The College of Wooster

Define Bracero:
A Study of Ethnic Identity in the Bracero Program,
A Prospectus

By

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Chapter One: Introduction to Junior Independent Study Prospectus

For my Junior IS, I chose to use an alternative model, the prospectus. Instead of writing a traditional one semester, independent research project, I created a thorough outline to guide my Senior IS, essentially making this a three semester project. I began with a careful study of my topic, which included reading prominent secondary literature in the field and gathering and analyzing primary sources. Along with an analysis of these sources and a narrative of my subject, my prospectus includes an articulation of the historical question I hope to answer next year, the methods I will employ to answer it, a tentative chapter outline of my Senior IS, and a research schedule to navigate the process. Using a prospectus will ultimately provide structure to my project next year, and help me make the most of my time to create a detailed, well researched, and original Senior IS.

Chapter Two: Thesis Statement/Articulation of Question

When the United States first began contracting Mexican men as braceros to harvest their crops and (to a lesser extent) lay down their railroad tracks during World War II, they never anticipated the consequences of this exchange. The bracero program, functioning under preexisting systems of cultural and labor relations, would create a shift in identity for both braceros and Mexican Americans. For the Mexican American community in particular, the bracero program would reveal tensions between assimilation, and embracing ties to their home country. Varying interests transformed braceros to fit many roles, often unwillingly- the Mexican government viewed them as transnational citizens migrating to uplift Mexico, while the United States saw them as the solution to labor shortages for two wars. California agribusiness used braceros as cheap, submissive alternatives to American field workers, while domestic unions treated them as imminent dangers to their jobs, wages, and working conditions. Entire communities of Mexican Americans split apart over the bracero program; some believed braceros would impede any progress made for acceptance by the mainstream, while others saw protecting their Mexican brothers as the key to breaking down racial barriers in the United States. Braceros also viewed themselves as serving different purposes, ranging from young men looking for adventure, to sons supporting impoverished families, proud Mexican citizens seeking better wages, and men hoping to migrate across the border permanently. The bracero program never functioned as a clean exchange of labor between countries, rather it made the bracero a pawn for manipulation by others, while simultaneously seeking to gain his own agency.

For my Senior Independent Study, I plan to analyze the role ethnic identity played in determining the responses of California growers, American unions, and Mexican American advocacy groups to the presence of braceros. I want to explore if the cultural identity of braceros as Mexican nationals affected their place in labor struggles and Mexican Americans' fight for equality in the United States. This examination will involve answering a series of secondary questions, such as if responses to cultural identity correlated with the treatment braceros received while away from Mexico. Did any involved interest, such as agribusiness, have the power to create the frameworks braceros found themselves in, or were the actors in the agricultural labor sphere all equal players? How did Mexican identity affect the agency of braceros? Did a Mexican identity exclude braceros from protective agencies such as unions and political groups, or did they get included under their umbrella of activism? Taking this investigation further, I want to analyze the role ethnic identity played in the bracero experience according to the workers themselves, using oral histories and taking one of my own from my grandfather, a former railroad bracero. Hopefully looking at the identity of braceros as Mexican laborers will contribute to an understanding of the complexity of the bracero program, and why it veered so drastically from what its creators intended.

So far in my research, several trends stand out. There seems to be a divide in the treatment of Americans of Mexican descent and alien residents, such as braceros, pointing to a possible relationship between ethnic identity and citizenship status. The power held in business and industry also appears to influence how unions responded to braceros. For example, agribusiness in California had much stricter hierarchy of power, with unions residing at the bottom, while railroad companies treated their unions with

more respect. Thus, the entrance of Mexican contract workers held a different significance in both spheres of labor. Debates over the existence of labor shortages and disagreements over wages also seems to have determined the outlooks of agricultural unions. Because American laborers faced these threats to their livelihoods, ethnic identity, rather than class or identity as a laborer, seemed to make all the difference to unions in determining what workers deserved better rights, jobs, and higher pay. It also appears that the biggest advocates for braceros rights had cultural ties to Mexico as immigrants, or as Mexican Americans, perhaps showing a tie between ethnic identity and advocacy. A more in depth study of the role of bracero identity my senior year will help me analyze these trends and their validity, and what it meant for the bracero program as a whole.

Chapter Three: Narrative

The Emergency Farm labor Program, more commonly referred to as the bracero program, originally served as the United States' solution to labor shortages during World War II.[1] This bilateral contract-labor system with Mexico allowed for the importation of Mexican men, called braceros, to work American fields and on some railroads. Mexican men would volunteer to be sent to the border to recruitment centers, signing labor contracts guaranteeing standard living and working conditions, wages, and how long they would work in the United States. Through the bracero program, impoverished Mexicans had the opportunity to earn higher wages, and become better farmers. In return, they would labor for American agricultural companies and promptly repatriate at the conclusion of their contracts.[2] Although the program began in 1942, agribusiness interests saw to it that braceros remained long after World War II. Braceros signed over 4.6 million labor contracts over the next twenty to years, the largest importation of migrant labor in American history.[3]

In spite of the bracero program's long history and magnitude, the influence of agribusiness caused the bracero program to veer far from its intended purpose. Growers frequently exploited braceros, shortchanged their wages, provided them with inferior working and living conditions, and used them as strikebreakers. The program's failure to ultimately benefit the bracero worker primarily stems from the inability of both nations to

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[1] David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), 134.
[2] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1.
[3] Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, ed. Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79.

address growers' exploitation of their workers, which they had gotten away with for decades. By ignoring growers' powerful position in agriculture, the bracero program only institutionalized the substandard treatment of laborers. With the framework of grower domination bound to bracero program, agribusiness had an avenue to conquer domestic and Mexican laborers for the next twenty-two years.

Government officials modeled the bracero program on labor practices from the 1920s and 1930s that allowed farmers to solidify their growing power in agribusiness with 'submissive' Mexican labor. Beginning in the 1920s, agriculture in the Southwest, particularly in California and Texas, evolved from primarily small farming organizations to "factories in the field".[4] These new agribusiness conglomerates depended heavily on manual labor to pick cotton, and harvest fruits and vegetables. To sustain their profit, growers sought a seasonal, disposable workforce to prevent high labor costs. Growers quickly saw Mexicans as the ideal ethnic group for the job, characterizing them as "docile, courteous, and [more] reliable than native-born or Asian alternatives." Some even cast Mexicans as racially predisposed to perform manual labor, and believed that "life on the hacienda down in 'Old Mexico' conditioned them to loyally serve a rural patrol." Growers, to legally ensure their control over the workforce, used their influence to exclude both agricultural and foreign laborers from the Wagner Act, a New Deal initiative protecting workers' rights.[5] By using these precedents set in agriculture as the backbone of the bracero program, government officials increased growers' power by codifying their access to Mexican workers, who growers only requested to continue their domination of labor through World War II.

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[4] Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," 81.
[5] Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," 81-82.

The concept of Mexican migration to the United States for temporary agricultural work also did not originate from the bracero program, but had been a pattern throughout the early 20th century. In the 1910s, Mexicans came to the United States as laborers in such great numbers that anti-immigration laws such as the Alien Contract Law excluded them. Generally, Mexican migrants did not cross over the border to realize their own dreams of economic improvement, but simply to find jobs. The expansion of agribusiness in the Southwest created and extended the need for laborers, creating the perfect opportunity for Mexico's excess of impoverished workers.[6] To satisfy these labor demands, American employers hired private labor contractors to coerce peasant Mexican laborers into striking up semi-legal labor contracts in what became known as the enganche system (from *el enganche*, meaning "the hook", implying that these laborers got hooked with the empty promise of better wages).[7] Mexican migrants took advantage of the border's proximity to agribusiness in Texas and California, and through structures such as the enganche system, a pattern of circular migration back and forth over the border became common. Mexican men had the opportunity to venture north for seasonal labor or during economic difficulty in Mexico, but almost always returned home.[8] American growers came to rely on these *enganchadores* recruiters to bring temporary Mexican labor to the country as Congress restricted European immigration and the

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[6] George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 39.
[7] Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," *Journal of the West*, 47, no. 3 (2008): 66.
[8] George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 41.

United States entered World War I.[9] President Taft even went so far as to meet with Mexican President Porfirio Díaz to officially contract unemployed Mexicans to specific American growers to ensure this flow of labor.[10] Several years later, the Immigration Act of 1917 would grant temporary entry to Western Hemisphere migrants, including Mexicans, and initiate the first publicly sanctioned provisional labor program in preparation for World War I (often referred to as 'the first bracero program').[11] These migration patterns gave growers the chance to capitalize off of Mexican migrant labor, making the later exploitation of World War II braceros a historical precedent associated with temporary labor, rather than a unique consequence resulting from the bracero program itself.

When the United States entered World War II in December of 1941, the United States and Mexico believed a formal bilateral contract labor system would solve their respective problems from the 1920s and 1930s. From the American perspective, labor shortages during World War I had made the government fearful of repeating history. Limits on Asian immigration, such as the Congressionally passed Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and a 1908 Gentleman's Agreement restricting Japanese immigration, contributed to the possibility of a labor shortage during World War I.[12] This caused the United States to recruit Mexican laborers in a less formal bracero exchange from 1917 to

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[9] Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," 66.
[10] Erasmo Gamboa, "On the Nation's Periphery: Mexican Braceros and the Pacific Northwest Railroad Industry 1943-1946," *Mexican Americans & World War II*, ed. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 270.
[11] Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," 66.
[12] Erasmo Gamboa, "On the Nation's Periphery", 270.

1922.[13] With the United States again finding itself fighting in a World War, the American government deemed an officially negotiated bilateral bracero program necessary to protect industries crucial to winning the war from labor shortages. On the other side of the border, Mexico had not yet fully recovered from the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution overhauled the government while simultaneously destroying the nation's most impoverished regions. In the war's aftermath, the new heads of state believed participating in a contract-labor program would solidify the new government, and the destruction of a national community made Mexico's lowest class into ideal candidates for braceros.[14] These challenges facing both the United States and Mexico made both governments feel it would be in their best interests formally participate in a bracero program, especially as the United States pledged its domestic workers to fighting for World War II.

Although an official bracero program piqued the Mexican government's interests, assurances needed to be made before it would commit to the exportation of its citizens. Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho in particular saw value in the bracero program as Mexico's contribution to World War II, and as a tool to control immigration to the United States.[15] But despite the president's endorsement, the Mexican government rejected the initial offer for a bracero program. The Mexican state voiced concerns that the program would only encourage the discrimination Mexicans already faced in the United States. To woo the Mexican government, American negotiators guaranteed requirements would be set and upheld concerning braceros' wages, housing,

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[13] Vernon Briggs, *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 97.
[14] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 5.
[15] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 22.

transportation, and protection against discrimination would be enforced. The United States also promised that Mexican officials could oversee the progress of the program to their liking, in addition to the American agencies in charge.[16] Although hindsight would eventually vindicate concerns over the treatment of braceros, at the time, these commitments successfully assuaged the Mexican government into sending a labor force across the border. Thus, on August 4, 1942 in Mexico City, representatives of the United States and Mexico ratified the first international executive agreement for the bracero program.[17]

The United States government had an easier time approving the bracero program because they employed underhanded techniques to ensure its passage, reflecting their belief that bracero labor would be paramount to the war. To the public, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made the program appear essential. He assured constituents that the bracero program represented the crucial role Mexico would play in the "war of [food] production, upon which the inevitable success of [the American] military program depends."[18] When threatened by domestic politics or foreign relations, national agencies propped up the program to ensure it did not die. The War Manpower Commission, the Immigration Service, and the Departments of State, Labor and Agriculture all clandestinely nominated members to form a Special Committee on the Importation of Mexican Labor to iron out the program's specifics amongst themselves, ensuring protection from public or Congressional debate. Only several months after the design and

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[16] Erasmo Gamboa, "On the Nation's Periphery", 275.
[17] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*, (Charlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1964), 47.
[18] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon*, (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 15.

ratification of the bracero program did Congress even formally submit its approval.[19] The United States government clearly desired bracero labor badly enough to use patchy methods to ensure the program's passage, demonstrating that their stake in the bracero program concentrated solely on guaranteeing consistent access to Mexican labor.

