically drawn the attention of the international media.[539] The international reporters and their cameras had finally drawn agribusiness and the Mexican government to the negotiating table.

The media attention that the San Quintin strike received in 2015 also shined a light on the ongoing efforts by indigenous Mexican farmworkers organizing along the US Pacific Coast. *The Nation,* for instance, published a story in August 2015 outlining the farmworkers' common struggles and connections. David Bacon, the article's author, noted that the San Quintin farmworkers had allies in Burlington, Washington, where Mixtec and Triqui berry pickers had formed an independent union called Families United for Justice. Berry pickers in the US today face many of the same problems that farmworkers have confronted since the mid-twentieth century. The H-2A guest worker program depresses wages like the Bracero Program once did more than seven decades ago. Migrant deportability, moreover, remains a strong disciplinary tool that threatens workers with removal if they draw attention to themselves.[540] The undocumented status of many of these farmworkers not only hinders their labor efforts, but it also augments their precarity. While San Quintin's berry pickers sometimes receive Mexican government subsidies that help them survive during the idle seasons, the undocumented

---

[538] Richard Marosi, "Amid mounting tension, Mexico agrees to subsidize farmworkers' wages," *Los Angeles Times,* May 14, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-baja-farmworkers-20150515-story.html.
[539] The Times Editorial Board, "Editorial: Farmworkers win big—maybe—in Baja," *Los Angeles Times,* June 11, 2014, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-baja-farmworker-deal-20150611-story.html.
[540] When members of the Oaxacan diaspora coordinated work stoppages in Greenfield, California in 1999 to protest inhumane working conditions, for instance, immigration raids soon followed.

status of migrant farmworkers in the US make them ineligible for these kinds of public assistance. The neoliberal assault on public spending, moreover, threatens to eliminate the few public resources available to legal residents and citizens. These conditions have motivated farmworkers on both sides of the border to organize internationally and to advocate for the "right to not migrate, or the right to stay home—for jobs, education, and economic development in homes communities that would make migration a voluntary choice, rather than a necessity for survival."[541]

The strikes and work stoppages that indigenous Mexican berry pickers have organized on both sides of the US-Mexico border continue to highlight the poverty that agribusiness forces upon farmworkers. The seasonal nature of farm work, as some growers have candidly observed, requires a workforce that is inevitably unemployed a fraction of the year. A population that is underpaid, that is forced to migrate seasonally to find employment, or that is unemployed several months every year will likely depend on public assistance at one or more points in their lives. Jerry Brown acknowledged this reality in 1975 when he stated during his gubernatorial inaugural address that it was time to provide unemployment insurance to California's farmworkers.[542] In the San Quintin Valley, the Mexican government has also acknowledged the poverty of farm work and provided berry pickers with pensions, healthcare, and need-based assistance. Although some Mexicans might believe that the responsibility of providing decent wages to berry

[541] Bacon, "The Pacific Coast Farm-Worker Rebellion."
[542] Pawell, *The Union of their Dreams,* 153.

pickers should fall on the companies that employ them, most agree that farmworkers should earn a *salario digno* (living wage).[543]

While Mexico's corrupt government has allowed companies to continue their abusive business practices and keep wages low, xenophobia and racism in the U.S. have fueled a political system that blames undocumented workers for their exploitation as cheap labor. The racial script of the Mexican immigrant dependent on public assistance justified the repatriation of approximately one million Mexican immigrants and their U.S. citizen children in the 1930s.[544] This stereotype fueled the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in the 1990s that would have denied access to healthcare and education to unauthorized migrants. Millions of Americans voted to elect Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016 in spite—*or because*—of the fact that he called Mexican immigrants "rapists" in a public speech to announce his campaign.[545] Trump's racist portrayal of Mexican immigrants built on the stereotype of the "criminal" immigrant who broke immigration laws to enter the United States. These racial scripts have ensured that Mexican immigrants remain "Always the laborer[s], Never the Citizen[s]."[546] Mexico, however, is not free of xenophobia and racism. As Haitian migration to Baja California has left more than clear, Mexicans are willing to adopt the same attitudes when destitute immigrants appear to utilize public resources or put a strain on the state. As Baja

---

[543] Antonio Heras, "Dos años después del paro, nada ha cambiado para los jornalerso de San Quintín," *proceso,* March 6, 2017, http://www.proceso.com.mx/476942/dos-anos-despues-de-paro-nada-ha-cambiado-para-los-jornaleros-de-san-quintin.
[544] Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal.*
[545] Washington Post Staff, "Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid," *Washington Post,* June 16, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/?utm_term=.f8a1811c49db.
[546] Mark Reisler, "Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of the Mexican Immigrant during the 1920s," *Pacific Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1976): 231-254.