Once the bracero exchange began, the recruitment process in Mexico showed fundamental flaws, suggesting the Mexican government may not have been as in control of the program as originally thought in negotiations. The government only allowed men to participate in the exchange, for fear that transporting families would encourage permanent emigration. In addition, braceros had to be at least eighteen years old, and needed experience in agriculture and to pass physical examinations. In practice however, many non-agricultural laborers became braceros, and doctors exams could easily be bypassed.[20] Men needed official documents to enter the recruitment process along with recommendations of good character. While originally these 'tickets' into the bracero program could be freely obtained, corrupt Mexican officials quickly realized the opportunity for extortion and charged steep prices for sometimes counterfeit working papers.[21] Regardless of how men obtained them, braceros with papers then congregated at screening centers, original housed in Mexico City's stadiums. Mobs of peasant men and their families overwhelmed these stadiums, causing the location of recruitment centers to be moved around Mexico, so as not to swarm the capital with Mexico's most undesirable citizens.[22] At recruitment centers, laborers would be inspected and if accepted as

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[19] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1992), 1-2.
[20] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 22-23.
[21] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 91.
[22] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 52.

braceros, shipped by either train or bus to the border, where they transitioned from the Mexican leg of recruitment to the American.[23] Although the Mexican process proved easier for braceros to navigate, the government's inability to handle the influx of hopeful braceros and their facilitation of fraud served as red flags, signaling structural problems in this early stage of the bracero program. As later proven when braceros entered the United States, the Mexican government simply lacked the effectiveness to properly facilitate their end of the bracero program.

Upon arrival in the United States, braceros again passed through a vetting process, although this time the United States allowed growers to dominate the selection process, foreshadowing their immense influence over the bracero program as a whole. At American reception centers, after braceros received an additional physical examination by American doctors, inspectors ordered them to strip naked to be doused with DDT, to kill the lice inspectors presumed they carried over the border. Braceros also had their clothes thoroughly scrubbed, in an attempt to wash away their assumed filth as peasant laborers. Agribusiness representatives would then look braceros over for the physical marks of a good laborer, such as calluses or old scars, and desired personal traits, such as obedience and unintelligence. Once the qualities growers had valued for decades could be identified, braceros would then be offered a contract.[24] When the United States and Mexican governments collaborated to create the bracero program, they expected a degree of thoughtfulness to go into the decision before braceros signed their names on the dotted line. But as the recruiting process grew in magnitude, inspectors bypassed steps to more efficiently deliver Mexican labor to growers. Soon, "there was little time at Empalme or

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[23] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 93-94.
[24] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 98-99.

El Centro [recruitment centers] for reading and explanation of four pages of small print. On some days a thousand or more men arrived at the contracting center before mid-day to be X-rayed, dusted, questioned, contracted and dispatched before seven o'clock in the evening."[25] Similar to Mexico, United States showed clear signs that even in recruitment, the program played out much differently in reality than intended on paper. Government inspectors allowed growers to incorporate their power into the bracero program by handpicking laborers according to who looked most likely to be dominated. The grower control that existed at the very beginning of a bracero's journey would prove only to continue as they reached the fields.

Although bracero contracts guaranteed them certain rights, growers' abuse of flaws and loopholes in the terms eventually led to them breaking contracts however they saw fit. Bracero contracts promised suitable housing, access to medical care, roundtrip transportation to the United States courtesy of Mexico, accident insurance, food, and exemption from military service and discrimination.[26] They also explicitly prohibited the use of braceros in labor disputes in any way, including to break strikes.[27] As direct employees of the United States government, contracts stated braceros would be paid according to the prevailing wage, or the local minimum pay standards for American laborers doing similar work.[28] Initially meant to safeguard braceros with equal wages, growers manipulated this policy to arbitrarily determine domestic minimum wage by county, resulting in lower bracero wages.[29] Program negotiators failed to specify how

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[25] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 127.
[26] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 22-23.
[27] Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," 84.
[28] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 22-23.
[29] Vernon Briggs, *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*, 101.

many braceros the United States intended to recruit, or how long the bracero program would last. The agreement only stated that each government needed to give the other ninety days notice before withdrawing.[30] Without set limits, growers could exploit thousands of Mexicans indefinitely. Vague notions like prevailing wage, bracero quotas, and the length of the program encouraged growers to interpret the terms in the bracero contracts to their benefit, often at the disadvantage of the worker. This paved the way for even concrete conditions of the program, such as adequate working conditions and housing, and the use of braceros as strikebreakers to be flagrantly disregarded by growers, who already wielded tremendous power outside the restrictions of the bracero program.

Once the United States and Mexican governments formally approved the bracero program and braceros began to populate American fields, the program generally went through three unofficial phases. The first covered World War II, and appropriately lasted from 1942 to 1947. The second interim period laster form 1948 to 1951, when Mexico withdrew its support of the program and the United States unilaterally contracted braceros to be direct employees of growers. When the United States again needed wartime labor after entering the Korean War, the United States submitted to some of Mexico's demands to return to a bilateral exchange, marking the programs final phase from 1951 until 1964.[31] With the exception of the program's second period, the Mexican government frequently threatened to suspend the program to protest the treatment of braceros. The United States usually renegotiated their end of the bracero program without Mexico resorting to a stoppage, although this generally had little effect on changing the

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[30] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 15.
[31] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.

status quo of the program.[32] But these exceptions aside, this three phase outline generally serves as a broad trajectory of the bracero program.

Although the first phase of the bracero program can be considered the strongest due to the Mexican government's strong influence, the mistreatment of braceros indicates that despite Mexico's presence, growers still frequently abused the bracero program. This would be the only stage of the program in which the United States would treat Mexico as an equal partner, because of their need for wartime labor. The Mexican government used this leverage to demand that the federal government directly employ braceros, to protect their welfare by serving as a buffer between the workers and growers.[33] However, growers still exploited braceros and neglected to honor their contracts, exemplified by the Mexican government's termination of the program on February 8, 1943. Rather than lose their wartime labor supply, the United States agreed to meet Mexico's demands for better supervision of the program. This included increasing the authority of Mexican Labor Inspectors, who along with Mexican Consuls, could freely access farms that employed braceros. The Mexican government, adequately satisfied with these new terms, resumed recruitment on March 16, 1943. The influence yielded by Mexico at this stage of the bracero program allowed them to practice the tactic of suspension and negotiation to meet their demands.[34] The Mexican government had good intentions in committing to the welfare of their nationals, however their frequent withdrawals prove that violations of the program's terms still persisted. The United States still had to contend with significant

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[32] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 17.
[33] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.
[34] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 17-18.

pressure from growers, and Mexico's frequent protests of the abuse of braceros simply could not, and would not, be enough to enforce the treatment promised to braceros.

An example of agribusiness' powerful influence in this stage of the program can be shown by their impact as the catalyst that caused the United States government to drive out the agency originally in charge of running the bracero program. Initially the Farm Security Administration, under the umbrella of the Department of Agriculture, had the responsibility of recruiting and contracting braceros before lending them out to employers.[35] From the beginning of their jurisdiction in August of 1942, the FSA had a tumultuous relationship with growers. The agency's passion for seeing that minority groups and small farmers did not fall between the cracks of the federal bureaucracy caused conservative farm organizations to resent the FSA for their politics, and control over their precious labor force.[36] When the FSA showed their allegiance to American workers by using federal funds to transport them to farms as a first resort to fill labor shortages, a move in the spirit of the bracero program, growers retaliated.[37] They leaned on the federal government to remove this "social reform" agency. The government responded to growers' demands accordingly, replacing the FSA with the War Food Administration in March of 1943. The government's removal of the FSA from power less than a year after the agency took control of the bracero program signifies the incredible influence growers possessed over the bracero program.[38] This early flex of growers'

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[35] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 20-21.
[36] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 16-17.
[37] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 18-19.
[38] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 22.

power over the government only foreshadowed a pattern that would continue until the termination of the bracero program.

In the first phase of the bracero program, Congress passed Public Law 45 on April 29, 1943, which would serve as its official endorsement of the program and cater almost exclusively to growers, further expanding their realm of influence. This legislation codified the previously mentioned switch from the Farm Security Administration to the War Food Administration as primary agency in charge of the bracero program. This effectively overturned many of the FSA's progressive policies, including bussing American workers to farms to give them priority over foreign labor. By not funding this measure, the government essentially encouraged growers to use readily available bracero labor instead of making efforts to hire Americans. PL 45 also stipulated that domestic laborers would not receive the same protections guaranteed to braceros in their contracts, decreasing the appeal of farm labor to American workers while braceros still came in steady streams to farms. PL 45 would widen the avenues for growers to use foreign labor by authorizing the Immigration Commissioner to wave the prohibitions for contract labor under the Immigration Law of 1917. The Immigration Service slyly interpreted this as implicit permission to recruit braceros directly at the border, bypassing the Mexican recruitment process. This greatly appeased growers, who resented the Mexican government as an obstacle between them and bracero labor.[39] PL 45 served as an incredibly significant piece of legislation in the bracero program, and showed how the influence of agribusiness stretched from California to Washington DC. With Congress's

[39] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 22-23.

approval of PL 45, growers strengthened their already tight grip over both braceros and the entire American agricultural labor force.

During World War II, the United States and Mexico fashioned a railroad bracero program to parallel the agricultural program. A contrast of the railroad program's origins to the agricultural program further illuminates the effect of agribusiness, and their great impact on the bracero program. In 1941, the Southern Pacific Company requested braceros, claiming they could not meet labor demands with only the national market as a resource. They insisted a labor shortage would be detrimental to the war effort, because the building and maintenance of railroads transported goods necessary for America's success in World War II. The Immigration Service initially denied the request and told Southern Pacific, along with other railroad companies hungry for braceros, that the burden of proof lay with them to convince the War Manpower Commission of a real labor shortage.[40] For two years, the railroad industry and the federal government negotiated the most effective way to draw domestic labor to the tracks before resorting to using foreign labor. The agricultural industry bypassed this step, largely because growers unquestionably possessed the most superiority in the field, and demanded they needed braceros. In the railroad industry, unions carried significant influence, so when they called for priority to be given to American workers, the government and railroad companies took them seriously. After providing transportation for American railroad workers, hiring women and unskilled laborers, experimenting with African American labor, and raising wages, the railroad industry failed to fill their labor shortages and still clamored for braceros. At the start of 1943, the War Manpower Commission officially

[40] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, (CMAS Books, 1999), 61.

looked into designing a railroad bracero program.[41] They would later be the agency to contract braceros, while recruiting the Railroad Retirement Board to be the supervising agency.[42] The railroad bracero program would eventually bring 100,000 Mexican men to work on over thirty railroads across the continental United States, and lasting two and a half years, it would be the only part of the bracero program to end with World War II as originally planned.[43] Although historians often let the railroad program be overshadowed by the agricultural program due to its scale and duration, the program has significance as a model for what negotiators intended when designing the bracero program. While the railroad program still saw abuse of braceros, comparisons between the railroad and agricultural programs show just how many liberties agribusiness took with both the program itself, and the laborers lent to them.

In negotiations creating the railroad bracero program, the Mexican government again voiced concerns about workers' protection. However in this instance, Mexico used the agricultural program to predict the welfare of railroad braceros, but not the United States' supervision of the program. In 1943, the State Department sanctioned the American Ambassador to Mexico to propose a plan for the expansion of the bracero program to the Mexican Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. The Mexican government initially refused to negotiate out of displeasure for the agricultural program, which primarily stemmed from growers' abuse of braceros and disregard for their contracts. Stories of former braceros' encounters with discrimination often made their way into Mexican newspapers, and tainted national opinions of the program. Although the

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[41] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 61-66.
[42] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 54.
[43] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, ix.

government had reservations about the bracero program, Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho dismissed these concerns and extended his support for a railroad program. With his intervention, negotiations began.[44] However, when Marte Rodolfo Gómez became Mexico's new Secretario de Agricultura, his deep criticism of the bracero program upset these negotiations. Both governments believed the success the existing agricultural program would determine the outcome of a railroad bracero program. Because of Gómez's intense disapproval of the exchange, he threatened to use his veto to suspend recruitment of agricultural braceros, tabling any plans for a railroad program. President Camacho again intervened, assuring him that in the big picture, cooperation with the United States would serve Mexico's best interests. The Farm Security Administration, at this time still in charge of the bracero program, collaborated with the Mexican government to work through their issues with the program, and amended the agreement. With the Mexican government's reaffirmed approval of the agricultural program, negotiations for the railroad program continued.[45] The Mexican government again recognized problems in the agricultural bracero program that encouraged mistreatment of their citizens, but instead of correcting them in a new bracero program, they contributed to a cycle that passive accepted abuse. The Mexican government not only continued to put blind faith in the United States, despite examples suggesting they could not adequately enforce the terms of the bracero program, but poured even more of their men into expanding a fundamentally flawed program.

While the Mexican government continued attempts to advocate for its workers in the 1943 discussions creating the railroad bracero program, two patterns began to

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[44] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 67.
[45] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 68.

emerge; the United State government began to disregard Mexico's input, and the Mexican government started backing down from their demands, effectively giving up their leverage. Three separate bilateral discussions designed the bracero program, with the first establishing each country's stake in the program. The Mexican government needed assurance from the United States government that the program only intended to take unskilled laborers out of Mexico. Although eventually railroads would ignore this, at the time, the United States promised to comply. With this settled, negotiations focused on the scope of the program. The Mexican government only anticipated sending about five hundred men to work the railroads, while the War Manpower Commission wanted to recruit six thousand braceros. This request caught the Mexican government off guard, rendering them unable to respond to the demand and concluding this initial discussion. When both nations met again on April 3, 1943, they agreed on specific terms for the railroad bracero program. The State Department contemplated deducting a portion of braceros' wages, so they could receive benefits under the Railroad Retirement Board, but the Mexican government rejected this, calling it unreasonable. By the time braceros would be eligible to collect benefits, they would have long returned to Mexico. Additionally, the Mexican government believed treating braceros like American workers violated the spirit of the agreement, since both nations viewed braceros as temporary laborers. The final negations meant to ensure Mexico's satisfaction with the program, although the United States only did this superficially. The Mexican government still insisted it would be ridiculous for the Railroad Retirement Board to cover braceros, and instead proposed a group insurance plan for them. American negotiators ignored this request, and the clause in the railroad agreement went unamended. The Mexican

government passively accepted this response, and conceded to the earlier contested request of sending six thousand men as braceros.[46] An exchange of notes between America's Ambassador to Mexico and Mexico's Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores on April 29, 1943 marked the official binding agreement of the railroad bracero program.[47] Although the bracero program of World War II successfully expanded to cover a second industry, after only a year into the program, the Mexican government had already begun to lose its status as an equal partner, eventually affecting their control over the fate of braceros.

From this series of negotiations, the United States and Mexican governments produced a five page document that served as the backbone of the railroad bracero program until its termination, despite the document containing significant loopholes.[48] The agreement can be carved up into three sections, the first of which outlined the general principals of the program. It stated that braceros would be protected from discrimination under Executive Order No. 8802, would carry the rights of Mexican citizens with them across the border, and guaranteed that their presence in the labor force would not disrupt the wage structure for Americans. The second section detailed the administration of the program. While the United States government still managed the program, they delegated the War Manpower Commission to be the primary employer of braceros. The last and most detailed portion of the agreement outlined the minimum standards for braceros' wages and conditions. It made transportation to and from Mexico the responsibility of the employer, and prohibited wage deductions. Although braceros

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[46] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 69-71.
[47] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 72.
[48] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 72.

still could not engage in union activity, they could elect a representative to negotiate with both employers and unions. This section also specifically laid out a 'triangle of contracts', meaning the Mexican government gave the WMC permission to recruit braceros, who the WMC would in turn lend to growers, ensuring that braceros would never be directly obligated to employers.[49] Although otherwise sound, the agreement failed to specifically outline the roles of both governments. This did not create problems in Mexico, because the government's primarily exported workers. However in the United States, the federal government's vaguely defined role allowed them to oversee the program through a collaboration of agencies, instead of effectively supervise the program as an administrator. This opened a huge window for railroad industries to provide inadequate housing and unfair wages, like their agribusiness counterparts.[50] Because the Mexican and American governments refused to close these gaps, or lacked the ability to create iron clad regulations for the program, they allowed the same problems that plagued the agricultural program to repeat themselves in the railroad bracero program.

One essential difference between the agriculture and railroad industries centered around the power held by their unions, with the strength of railroad unions playing a critical role in terminating the railroad bracero program. When Japan surrendered from World War II in August of 1945, railroad unions pressured the federal government to disband the bracero program and repatriate the workers back to Mexico.[51] The War Manpower Commission complied by ending recruitment, with the last band of braceros leaving for the United States on August 24, 1945. The railroad industry begged for the

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[49] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 72-74.
[50] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 119.
[51] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 135.

program to be extended for at least another year, or until they felt domestic labor could step up to fill the holes left by braceros. Unions, in response, continued to demand immediate repatriation.[52] The positions held by the federal government ranged across the board; the Immigration Service believed in immediate repatriation, while the Department of State supported a repatriation rate similar to the rate at which braceros arrived.[53] The WMC ultimately sided with the unions, declaring that all railroad braceros (about fifty thousand in number) must be back in Mexico within thirty days of August 28. This time, instead of the railroad industries, the Mexican government advocated that braceros stay in the United States, fearing that such a large and sudden infusion of men into their workforce would lead to disaster. The WMC compromised with unions, railroad companies, and the Mexican government, allowing current braceros to finish their contracts, and leave the United States within a six month grace period.[54] Because railroad unions had not suffered the same long, oppressive history under the thumb of agribusiness like field workers, they stood a greater chance going toe to toe with railroad companies over the favor of the federal government. Although certainly not the only factor contributing to the termination of the railroad bracero program, unions played a crucial role in ensuring that the program did not last beyond World War II, while growers would use their power to guarantee their access to braceros for two more decades.

Although negotiators intended the bracero program to parallel World War II, pressure from growers, combined with a shift in bilateral negotiations not only changed the fundamental nature of the program, but in 1948 pushed it into a second phase. After

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[52] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 152.
[53] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 154.
[54] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 152.

Germany and Japan's surrender, the Department of State notified Mexico that the bracero program should end with World War II, proposing its official termination within ninety days of November 15, 1946.[55] The Mexican government, finally fed up with America's unwillingness or inability to enforce the terms of the bracero program, obliged this request, refusing to renew their end of the bilateral agreement. Growers panicked. They insisted the agricultural industry depended on bracero labor, and their outcries led to unilateral extensions of the program through executive orders.[56] This occurred without Congress's renewal of Public Law 45, the official legislation codifying the program, or Mexico rejoining the program, which they abandoned out of protest.[57] On top of this, the bracero program saw another shift in governing agencies, with the dismantling of the War Manpower Commission in January 1948 effectively deferring responsibility for braceros to the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Employment Security, adding to the instability.[58] This transformation of the bracero program from a bilateral to a unilateral exchange, coupled with the shift of governing agencies in the United States, created a dramatic change in the bracero program, which used to their advantage.

This second phase of the bracero program can be characterized by the direct recruitment of braceros by growers, a move previously avoided by the bilateral agreements because it gave growers too much power. Instead of growers needing to pressure a middleman to satisfy their demands, direct recruitment allowed them to dominate the program freely. On paper, the Immigration Service still supervised recruitment, but in reality they provided no effective oversight and growers could easily

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[55] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 48.
[56] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.
[57] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 2.
[58] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 51.

bypass many legislative formalities. Growers took it upon themselves to shorten bracero contracts to forty five days, increasing the number of trips braceros needed to make to profit from their time in the United States. Naturally, these changes combined with the blind eye of the federal government caused complaints of abuse to skyrocket.[59] Braceros reported deficient food, substandard housing, appalling work conditions, and often times growers employed too many workers for each to receive adequate work. Seeing no other alternative, many braceros broke their contracts and "skipped" from farms, with desertion rates hovering around fifty percent in some areas.[60] Although generally growers could get away with free reign during this phase of the program, eventually their power hit some limits; due to the overwhelming amount of complaints from braceros, the federal government forced growers to extend contracts to at least eighteen months, but other conditions remained.[61] These exceptions aside, the new policy permitting permitting agribusiness to directly recruit braceros allowed growers to treat braceros in a way that maximized their benefits, with the federal government doing the bare minimum to hold them back.

During this stage, the federal government not only let growers freely control the program, but even supported their compulsion for Mexican labor for as long as possible. In response to growers' claims that recruiting braceros from Mexico would be too time consuming and expensive, the Immigration Service went as far as to condone on-the-spot legalization of alien Mexican agricultural workers. Although not braceros themselves, special previsions given to "wetback" Mexican labor, along with braceros, confirmed the

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[59] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.
[60] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 42-43.
[61] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 23.

priority the federal government gave to employing Mexican labor over domestics.[62] The Mexican government lost its power when it withdrew from the bilateral bracero agreement, rendering them unable to combat the combined forces of growers and the United States government. Barbara Schmitter Heisler powerfully depicts the state of recruitment at this stage of the bracero program:

> After months of renegotiating the treaty with Mexico, which was demanding better protection and higher wages for braceros, the departments of Labor; Justice and State issued a press release indicating that the United States would award contracts to migrants crossing the border. Although the Mexican government denounced this action, implored citizens to stay home, and declared that no one would be permitted to cross and those who did would be punished, thousands of Mexicans congregated at the U.S./Mexican border near Mexicali and thousands more arrived daily. When the United States pulled back the gates...hundreds of Mexicans rushed across the border into the "extended arms of the border patrol" as Mexican soldiers tried to prevent them from crossing. Men who had previously entered illegally and were already working in the United States were encouraged by the Border Patrol to briefly step over the border (step-over) to meet the official requirement of having been expelled to Mexico and allowing them to reenter with INS sanction. Responding to the chaotic situation, and the negative press showing Mexican soldiers beating workers who wanted to cross, the Mexican government reversed its decision and instructed its officials to allow people to cross the border.[63]

By 1950, this INS policy grew to such magnitude that 'legalized illegals' outnumbered recruited braceros five to one, with both groups crippling domestic labor.[64] Due to the extreme conditions of the program, growers could not sustain their unchecked power indefinitely, and with the United States entering the Korean War, the bracero program entered its third and final phase.