California's undocumented immigrants, Haitians risk becoming an underclass of unauthorized workers. The first Haitians to join the local workforce did so by joining the informal economy, the only sector where they could find employment. This motivated Mexican authorities and Haitian leaders to urge migrants to regularize their status as they settle permanently in the region.[547]

One of the Bracero Program's largest features was the production of an underclass of vulnerable workers. As Cindy Hahamovitch has shown, guest workers' deportabilty makes them second-class denizens who are "denied the political power necessary to enforce their basic rights."[548] By separating families and placing farmworkers' social reproduction in Mexico, the Bracero Program also gave agribusiness the means to hide workers' poverty and deny them the living wages they deserved. Although labor leaders like Galarza argued in the 1950s that the Bracero Program was importing "the lower standards of living of workers of another country," the fact is that it was exporting poverty to Mexico.[549] Today agribusiness has not only externalized social reproduction to Mexico, but it has also outsourced farm labor to places like the San Quintin Valley. The farm export industry in San Quintin is the neoliberal continuation of the Bracero Program. Indigenous Mexican migrants from the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas are today's braceros, a population that has been forced to migrate within and beyond territorial lines and who ultimately pays the price of their cheap labor.

---

[547] Cuéllar, "Gobierno de México ofrece a haitianos 'retorno asistido;'" García, "Regularizará México cerca de 4 mil caribeños."
[548] Hahamovotich, *No Man's Land,* 242.
[549] "Do the Nationals Have to Be Moved?" *Brawley News.*

References

Published Secondary Sources

Alvarez, Robert R. *Familia: Migration and Adaptation in Baja and Alta California, 1800-1975*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Andrés, Benny Joseph. "Power and Control in Imperial Valley, California: Nature, Agribusiness, Labor, and Race Relations, 1900-1940." PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2003.

---------. *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015.

Anguiano Téllez, María Eugenia. *Agricultura y migración en el Valle de Mexicali*. Tijuana, Baja California, México: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1995.

Bardacke, Frank. *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chávez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers.* New York: Verso, 2011.

Boime, Eric I. "Fluid Boundaries: Southern California, Baja California, and the Conflict Over the Colorado River, 1848-1944." PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002.

Brooks, James, Christopher R. DeCorse, and John Walton. *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning, and Narrative in Microhistory.* Santa Fe, N.M: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008.

Burawoy, Michael. "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material from Southern Africa and the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 81 no. 5 (1976): 1050-1087.

Bustamante, Jorge A. "Maquiladoras: A New Face of International Capitalism on Mexico's Northern Frontier." In *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor*, edited by June C. Nash and María P. Fernández-Kelly, 224-256. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.

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

Canaday, Margot. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Chávez, Sergio. *Border Lives: Fronterizos, Transnational Migrants, and Commuters in Tijuana*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Cohen, Deborah. "From Peasant to Worker: Migration, Masculinity, and the Making of Mexican Workers in the US." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69 no. 1 (2006): 81-103.

---------. *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Córdoba Ramírez, Diana Irina. "Las contrataciones de braceros en el estado de Chihuahua." In *Tras los pasos de los braceros: Entre la teoría y la realidad,* edited by Aidé Grijalva and Rafael Arriaga Mártinez, 203-225. Mexico City: Juan Pablo Editor, 2015.

Cravey, Altha. "Toque una Ranchera, Por Favor." *Antipode* 35, no. 3 (2003): 603-621.

De Genova, Nicholas. "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2002): 419-447.

---------. "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality.'" *Latino Studies* 2 no. 2 (2004): 160-185.

España-Maram, Linda. *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Fernández-Kelly, María Patricia. "Mexican Border Industrialization, Female Labor Force Participation and Migration." In *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor*, edited by June C. Nash and María P. Fernández-Kelly, 205-223. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.

Fernández-Kelly, María Patricia and Douglas Massey. "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007): 98-118.

FitzGerald, David. *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Flores, Lori A. *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Fujita-Rony, Dorothy B. *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

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

Gamboa, Erasmo. *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000.

Garcia, Matt. *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

García y Griego, Manuel. "The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964." In *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States,* edited by David G. Gutiérrez, 45-85. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1996.

Goldstein, Alyosha. *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action During the American Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

González, Gilbert G. *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

Grijalva, Aidé. "La bracereada que llegó para quedarse: Mexicali y el programa bracero." In *Tras los pasos de los braceros: Entre la teoría y la realidad,* edited by Aidé Grijalva and Rafael Arriaga Mártinez, 227-263. Mexico City: Juan Pablo Editor, 2015,

Grove, Wayne A. "The Mexican Farm Labor Program, 1942-1964: Government-Administered Labor Market Insurance for Farmers." *Agricultural History* 70, no. 2 (1996): 302-320.

Guerin-Gonzales, Camille. *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Güicho Gutiérrez, Felipe. *Y nació Pueblo Nuevo*. Mexicali: Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos, 1999.

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

Hahamovitch, Cindy. *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Hernández, Kelly Lytle. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2010.

---------. *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Higbie, Frank Tobias. *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

---------. "Women and Children First: New Directions in Anti-Immigrant Politics." *Socialist Review* Vol. 25 (1995): 169-190.