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[62] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 2.
[63] Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," 6-7.
[64] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 2.

With the Untied States again at war, preventing labor shortages proved to be more important to the American government than appeasing large agribusiness interests, and definitely took priority over ensuring the quality treatment of braceros. In 1951, when the United States sent representatives to Mexico City to propose a new bilateral agreement, the Mexican government used their new leverage accordingly. Unhappy with growers directly recruiting braceros, they demanded a new bill be introduced in Congress to reestablish government sponsorship of the bracero program, or Mexico would refuse to participate. While the current state of the bracero program pleased growers, the American government and the bracero laborers saw it deteriorating into chaos. In order secure their access to Mexican labor, especially in the new climate of the Korean War, the United States had no choice but to take back the reins of power from growers and bend to Mexico's demands.[65] Although this led to a more efficient program and ultimately benefitted braceros, this shift revealed the true priorities of the American government. The United States justified sacrificing oversight of the program to pacify growers, but only saw it necessary to include Mexico in an exchange of its own citizens when the benefits outweighed what growers could offer. While the United States contemplated their options, they consistently overlooked the welfare of the bracero worker as a factor in determining the success of the bracero program, while the power held by growers always made them a significant player in the bracero program.

While the United States again desired wartime labor, large factions of the federal government responded with a lack of enthusiasm, although pressure from growers caused these hesitations to be overlooked. In 1951, President Harry Truman established a

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[65] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 43.

Commission on Migratory Labor to compose a report detailing the state of American farm labor. The Commission's findings confirmed many commonly known facts; domestic workers could not complete with braceros for jobs, and their presence in the labor force depressed wages for Americans. The Commission observed growers' preference for hiring braceros, who had to comply with growers' demands because they had the constant threat of deportation hanging over their heads.[66] Furthermore, the employment of braceros contributed to an influx of illegal immigrants who could not legally enter the country through the bracero program, and undermined the process of collective bargaining for all agricultural laborers. The Commission included in its reports accounts of employers abusing braceros, and concluded that lax enforcement by government agencies permitted the subpar living and working conditions braceros frequently experienced.[67] Despite uncovering the degrees of braceros' exploitation, the Commission only offered the meager solution that "future efforts" should be made to reduce dependence on foreign labor.[68] Against their recommendations regarding the bracero program, however vague, the conditions brought about by the Korean War combined with growers' fears of industrial collapse without braceros proved to be too much for the federal government, who extended the program anyway. Public Law 78 would emerge from Congress as a result, again officially instituting the bracero program.[69] Similar to Mexico, against better judgement the United States continued using braceros, with growers undeniably fueling America's persistence.

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[66] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 167.
[67] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 2.
[68] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 167.
[69] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 2-3.

After agreeing to return to a binational agreement, the United States sought to rectify the bracero program with legislation officially binding them to braceros, however just as in the first phase of the bracero program, the legislation passed contained loopholes for growers to exploit. Representative W.R. Poage (D-TX) with Senator Allan Ellender (D-LA) introduced Public Law 78 before Congress, intending it to formalize and stabilize the bracero program by explicitly authorizing contract labor, with the United States again acting as the official contractor. The American Farm Bureau, an organization of growers, made sure to lobby for PL 78, ensuring its passage. Their influence, combined with Senator Ellender's testimony that the Korean War made the importation of Mexican labor imminent, resulted in the bill's hasty approval on July 12, 1951, with little opposition.[70] Although the creators of the law designed it to increase the effectiveness of the program, they failed to define what constituted a great enough labor shortage to bring in braceros, or what the legislation specifically meant when it said braceros would be paid according to the prevailing wage. They further neglected to consult President Truman's Commission on Migratory Labor on how to improve the program, despite the Commission's intensive research.[71] With its flaws intact, PL 78 passed through Congress four times through 1959 as an amendment to the Agriculture Act, to avoid opposition or close inspection of the program, and would generally outline the terms of the bracero program until its completion in 1964.[72] Although the United States took measures to refine the program beyond just making it bilateral, they again failed to resolve fundamental problems in the program. This allowed growers to continue

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[70] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 45.
[71] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 44.
[72] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 45.

exploiting braceros, effectively allowing minimal progress from the first phase of the bracero program.

The Korean War bracero program under Public Law 78 did not function much differently from the World War II bracero program under Public Law 45, repeating positive aspects missing from the second phase of the program, as well as the program's problems from the first phase. PL 78 required that the Secretary of Labor confirm a genuine labor shortage before braceros could be contracted, meaning growers had to exacerbate domestic labor first so as not to negatively affect Americans.[73] The Department of Labor would then determine if individual growers requesting braceros truly needed an infusion of labor to work the fields, and would give Mexico thirty days notice to deliver the number of braceros requested. Similar to the World War II program, braceros would obtain permits from Mexican officials (legally and otherwise) in order to be sent to recruiting centers, where they often had to pay additional bribes to progress. After passing the necessary medical exams at the border, braceros would be free to sign their labor contracts.[74] Although technically Congress gave braceros the freedom to pick and choose amongst the contracts offered, in practice this proved to be a formality; braceros who turned down offers got blacklisted from farms or even returned to Mexico, proving that growers still retained their hold over the agricultural labor sector.[75] While the system under PL 78 improved the grower-dominated chaos following World War II, unresolved issues in the bracero program again resurfaced. Braceros still found themselves to be victims of extortion in Mexico as they began their journeys, and again at

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[73] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 43-44.
[74] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 62.
[75] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 63.

recruitment centers once in the United States, despite the program once more being under government supervision. The familiar pattern of abuse from the first phase of the program had come back to haunt braceros, with abuse in the fields soon to follow.

Mexico, still unhappy with the treatment of their nationals, returned to attempting the same minimally effective forms of protest used during the World War II bracero program. In January 1952, Mexico expressed such displeasure that they called for a renegotiation of the entire program. As the program currently stood, the Department of Labor oversaw braceros, while the Immigration Service had the duty of regulating employers. With two agencies splitting the responsibility of supervising the bracero program, program violations easily passed unnoticed, only exacerbating Mexico's complaints.[76] In particular, Mexico disapproved of bracero recruitment centers lining the border, the subsistence paid to unemployed braceros recruited by overeager growers, and the determination of prevailing wage. This time, the United States stood its ground and threatened to continue using bracero labor with or without Mexico's blessing, effectively threatening to take the bracero program backwards. The United States allowed the bilateral agreement to expire on January 15, 1954, stating it would instead give work on a first come, first serve basis for Mexican migrants. This free-for-all system only lasted a few weeks before Mexico withdrew its objections and renegotiated the bilateral agreement according to America's wishes. This incident proved extremely significant for Mexico. By backing down from their justified objections to the bracero program and submitting when faced with opposition from the United States, Mexico gave up what remained of its influence, and would continue to be without bargaining power throughout

[76] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 64.

the remainder of the program.[77] In twelve years, Mexico still had not learned how to effectively demand the protection of their citizens while guests in the United States. This shortcoming by their mother country would contribute to list of factors allowing growers to continue serving their own interests, and exploiting braceros as they pleased.

Although Public Law 78 set the status quo for the bracero program for Mexico, the United States, growers, and braceros for over a decade, this all changed in the 1960s when the Kennedy Administration came into office. Initially the administration supported the bracero program, believing additional amendments could fix some of its fundamental flaws. Under the illusion that braceros had much more input into negotiating their wages than they did, President Kennedy allowed the program to be extended with the old promise of stricter regulation for the future. The new presidential administration also brought changes to agriculture that would reduce growers' stake in the bracero program. In 1962 the Department of Labor implemented an "adverse-effect wage rate", meaning the DOL determined minimum wage rates set for laborers by state, setting a standard for the wages of braceros, instead of growers arbitrarily determining prevailing wage rates by county, which left plenty of room for wage fluctuation. These new wage rates set by the DOL generally paid more than grower-set prevailing wages, decreasing the program's appeal to agribusiness.[78] The popularity of the bracero program also waned with the mechanization of farming. For example, in Texas and California cotton farmers used the most braceros, however by the early 1960s about 95 percent of cotton could be picked by machines instead of Mexican field-hands. Without large cotton growers on their side, it

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[77] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 66-67.

[78] Vernon Briggs, *Immigration Policy and the American Labor Force*, 101.

became increasingly more difficult for farmers of specialty crops to fight against a crackdown on bracero regulation. Between the changes made to the program under President Kennedy, growers' lack of enthusiasm for bracero labor, and the mechanization of farming, it became harder to make arguments for the necessity of the bracero program.[79] The bracero program eventually fell under President Kennedy's larger umbrella of reversing America's arrogant, unilateral policy attitudes toward Latin America as part of the Good Neighbor Policy. With no strong advocates for the program, Congress extended PL 78 for the last time in 1963 for one year, allowing it to expire naturally, and the bracero program to officially come to an end.[80]

The bracero program, although nobly intentioned, never could have succeeded because it failed to rectify the precedents of agribusiness control when it began. Throughout the decades, the United States and Mexican governments consistently cemented the fundamental flaws in the program, as opposed to effectively addressing them. Instead, the bracero program allowed totalitarian growers to continue lording over American laborers, and abuse Mexican braceros through a codified program. This failure of growers to treat braceros with dignity, combined with both governments' inability to effectively advocate for braceros, resulted in a program that only rewarded growers. Mexican nationals did not receive the treatment or wages they signed up for, and Mexico allowed the United States to bully them instead of improving their national image. Thus, the bracero program can be thought of as a one sided exchange of benefits, with agribusiness selfishly protecting its interests at the core, instead of functioning as the bilateral exchange it was meant to be.

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[79] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 168-169.
[80] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 104.

Chapter Four: Methodology Statement

Upon their arrival in the United States, Mexican guest workers during the bracero program unwillingly found themselves caught in struggles and power plays between a variety of actors. California agribusiness interests sought to secure an avenue of cheap Mexican labor to work their fields, and maintain their decades-old dominance over the entire agricultural labor force. Domestic unions demanded higher wages and superior working conditions, attempting to fight an uphill battle against the oppression of big agribusiness. Mexican American social and political groups found themselves searching for a place in the United States, whether that meant assimilating away their Mexican roots, or embracing the cultural ties to their homeland. Regardless of the philosophy, Mexican Americans wanted to claim their civil rights, particularly in spheres like labor. The addition of braceros workers in labor force from the 1940s to the mid-1960s only complicated these relationships, and interrupted the goals of these three interests.

For my Independent Study, I want to measure the responses of California agribusiness, domestic agricultural unions, and Mexican American advocacy groups to the presence of braceros. Although this could be attempted in a variety of ways, I will analyze these reactions through the lens of braceros' identity as Mexicans. For example, California growers viewed Mexican labor as ideal because of their perceived docility and because they would labor for cheap wages. Domestic unions 'othered' braceros because their employers clearly favored foreign labor, and the illegal use of braceros as strikebreakers made Mexican laborers a threat to domestic field workers. The Mexican American community largely stood divided on the presence of braceros- some sought to embrace their Mexican brothers because of ties to the mother country, while others saw

Mexican nationals as impeding recent immigrants' transformation into Americans. Focusing on the role of braceros' ethnic identity would contribute to an understanding of their place in the larger struggles of California agricultural labor, and potentially explain the motives behind each respective group's treatment of the guest workers.

Before focusing on the bracero program or the migrants themselves, I plan to conduct a broad but thorough study of the context surrounding the bracero program. This would include researching the evolution of agriculture in California coupled with a history of agricultural labor movements, the history of the Mexican Revolution (which arguably prompted a need for a new national identity, in part solidified by the bracero program), the political histories of the United States and Mexico for context of the program's negotiations, the evolution of Mexican American cultural identity and the histories of prominent Mexican American advocacy groups. Although this information may not directly come through in my analysis of identity politics in the bracero program, it would greatly inform an understanding of the historical context of the project.

A contribution to the larger field of study on any subject requires a historian to gain a comprehensive understanding of the secondary literature. For this project, this means focusing on Mexican ethnic history in the United States. Although labor history will certainly be significant, my analysis will primarily frame the role of braceros in labor history with an emphasis on identity politics. On a basic level, secondary sources would provide information with which to construct a solid narrative on the bracero program and the influential factors surrounding it. But going further, each secondary source analysis offers a framework with which to view braceros and the program. Patching together

historiographic theories will help me create an ethnic history of labor with braceros at the center, and provide the tools to formulate my own original, overarching thesis.

Primary source documents, particularly those from prominent unions in California during the bracero program and influential Mexican American groups, would also contribute to an analysis of how braceros, as Mexican nationals, fit into larger struggles within the Mexican American community and between agribusiness and organized labor. Primary documents have been archived online by the Smithsonian and the National Archives, and several archives exist around the country on Mexican American activists Ernesto Galarza, George I. Sánchez, and Mexican American groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the United Farm Workers of America union. Using oral histories taken of former braceros would also serve as a means to measure identity issues as they affected the workers, and not just how identity factored into the responses braceros elicited. Oral history archives of braceros already exist online, but with these examples as a guide, I hope to conduct my own oral history on my grandfather, who made multiple trips to California as a bracero, as my own original contribution to my project and the historical field.

Chapter Five: Chapter Outline

Introduction

Chapter One:

The American and Mexican Governments as National Actors

Introduction: Narrative discussing basic factors prompting the United States and Mexico to participate in a bilateral contract-labor exchange, an introduction to the negotiation process that created the bracero program and its original terms.

Examination of the state of Mexico after the Mexican Revolution:

I. Focus on the war's effect on Mexico's poorest citizens and most impoverished areas.

II. Tracing the emerging emphasis on a collective Mexican identity.

Analysis of Mexico's rhetoric inspiring their involvement in bracero program:

I.Mexico's characterization of peasants as *mestizos*, who the government viewed as social and state embarrassments.

II."Uplifting the peasant" argument: the Mexico government believed sending Mexico's lowest class of men to the United States would allow them to learn skills and earn wages they could bring home to Mexico, which would serve two purposes. Nationally, it would increase the image and welfare of Mexico, and individually it would transform poor agricultural laborers into citizens of worth.

III."Mexican shame" argument: Alternate view of Mexico's characterization of the bracero program, that it signified a failed revolution, dependence on the United States, and the program's popularity reflected negatively on the Mexican state.

• Investigation of the factors prompting the United States to propose a bracero program:

I.Attempts to fill World War II labor shortages in the agriculture and railroad industries with domestic workers.

II.Pressure from large agribusinesses on the American government to import Mexican labor, includes testimonies before Congress.

Chapter Two:

Large Growers and California Agribusiness

Introduction: Narrative emphasizing existing precedents of grower domination over domestic and Mexican labor before the bracero program, how this affected the dynamic between agribusiness and labor during the 1940s and 1950s.

Stereotypes of Mexican labor before the bracero program:

I.Mexicans viewed as racially predisposed to excel at agricultural labor, particularly compared to created images of inadequate American workers, who growers viewed as failures in a social Darwinistic system.

II.Analysis of legislation that passed with the lobbying of agribusiness, and how it encouraged their preference for Mexican labor.

Images of "Mexicanness" in the bracero recruitment process:

I.Traits growers identified before they presented braceros with contracts, such as docility, ignorance, and physical signs of hard labor. Includes steps in the recruitment process that reflected implicit American stereotypes of Mexicans, such as dosing all potential braceros with DDT to eradicate lice and mandated scrubbing of clothes to remove filth.

II.Bracero participation in "performing backwardness" for growers. Inclusion of bracero testimonies recounting the traits they knew would and would not get them hired by growers. Physical practices of "Mexicanness", such as rubbing hands with rocks to form calluses, giving the appearance of an experienced laborer.

- Agribusiness actively choosing to use braceros over domestic laborers:

I.Blatant violations of terms in the bracero program preventing the depression of wages and conditions for American workers, such as the abuse of prevailing wage.

II.The use of braceros as scabs to break American union strikes, despite growers being forbidden to involve braceros in labor disputes.

Chapter Three:

American Unions and the Domestic Labor Force

Introduction: Details the effects of bracero labor in the labor force, including less jobs due to bracero competition (increasing migration), wages American workers could not live on, and ineffectiveness of union protests.

Difficulties of union organization before the bracero program:

I.Stereotypes of agricultural laborers as less significant than industrial workers, leading to less perceived need for organization. Image of agribusiness as docile farmers, when in reality growers resembled industrial conglomerates.

II.Intimidation tactics and violence employed by growers to discourage and prevent strikes and union organizing.

Domestic unions and their responses to bracero labor:

I. Includes the American Federation of Labor, Congress of Industrial Organizations, National Farm Labor Union, United Farm Workers of America, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee.

II. Examination of any relationships domestic unions had with Mexican unions over the inclusion of bracero or illegal Mexican labor, such as the Confederación de Trabajadores de México.

Protests led by domestic unions involving braceros:

I.Profile of Ernesto Galarza, Mexican American labor leader for the NFLU and facilitator of the DiGiorgio strike. Focus on his later advocacy to end the bracero program, due to the rampant abuses of its workers.

II.1947 DiGiorgio Fruit Incorporation strike in Imperial Valley, California. The six week strike ultimately failed due to growers forcing braceros to continue working in the fields, despite braceros supporting the NFLU strike.

III.1961 Lettuce Strike in Imperial Valley, growers also called in braceros to break the strike, although the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (the striking union) took action to directly attack braceros.

Chapter Four:

The Mexican American Community and Braceros

Introduction: A brief narrative history of Mexican immigrants and Mexican American laborers in the 1920s and 1930s, who would most likely be directly involved with, or be the parents of a second generation labor force by the time of the bracero program.

Prominent theories of the construction of Mexican American identity:

I.George Sánchez, who analyzes assimilation efforts by the United States and the Mexican government's efforts to instill Mexican culture in recent Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. Sánchez argues that before the bracero program, these Mexicans and Mexican Americans formed a hybrid community and sense of identity.

II.David Gutíerrez, who believes ethnic and political identities primarily determine one's view on Mexican immigration in the Mexican American community

III.Mario Garcia, who writes primarily on the second generation of Mexican immigrants who pooled their collective experiences during the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War to inform a sense of identity that would lead them to political advocacy.

Responses of Mexican American advocacy groups and political actors to the bracero program:

I.Includes groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA), the American GI Forum, El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Espanola (Spanish-Speaking Congress).

II.Includes leaders such as Ernesto Galarza, George I. Sánchez (president of LULAC), Ignacio "Nacho" López (reporter who covered braceros in the muckraking Spanish-language newspaper, *El Espectador*), Bert Corona (Mexican American labor and civil rights leader).

Chapter Five:

Braceros, In Their Own Words

Introduction: Although braceros often did not posses much power while in the United States, they remained aware of the struggles between the Mexican and American governments, growers, unions, and the Mexican American communities. Braceros sought agency through these groups whenever possible, rendering them not entirely vulnerable.

Archived bracero oral histories:

I. Common threads of patterns previously discussed academically (such as "performing backwardness" in recruitment centers, being used as strikebreakers, interactions with domestic unions, etc.), from the perspective of bracero workers.

II. Analysis as to their own sense of ethnic identity, for example, seeing oneself as a Mexican national intending to return home after working as a bracero, aspiring to eventually be American, any affiliations with domestic labor or Mexican American communities, etc.

Oral history of Fausto Sanchez Aguilar:

I. Recording his story as a railroad bracero, who made repeat trips to California as a bracero.

II. Any personal experiences or comments relating to any of the patterns or events illuminated in my scholarly research of the bracero program.

Conclusion

Chapter Six: Analysis of Primary Sources

The primary sources that inform this study concerning ethnic identity issues come from a variety of sources. My grandfather's personal documents from his time as a railroad bracero for Southern Pacific from 1943 to 1945 offer glimpses into his personal history, and how he fits in the larger characterization of braceros during World War II. The oral histories recorded in David Bacon's *Communities Without Borders* demonstrate how through this medium, braceros' views of themselves and their conditions can inform their own sense of agency. Carey McWilliams, a journalist and expert on California agriculture and labor before and during the bracero program, through his writing represents how braceros affected the relationship between agribusiness and domestic labor. Finally, a series of news articles reporting the 1961 Lettuce Strike in Imperial Valley shows direct examples of how braceros, as unwilling strikebreakers, disrupted the aims of unions and could be manipulated by large growers. These primary sources, although focusing on a range of topics, all contain clues informing the treatment of braceros, the status of the program, and most importantly how their role as specifically Mexican laborers played into their experience.

Fausto Sanchez Aguilar's collection of bracero documents can be interpreted as pieces hinting at his overall experience as a bracero worker. The packet specifically contains his contract allowing him to work the railroads, a Statement of Complaint filed by the worker, two train tickets issued in conjunction with the bracero program, a social security card, and document in Spanish detailing the worker's family history.[1] Starting chronologically, Aguilar received a train ticket for July 23, 1943. The railroad bracero

[1] Fausto Sanchez Aguilar, Braceros Individual Work Agreement, August 13, 1945. Statement of Complaint, April 18, 1945. In possession of author.

program went into effect on April 29, 1943, so relatively speaking, Aguilar came to the United States as one of the first braceros in the program. He arrived via train, which according to the oral testimonies included in Deborah Cohen's *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico,* could have either been a pleasant or terrible experience.[2] The War Manpower Commission issued Aguilar's corresponding Statement of Complaint on April 18, 1945 in California, although it does not specify if Aguilar labored in California, or if this denoted the location of the WMC office. A discrepancy in time exists between Aguilar's first train ticket and the Statement of Compliant, making it unclear if these two documents came from the same bracero venture or from two different trips. However, this document confirms Aguilar's employment by the Southern Pacific Company, one of the primary railroads to use bracero labor. Aguilar filed that he "desires to return to Mexico," with his reasons not specified. Instead the document nullifies his contract, and states that Southern Pacific must return him to his point of contract in Mexico. Although the links between these papers remain murky, they might be pieces documenting one complete trip as a bracero.