HoSang, Daniel Martinez. *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Jiménez, Tomás R. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Kang, Deborah S. *The INS on the Line: Making Immigration Law on the US-Mexico Border, 1917-1954*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Katz, Cindi. "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction." *Antipode* Vol. 34 No. 4 (2001): 709-728.

Lee, Erika. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

León Portilla, Miguel, and David Piñera Ramírez. *Baja California: historia breve*. México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas, 2011.

Leonard, Karen Isaksen. *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

Limón, José E. *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.

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

Lucero, Héctor Manuel. "Peopling Baja California." In *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Bajalta California,* edited by Michael J. Dear, Gustavo Leclerc, and Jo-Anne Berelowitz, 83-118. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Luibhéid, Eithne. *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Martin, Nina. "The Crisis of Social Reproduction Among Migrant Workers: Interrogating the Role of Migrant Civil Society." *Antipode* 42, no. 1 (2010): 127-151.

Martínez, Oscar J. *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives.* Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996.

Massey, Douglas S. and Karen A. Pren. "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America." *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 1 (2012): 1-29.

Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002.

McNamara, Patrick J. *Sons of the Sierra: Juárez, Díaz, and the People of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, 1855-1920.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds. *The Course of Mexican History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Mines, Richard and Ricardo Anzaldúa. *New Migrants vs. Old Migrants: Alternative Labor Market Structures in the California Citrus Industry.* La Jolla: Program in US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982.

Mitchell, Don. *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012.

Mitchell, H.L. *Mean Things Happening in This Land: The Life and Times of H.L. Mitchell, Co-founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.* Montclair, N.J.: Allanheld, Osmun, 1979.

Mize, Ronald L. and Alicia C. S. Swords. *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Molina, Natalia. *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

---------. *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Montejano, David. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987.

Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Orozco Maciel, Raúl. *De este lado del puente: el tradicional barrio de Pueblo Nuevo*. Mexicali, Baja California: Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 1995.

Ortega Villa, Luz María and Guadalupe Ortega Villa. *Donde empieza la carne asada: Consumo de bienes culturales en sectores populares de Mexicali.* Mexicali: Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, 2005.

Pawell, Miriam. *The Union of their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2010.

Peck, Gunther. *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Perales, Monica. *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Pitti, Stephen J. *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans*. Princeton University Press, 2003.

Reisler, Mark. *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood, Press, 1976.

Robinson, William I. *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Rodríguez, Néstor. "The Battle for the Border: Notes on Autonomous Migration, Transnational Communites, and the State*." Social Justice*. 23.3 (1996).

Rosas, Ana E. *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border.* Berkeley: University of California, 2014.

Round, Phillip H. *The Impossible Land: Story and Place in California's Imperial Valley*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

Sanmiguel-Valderrama, Olga. "Border Enforcement at Family Sites: Social Reproductive Implications for Mexican and Central American Manual Labor in the United States." *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 5 (2013): 78-92.

Schantz, Eric Michael. “From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: vice tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965.” PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001.

Scruggs, Otey M. *Braceros. “Wetbacks,” and the Farm Labor Problem.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988.

Sherman, John W. “The Mexican ‘Miracle’ and Its Collapse.” In *The Oxford History of Mexico,* edited by Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley, 575-607. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Smith, Barbara Ellen and Jamie Winders. "‘We’re here to Stay’: Economic Restructuring, Latino Migration and Place-Making in the US South." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33, no. 1 (2008): 60-72.

Smith, Michael P. and Luis E. Guarnizo. *Transnationalism from Below.* New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998.

Stein, Judith. *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies*. New Haven [Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and Its Discontents.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.

Torpey, John C. “Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate Means of Movement.” *Sociological Theory* 16 (1998): 239-259.

Way, Peter. "Evil Humors and Ardent Spirits: The Rough Culture of Canal Construction Laborers." *The Journal of American History* 79 no. 4 (1993): 1397-1428.

Wimmer, Andreas and Nina Glick Schiller. “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology.” *International Migration Review* 37 no. 3 (2003): 576-610.

Zúñiga, Víctor and Rubén Hernández-León. *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005.

Published Primary Sources

Baja California and Braulio Maldonado Sández. *II informe del Lic. Braulio Maldonado S., Governador Constitucional del Estado de Baja California: 1º octubre de 1954 a 1º de octubre de 1955*. Mexicali: Gobierno de Baja California, 1955.

México. *6˚censo de población. 1940* México: Secretaría de la economía nacional, Dirección general de estadística, 1943.

México. *VIII censo general de población, 1960 Baja California, Territorio.* México, D.F.: Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Secretaría de Industria y Comercio, Dirección General de Estadística, 1963.

México, *IX censo general de población, 1970: 28 de enero de 1970* (México: Dirección general de estadística, 1971).

México. *Séptimo censo general de población, 6 de junio de 1950.* México: México: Dirección general de estadística, 1952.

Archives and Personal Papers Collections

- Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico
- Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California, Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico
- Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico

- Anne Draper Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University
- Ernesto Galarza Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University
- Benjamin L. Yellen Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California San Diego