Aguilar's worker contract, issued on August 13, 1945, comes next chronologically in this packet, implying that Aguilar made at least two trips to the United States through the bracero program. Clearly, whatever prompted Aguilar to break his contract did not deter him from signing another only four months later. The contract specifies that Aguilar would not perform agricultural labor, which raises questions as to why he would remain in the same industry in light of his mysterious leave earlier in the

[2] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 97.

year. The contract contains one column of policies in English with a Spanish translation to the right, which in Aguilar's case, counters the claim that recruiters kept braceros ignorant of the terms when signing their contracts. The document characterizes Aguilar as a twenty three year old single man, and that his economic dependents included his mother, Delfina Sanchez de Aguilar. This indicates that Aguilar fit the profile of young single men who generally sought out the bracero program, especially considering that his earlier stint in the program would make him twenty one at his earliest known entrance into the program (as indicated by his train ticket from 1943). A dependent mother may have contributed to the circumstances leading Aguilar to repeatedly sign bracero contracts. Again analyzing the dates, I can only assume Aguilar signed this contract in Mexico, since the packet includes another train ticket dated August 15, 1945, two days after he dated the contract. The last document included looks like an official family history written in Spanish, issued by the Municipality of Coxcatlán, Aguilar's hometown. Cohen writes that before obtaining contracts, many braceros needed certificates of good character, however this document dates from 1985.[3] Hopefully subsequent interviews with Aguilar will place these documents into context, giving continuity to his second trip to the United States as a bracero.

David Bacon's *Communities Without Borders* uses oral histories and photographs to give voices to undocumented Mexican and Guatemalan workers living in the United States.[4] Although the introduction mentions that the oral histories "[were] fleshed out by David Bacon's insightful interviews," the pieces themselves only include the

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[3] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 108-109.
[4] David Bacon, *Communities Without Borders: Images and Voices from the World of Migration*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

interviewee's testimony. Although this allows Bacon to present an undiluted oral history, by not including his questions, he removes his own framework of the raw material. Three of Bacon's oral histories relate to braceros, and include the son of a bracero worker, an agricultural bracero who eventually obtained citizenship, and an agricultural bracero who skipped on his contract after arriving to the United States. Despite recounting the injustices that accompanied immigration, inequality of opportunity, and the exploits of the bracero program, each of these testimonies reflects a sense of agency in braceros. The son of the bracero recalls that his father enrolled in the program to realize the American dream, and remembers a sense of pride that with his father's wages, the son would receive new clothes, toys, and even leftover harvest fruit as a child. One agricultural worker, although describing in detail the abusive conditions in the recruitment centers, the barracks, and out in the fields, remembers his experience as valuable. He frames his time as a bracero as a necessary precursor to his participation in the farm workers' movement, and his own path to American citizenship. The bracero who deserted, by the very nature of his narrative reflects his agency; when he became unsatisfied with the bracero program, he simply left in search of a better job. Through his tone, Bacon conveys that these oral histories do not tell stories of victimization because of the bracero program. One bracero even reminisces, "I lived life as a worker, and life [in the US] was good. I liked it here. At the beginning I always wanted to better myself and return to Mexico. But then I started liking living here too much to go back."[5] None of these men describes their time as a bracero, or the treatment they received as defining, but merely a stepping stone in a larger story of migration.

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[5] David Bacon, *Communities Without Borders*, 229.

The Carey McWilliams documents take a different approach to Mexican agricultural workers, writing through the lens of the tumultuous relationship between agribusiness and domestic unions. McWilliams' *Factories in the Field* can be characterized as a secondary source because he recounts the history of agribusiness and labor in California until 1940, but also as a primary source because he details their current relationship at the time of publication.[6] This provides solid context for the bracero program, which would be enacted in California two years later. With growers' 'terror tactics' of cross burning and violence from the 1930s in recent memory, McWilliams writes that laborers needed to stand up to growers through unions, and include members regardless of geography in California or industry (he groups cannery, packing, and agricultural industries together). According to McWilliams, much of growers' power comes from a perceived distinction between industry and farming, which most of America believes still consists of small plots of land and not agribusiness conglomerates. Unionization would disprove these preconceptions dividing agriculture and industry, and city and rural labor, which he sees as synonymous. The strong opinions McWilliams espouses in *Factories in the Field* most likely stem from his journalistic background; he mentions which incidents and patterns he observed firsthand, instead of reaching his conclusions through secondary research alone. McWilliams' notorious pro-labor and liberal political beliefs most likely dominate his perspective, and cloud objective analysis. For example, he likens growers to fascists and grower provided camps for laborers as concentration camps. Although his unique position as a journalist gives credibility to his

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

accounts, it creates an extreme characterization of the relationship between labor and agribusiness.

The second McWilliams document profiles the status of the bracero program in 1943, after the first year of the program, in a surprisingly positive light given his allusions to the program's shortcomings.[7] He opens the article with a quote from union leader Ernesto Galarza, who expresses his lack of enthusiasm about the American government's ability to monitor the flow of people. Despite McWilliams himself suggesting less than ideal conditions of the program, he concludes,"While compliance with the agreed standards may not be complete, my own investigations indicate that it has been substantial."[8] McWilliams includes testimonies by three braceros men to support his assessment of the program, with two reviewing it positively, and the third being "indifferent." The message McWilliams takes away from these interviews directly contradicts Galarza's opening remarks; he writes, "[The interviewees] all believe that the idea of exchanging skills and talents on a planned basis, between Mexico and the United States, is an excellent one that should be encouraged."[9] The fact that McWilliams wrote this article in 1943 most likely explains the tone of the article, which refutes the vast majority of accounts on the bracero program (and McWilliams' own later negative feelings). The program may have been too young for a pattern of exploitation to emerge (Galarza himself only condemned the program hypothetically). McWilliams previously wrote extreme criticisms about agribusiness in California, perhaps putting him in the position to believe that a government sponsored program could reduce the power of

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[7] Carey McWilliams, "They Saved the Crops." *The Inter-American*, August 1943, 10-14.
[8] Carey McWilliams, "They Saved the Crops." 11.
[9] Carey McWilliams, "They Saved the Crops." 12.

growers, especially with the program still in its infancy. The United States also still had troops fighting World War II at the time of the article's publication. This wartime environment may have decreased the acceptability of government criticisms, and served as an additional layer guiding McWilliams' positive reports on the bracero program, despite clear signs of problems.

The next three newspaper articles focus on the Imperial Valley Lettuce Strike of 1961, which highlight the illegal involvement of braceros in labor strikes. The events in Howard Kennedy's LA Times article occurred in the context of the California's Superior Court deciding whether domestic laborers picketing the Church Ranch would be legally permitted.[10] While unions waited in limbo over the verdict concerning the legality of picketing, Kennedy writes that growers and unions both received victories for their causes. The Church Ranch regained permission to use over two hundred bracero laborers, while the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the United Packinghouse Workers of America happily learned that these braceros would be forbidden from working the picketed fields. Kennedy mentions that the Church Ranch had their braceros taken away because two unions charged them with using braceros as strikebreakers. Although Kennedy does not specifically affirm this, the details that he provides supports the union's claims. Kennedy writes that when braceros could not return to struck fields, Imperial Valley citizens groups and volunteers from Cucamonga took to the fields to pick up the slack. These California supporters helped growers against union picketers, essentially replacing the braceros' role as scabs. Because these events occurred in 1961, one of the last years of the braceros program's existence, it shows that attempts to revise

[10] Howard Kennedy. "Lettuce Growers and Union Both Win Legal Victories." *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1961.

the program to protect the Mexican national over the years had little effect; despite being forbidden from doing so, growers still employed braceros as strikebreakers until almost the end of the program.

Time Magazine continued coverage of this strike, highlighting the use of braceros as weapons by both growers and unions. The article begins by describing the tensions of this strike; because lettuce must be harvested within a very specific time, any strike by unions would be dangerous to the entire crop.[11] This vulnerability inspired the AFL-CIO's Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to strike at the highlight of the season. The article very briefly supplements the current situation with an outline of the history of organized labor in California- since the Depression, growers usually met the organizational efforts of unions with violence. Unions thus utilized laws, treaties, and harvest schedules to increase their effectiveness. Due to the obstacles historically set by growers, it would not be unreasonable to infer that unions saw braceros as new barriers to their cause rather than as fellow laborers. The article later supports this, saying that the AWOC struck in the hopes of creating a situation in which braceros would be removed from farms. Farmers contended that the AWOC aimed to destroy the entire program, which the union did not deny. Several incidents between union members and sympathizers further complicated the situation, with protestors holding signs in Spanish outside bracero camps urging them to claim their liberty, however their picketing ironically held them captive in the work camps. Thirty eight pickets also assaulted braceros and threatened to burn the camp down if braceros continued to work as

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[11] "Violence in the Oasis." *Time*, Feb. 17, 1961. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=54203766&site=ehost-live (accessed February 26, 2012).

strikebreakers. Growers wanted to hunt down demonstrators with guns, but refrained in fear of creating a scenario the Mexican government would deem dangerous, prompting the withdrawal of all braceros from the region. This article also depicts the manipulation of braceros from both sides of the labor dispute. Ensuring their access to cheap labor determined how growers conducted themselves regarding the AWOC. The AWOC, in response, simultaneously urged the bracero to resist the power of growers, but refused to include them in their fight for fair wages and better conditions, going so far as to attack them for their forced role as scabs. To growers and labor unions, braceros most likely signified another layer to the complicated decades-old struggle for growers to retain their power, and unions to strip them of it.

A second piece by the *Los Angeles Times* on the 1961 Lettuce Strike describes the role of the federal government as a middleman struggling to navigate between California growers, disgruntled lettuce pickers, and the Mexican government, with each involved group failing to account for the welfare of braceros.[12] Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg warned California congressional delegates in Washington DC that if the government did not remove all braceros from struck farms for their safety, the Mexican government would file a formal protest. The author portrays Goldberg as stuck; Goldberg knows about abuse from both unions and growers, however if he responds by favoring growers on the issue, Mexico may withdraw all of its braceros. But if he bends under the pressure of the Mexican government, he would inadvertently support domestic unions, causing an uproar amongst California agribusiness. Goldberg states that there "has been a complete failure by both [unions and growers] to comprehend what is involved." The

[12] "Lettuce Strike Called Peril to U.S.-Mexican Relations." *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1961.

situation, and Goldberg's remarks, signify that although the dispute concerns braceros, braceros served as instruments in a larger battle between unions and growers. Further clues indicating irrelevance for braceros' welfare comes at the end of the article. Only in the last two paragraphs does the author mention that eleven union men were arrested, acquitted, and arrested again for allegedly inciting riots at labor camps, and that sitdown strikes in front of braceros camps constituted holding the workers against their will. Despite Mexico's primary concern in the article being the safety of their nationals, the author tacks on this incident at the tail end of the article, showing that governments belittled the significance of braceros workers getting caught in the crossfire between growers and unions.

An analysis of the documents listed provides a variety of insights concerning the nature of the bracero program. They identify a sense of identity amongst bracero workers along with a sense of agency (or lack thereof in the 1961 Lettuce Strike), and braceros' place in the struggle between growers and labor. Although each document greatly supplements an overarching picture provided by secondary resources, the organic information from these documents serves truly beneficial because it provides an authentic look into the bracero program, and the overall experience of these workers while in the United States.

Chapter Seven: Historiographic Essay

Since the termination of the bracero program, historians have dissected its twenty-two year history to explain the most important factors motivating it. This serves two purposes, to justify the program's deviation from initial negotiations, and to ascribe it merit as a precedent for Mexican immigration. In these investigations, historians have identified the key interests involved in the exchange, the roles they played, their motives, and their effect on the bracero program. Historians have also tried to identify the flaws of the program and the unintended consequences that resulted, which range from rampant abuse of Mexican nationals to Mexican American labor and civil rights movements. For the purposes of my Independent Study, I chose to arrange the prominent secondary literature thematically, according to the actors in the program I hope to study. This model allows one to follow the arguments made by historians concerning the bracero program as a whole, the influence of large agribusiness on the program, and the status of domestic labor and Mexican American communities during the bracero program. Ultimately, this compartmentalization facilitates a clearer analysis of the factors affecting the program beyond just the American and Mexican governments, and the bracero men themselves.

In looking at the origins of the bracero program, points of contention emerge regarding Mexico's stake in agreeing to send their citizens across the border for contract-labor. Deborah Cohen bases much of her work on the idea that the Mexican government intended the bracero program to uplift Mexico as a nation. She argues that after the Mexican Revolution, a collectivist ideology emerged in Mexico.[1] While this idea of a united Mexico had not yet permeated through the class system, the Mexican diplomats

[1] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 34.

negotiating the bracero program believed impoverished men (those most likely to become braceros) personified an undesirable image. The Mexican government saw the lowest classes as participating in primitive and un-modern practices, and viewed rural peasants as *mestizos* (citizens of European and Indian ancestry) who they characterized as social and state embarrassments due to their poverty.[2] The bracero program emerged as an opportunity for these men to become desirable citizens, who would acquire new agricultural skills and accumulate wages to bring home, serving as Mexico's gateway to modernization.[3] Although George Sánchez does not specifically address braceros, places the logic of Cohen's argument in historical context. He writes that in the 1920s after the Mexican Revolution, Mexico City similarly viewed rural communities as "primitive, backward, and savage," who needed to be civilized. The Mexican government sought to change peasant values and behavior through education to lead Mexico to greater capitalist production and national integration.[4] Sánchez essentially advocates that the idea of using the peasant to uplift Mexico originated after the Revolution, which Cohen believes continued into the 1940s, when negotiators created the bracero program. Michael Snodgrass, in his essay "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964", challenges this origin. He characterizes the bracero program as a source of shame for Mexico, "symbolic of a failed revolution and yet another reminder of Mexico's dependance on the United States." He reads the program as a loss of Mexican dignity, found in the irony of Mexican's poorest men still working fields that once belonged to Mexico, a sentiment he evidences with a

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[2] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 43-44.
[3] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 35.
[4] George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 119.

joke circulated in rural Jalisco: "Santa Anna sold [Americans] the land, and [Mexican President] Ávila Camacho rented the oxen."[5] Although Snodgrass' interpretation serves as a logical counterpoint to Cohen's characterization, the scope of literature available on the bracero program place Snodgrass in the minority opinion, with not even braceros feeling shame for the program.[6]

The purpose of the program in the United States, most scholars can agree, served primarily to benefit American agribusiness by supplying access to cheap foreign labor. Peter N. Kirstein, writing about the bracero program less than fifteen years after its termination, repeatedly emphasizes the redundancy of importing Mexicans to satisfy labor shortages during World War II. He believes the domestic labor more than existed, however growers drove away American workers with inadequate working conditions and low wages, all problems that would eventually plague the bracero program. Large farm conglomerates merely lusted for hoards of Mexican laborers they could treat as an economic commodity to cheaply exploit at their will, so they claimed to be in a labor crisis rather than cater to the demands of domestic workers.[7] Kitty Calavita, who analyzes the bracero program from the perspective of the Immigration Service, comes to the same root conclusions. She agrees the bracero program functioned as a vehicle to "[provide] growers with an 'endless army' of cheap labor," however she contends that the

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[5] Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, ed. Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80.
[6] For more information, see Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," 101, Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 104, David Bacon, *Communities Without Borders: Images and Voices from the World of Migration*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 219-229.
[7] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon*, (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), iii.

fragmented government agencies responsible for the bracero program primarily acted out of their own interests, benefits to growers simply resulted as a happy coincidence.[8] While the governments of the United States and Mexico publicized their good intentions for the program, across the board, historians remember the bracero program as instead serving the purpose of giving growers access to their ideal labor force rather than guarding the welfare of Mexican or American laborers.

Although historians have differing interpretations as to the legacy of the bracero program, they all tend to stem from the program's flaws. Barbara Driscoll, focusing on the railroad sector of the bracero program, claims it remains the only successful binational immigration exchange between the United States and Mexico. She attributes this to Mexico's effective protection of its laborers, the significant role organized labor played in the program's progression (unlike agricultural unions, who got steamrolled by agribusiness), and because the railroad program only lasted as long as intended.[9] Driscoll's statement essentially characterizes the general, primarily agricultural program as a failure, which serves as significant given the fact that scholars generally view the railroad program as a footnote to the history of the bracero program. Instead of comparing the railroad and agricultural programs like Driscoll, Jorge Durand attempts to look objectively at the entire bracero program, breaking down its attributes in a simple pro and con list. Despite acknowledging the program's many negative points, he ultimately ascribes the program worth in light of current immigration issues. Due to the people-smuggling and death that occurs in order for Mexicans to reach the United States,

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[8] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 1992), 3-4.
[9] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, (CMAS Books, 1999), x.

he believes another bilateral contract-labor agreement would control the chaos of contemporary Mexican immigration.[10] Using this same context of immigration issues, Barbara Schmitter Heisler interprets a different legacy left by the bracero program. She contends that it had a hand in institutionalizing the flow of undocumented migration to the United States, arguing that in the context of political leaders considering a repeat contract-labor exchange, the bracero program only proved that what theoretically begins as temporary migration only encourages permanent settlement. Alternatively to Durand, Schmitter Heisler believes increasing the number of permanent immigrant visas would be a more honest approach to immigration that would avoid the pitfalls of the bracero program.[11] Although differing in conclusions, the writings of Durand, Schmitter Heisler, and implicitly Driscoll all state that the bracero program showed the effectiveness of bilateral solutions to immigration issues, which can be remembered as an overarching legacy of the bracero program.

When historians turn their focus to one of the central players in the bracero program, California agribusiness, many observe the frameworks of grower control that emerged to give growers a heavy influence in the bracero program. Journalist Carey McWilliams, writing about the state of California agriculture in the 1920s and 1930s reports the longstanding historical precedent of power growers held over domestic and Mexican labor.[12] He records the state-wide organization of farms which allowed growers to consolidate their power, compared to agricultural workers who faced internal

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[10] Jorge Durand, "The Bracero Program (1942-1964): A Critical Appraisal," *Second Semester: Migración y Desarrollo* (2007), 38-39.
[11] Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," *Journal of the West*, 47, no. 3 (2008), 70-71.
[12] Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1940).

difficulties forming unions. Growers used their collective influence to suppress strikes using violence and intimidation, impeding any progress laborers attempted to gain higher wages and better conditions. McWilliams lays the historical groundwork for the frameworks of grower control Deborah Cohen would later build upon in her study of the bracero program. Growers employed a social Darwinistic view of agricultural laborers as failed, premodern farmers who did not work hard enough to achieve success. This ultimately shaped how growers treated domestic labor.[13] Cohen argues that to justify their control, growers ostracized the entire labor force as nonwhite, regardless of their actual race or ethnicity. This allowed for growers to openly prefer Mexican labor and cast off domestic laborers, who they deemed alcoholics, nomads or gypsies to explain their failure to become farmers, and instead settle for being laborers.[14] Ernesto Gamboa, although focusing on the use of braceros in the Pacific Northwest, further shows the scope of these frameworks in California agriculture, writing that they set the precedent for bracero treatment in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.[15] These structures of control laid out by McWilliams and Cohen would not only allow, but support the later actions of California agribusiness for the duration of the bracero program.

Growers generally used the hierarchy of power they placed on agricultural laborers as a means to freely exploit bracero workers because of their racial identity. In *North From Mexico*,[16] Carey McWilliams recalls stereotypes of subservient Mexican laborers existing amongst California growers before the creation of the bracero program.

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[13] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 48.
[14] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 58.
[15] Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest 1942-1947*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 76.
[16] Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1949).

Growers deliberately choosing to use Mexican labor became commonplace, because growers believed Mexicans could be most easily dominated out in the fields. Deborah Cohen continues to trace these stereotypes identified by McWilliams through the bracero program, particularly in the recruitment process. Cohen argues that in order to be chosen by growers as recruits, braceros quickly learned they had to perform backwardness, "...acting like the docile humble Indians that growers sought."[17] Growers also made sure to identify qualities they would not tolerate in a laborer, such as intelligence, arrogance, and sociability (or being a "ladykiller"), all qualities that would lead to a sense of agency and challenge this framework of agribusiness control.[18] These stereotypes in agriculture serve ultimately paved the way for the rampant abuse that occurred in the bracero program. In one of the most influential exposés of the bracero program, labor leader Ernesto Galarza chronicles the laundry of list of bracero exploitation.[19] From the perspective of historians, Galarza's account can be seen as the result of stereotyped practices occurring in agriculture for decades, all with the aim of strengthening growers' hold over their labor force.

When dealing with the influence of domestic labor and unions in the bracero program, historians make a point to emphasize their disunity. Harvey Levenstein, in his study of Mexican and American labor unions throughout the twentieth century, disputes clear categorizations of American unions. They neither served as tools of the government to supplement American economic and political imperialism, nor did they wholeheartedly

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[17] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 101.
[18] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 107.
[19] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the MAnaged Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960*, (Carlotte, Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1964).

advocate improving the conditions of their Mexican brothers; they occupied a more complex space in the middle, fluctuating between the two extremes.[20] In the context of the bracero program, discrepancies existed between both the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (despite their merge in 1955), and between national unions and their local chapters. For example, in 1954 the generally more conservative AFL lumped braceros in with illegal 'wetback' Mexican workers, seeing the entire Mexican national workforce as a threat to domestic agricultural labor. The CIO on the other hand, never called for the abolition of the bracero program, preferring instead to lobby for program reforms and the end of discrimination against American workers.[21] Similarly, national unions often had different agendas than their local chapters concerning Mexican labor. When national organizations determined that including Mexican workers would serve in the union's best interests, they found these policies unenforceable in states like California where competition with braceros posed a serious danger; national unions simply could not "...do much to force the locals to commit suicide."[22] Levenstein argues that this pattern of disparity stayed consistent from the 1920s through the 1950s. Carey McWilliams provides additional evidence supporting the pattern Levenstein identifies occurring prior to the bracero program. In the 1930s, the AFL responded with hostility to the idea of organizing cannery, agricultural, and packing-house workers together in one union in California. Because of this, during the first national convention of agricultural workers held in 1937, the group voted

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[20] Harvey Levenstein, *Labor Organizations in the United States and Mexico: A History of Their Relations*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971), 4.
[21] Harvey Levenstein, *Labor Organizations in the United States and Mexico*, 209-210.
[22] Harvey Levenstein, *Labor Organizations in the United States and Mexico*, 208-209.

unanimously to join the CIO instead, who welcomed a combined union with open arms.[23] While McWilliams' reports give these patterns validity as legitimate precedents in the labor sphere, Levenstein believes they still applied to unions during the bracero program. Their combined historical analysis explains the often disjointed response of domestic labor to the bracero presence, and perhaps partially accounts for their lack of effective influence against the bracero program.

While agricultural labor struggled against the immense power held by growers and their own internal fragmentation, historians show evidence that they could potentially achieve a sense of agency. For example, Michael Snodgrass argues that braceros advocated for themselves more than opponents of the program gave them credit for. Braceros often knew what they signed on for when enlisting in the bracero program, or quickly learned their rights once in labor camps. According to Snodgrass, scholars also assume braceros settled for mistreatment. He writes, "...[braceros] proved adept at protesting. Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Affairs archived hundreds of files documenting not only the workers' protests but also successful efforts to redress their grievances." As the program grew in the 1950s, so did braceros' protests- they resisted contractual violations by either staging formal or unauthorized protests, or deserting their contracts in search of better work elsewhere.[24] Barbara Driscoll, in her history of the railroad bracero program, continues the sentiment that labor could find strength even within the confines of the bracero program. She writes that one cannot overemphasize the significance of unions in the termination of the railroad program, and that their presence disproved popular assumptions that unions could not effectively protest the importation of foreign

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[23] Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 269-272.
[24] Michael Snodgrass, "The Bracero Program, 1942-1964," 90-91.

labor during a national crisis. Although railroad unions never had to use their power to its fullest extent, even as a symbolic force they demanded that American government agencies to listen to the interests of domestic labor.[25] Kitty Calavita would agree with these characterizations of labor to an extent; she finds that unions only held as much influence as the government deemed appropriate. For instance, when the Department of Labor changed the wage scale for braceros during the Kennedy Administration, they looked to organized labor for support against furious growers. This pattern continued until the program's termination in 1964; the government used unions as a scapegoat against growers, since organized labor lobbied against the bracero program for decades. This allowed only superficial power at best.[26] These historians, through their various avenues, all show examples of labor overcoming the obstacles set before them in the bracero program, proving that labor had alternatives other than exploitation, manipulation, and powerlessness.

Regarding Mexican Americans, historians have constructed various theories concerning the determinants of Mexican identity in the United States, and how braceros interrupted these systems of identity. George Sánchez focuses his study on Mexican American communities in Los Angeles from 1900 to 1945, analyzing their identity issues before the bracero program complicated these dynamics. Sánchez notes the difference between European migrants who came to the United States seeking a sense of cultural uniformity, while the Mexican and American governments saw Mexican migrants as blank slates on which to impose agendas for assimilation, or the strengthening of

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[25] Barbara Driscoll, *The Railroad Bracero: The Tracks North*, 168.
[26] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the I.N.S.*, 124.

Mexican identity. Mexican migrants began to form their own hybrid communities and collective identities in response, which most likely got disturbed by waves of bracero migration.[27] Mario Garcia tangentially builds off of Sánchez's ideas in his scholarship on the 'Mexican American generation', children of Mexican migrants between the 1930s and 1950s, whose collective experiences in the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War transformed them into leaders for Mexican American civil rights.[28] Garcia focuses on the meaning and influence of ethnicity on this second generation of Mexican Americans, as opposed to their Mexican parents (who Sánchez would argue found themselves treated as blank slates), and how changing senses of ethnicity led to political action.[29] These generational differences and their effect on ethnicity and identity tie in with David Gutiérrez's central argument in *Walls and Mirrors*, that personal senses of political and cultural identity ultimately determine Mexican Americans' stance on immigration.[30] Gutiérrez's argument becomes extremely significant when applied to braceros, who caused the Mexican American community to split in support or opposition of both the program and the laborers themselves. These three studies tied together help inform the sense of ethnic identity for Mexican Americans before and through the bracero program, and how this would determine the responses of the community to Mexican contract-labor.

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[27] George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 10-11.
[28] Mario Garica, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930-1960*, (Yale University Press, 1989), 1.
[29] Mario Garica, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930-1960*, (Yale University Press, 1989), 9-10.
[30] David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), 6.

When the Mexican American community felt threatened by braceros and illegal 'wetback' labor, they often retaliated by using organized labor as a means for agency. Zaragosa Vargas writes that during the bracero program, the presence of contract labor challenged Mexican Americans' sense of ethnic identity and citizenship. The influx of bracero and illegal labor from 1944 to 1954 created and exacerbated a hostile anti-alien environment, felt by all workers of Mexican descent. In response to these conditions, unions put their normal advocacy efforts on hold and focused their attention to aggressively campaigning against the bracero program.[31] Mexican Americans in agricultural unions pressured the Department of Labor to enact Operation Wetback in 1954, a national initiative to deport illegal Mexicans.[32] However unions realized this gave the Immigration and Naturalization Service license to invade the workplace, home, and places of entertainment in search of illegal Mexicans, with Mexican American activists being lumped in regardless of citizenship status. This prompted unions to inextricably link the issues of labor and civil rights as avenues to the greater goal of Mexican American social justice.[33] Deborah Cohen also sees links between labor and advocacy for greater rights, which she identifies in Mexican American labor leader Ernesto Galarza. Although he instrumented the 1947 strike against the DiGiorgio Fruit Corporation through the National Farm Labor Union, which failed because growers forced braceros into the role of scabs, Galarza became one of labor's biggest advocates against the

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[31] Zaragosa Vargas, "In the Years of Darkness and Torment; The Early Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1963," *New Mexico historical review*, 76, no. 4 (2001): 382-413, 8-9.
[32] Zaragosa Vargas, "In the Years of Darkness and Torment; The Early Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1963," 10-11.
[33] Zaragosa Vargas, "In the Years of Darkness and Torment; The Early Mexican American Struggle for Civil Rights, 1945-1963," 11, 13.

treatment of braceros. He believed growers placed agricultural laborers and braceros in similar conditions, and by exposing the abuses of the bracero program, he could bridge the gap between the two groups and their combined force could demand rights for both.[34] Despite Vargas and Cohen find benefits in funneling Mexican Americans' frustrations into organized labor, according to David Gutiérrez's general argument, this tactic would only prove to be partially effective. Because Gutiérrez attributes polarization over immigration issues to individual interpretations of political and ethnic identity, using the sphere of labor to gain civil rights (often impeded by illegal immigration and the bracero program) would still lead to fragmentation among the Mexican American community. Although debate certainly exists among historians as to the effectiveness of using unions as a tool for Mexican American rights and equality, no one can doubt that laborers utilized these links to the best of their ability, particularly during the bracero program.

The interests of California agribusiness, organized labor, and Mexican Americans all converged because of the bracero program, with the Mexican contract-laborers finding themselves caught somewhere in the middle. As identified through much of the scholarship on the bracero program, these interests would not function in a vacuum, but rather played off the actions and motives of each other to use braceros and the program to fit their needs and desires. This allows for not only a complicated narrative of the bracero program, but a spectrum of interpretations explaining the actions of each actor. While read closely and thoughtfully, this variety of analyses inform a more complete, yet still complex, understanding of the bracero program.

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[34] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects,* 164.

Chapter Eight: Annotated Bibliography

Barocas, Emily. "Examining the Legacy of the Braceros Program." *Morning Edition.* Recorded March 23, 2005. NPR. Web, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4556696&ps=rs.

This short piece from National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" segment addresses the bracero program in the context of President Bush's consideration of a similar contract-labor system in 2005. Emily Barocas includes snippets from Stewart Anderson, executive director for the National Foundation for American Policy, who believes the bracero program helped curb immigration. She also includes a soundbite from Vernon Briggs, a scholar from Cornell University who contends that guest worker programs hardly ever enforce themselves, which leads to problems. Although a very brief segment, I plan to use some quotes from Anderson and Briggs to supplement my analysis on the benefits of the program, or lack thereof.

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

Vernon Briggs' work focuses on United States immigration policy, and the evolution of its effects on the American labor force. Briggs emphasizes that his study pertains to policy development after World War II, and not the explanations for immigration (although his work does touch upon theoretical explanations). Briggs only includes one short general overview on the bracero program, informed in part by popular secondary sources such as Ernesto Galarza's *Merchants of Labor*, Richard Craig's *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy*, and Carey McWilliam's *North From Mexico*. Briggs' brief description of the program, although inconsequential in the larger scope of his book, includes details not generally referenced in works that focus more specifically on the bracero program. For example, he includes a paragraph comparing the codified bracero program of World War II to the more informal bracero program started in World War I, and includes details of the program's termination during the Kennedy administration, both of which are relative to my narrative of the program.

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

Kitty Calavita views the bracero program through the lens of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and how the agency played a role in the outcome of the program. She characterizes the bracero program as an avenue to provide large growers with cheap labor, although she

believes that the INS did not act primarily due to pressure from growers. Although the aims of the INS often overlapped with growers' interests, a relationship between the two groups did not exist- rather the INS saw opportunity for its own gain in the pursuits of growers. Furthermore, Calavita's research shows that the agencies behind the program, including the INS, were internally divided, and that these structural contradictions contributed to many of the problems of the program. Scholars writing about the bracero program frequently cite Calavita's work, making it significant in the field. One of its strengths comes from her focus on a narrative from the perspective of the government, when so many scholarly works analyze the bracero program with the laborer at the center. For my purposes, Calavita's analysis fills in many of the details of my own narrative of the bracero program. She also explores the role of organized labor as it interacted with the Department of Labor, which would inform my analysis of the role of unions during the bracero program.

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

Despite being a recent contribution to the field, Deborah Cohen's work thoroughly analyzes of the factors that culminated to drive the bracero program. She supports the argument made by those before her, that the American agenda for importing braceros centered around providing expendable workers for agribusiness. She also builds upon the undertones of previous works, that growers desired Mexican labor because their ethnic character fit growers' qualifications for the ideal worker. However, Cohen stretches this idea further, writing that not only did growers choose Mexicans because of their perceived ethnic identity, but through the recruitment process and their time in the fields, growers attempted to mold these braceros in an attempt to replace domestic labor. From the perspective of unions, Cohen writes organized American labor saw braceros as obstacles to their goals, and accordingly treated the Mexican nationals as threats as opposed to allies. But perhaps the strongest story that drives Cohen's analysis comes from the objectives of the Mexican government. She writes that after in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the government sought to modernize their poorest class of citizens by sending them to the United States to work. Through contact with American labor, these peasant men would ideally become transformed into transnational subjects that would use their new farming skills, experiences, and wages to raise the status of Mexico as a whole. Cohen's chapters analyze the bracero program from a wide range of perspectives, including using the lens of growers' interests, class, gender, race, labor, the Mexican and American states, and most importantly the incentives driving the bracero workers themselves. Cohen also supplements her analysis with interviews she conducted with former braceros. Cohen's work serves as an incredibly detailed and informative

resource for what I hope to study, and provided me with a framework with which to read other sources on the bracero program.

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

Barbara Driscoll's work remains one of the quintessential texts on the railroad bracero program. Railroad braceros were only contracted for two and a half years, as compared to the agricultural program, which lasted for over two decades. Because of this vast discrepancy, the majority of secondary literature available focuses on agricultural braceros, making Driscoll's book even more valuable. Driscoll provides a historical overview of the negotiations that created the program and how it unfolded in the United States and Mexico. She argues that the program developed because of a wartime environment combined with a strong relationship between the railroad industry and the federal government, and concluded in part due to the strong presence of unions. She also characterizes the railroad bracero program as the only successful binational immigration exchange between the United States and Mexico, due to the formal negotiations in which Mexico used its power to protect its workers, and the program remaining as temporary as its creators envisioned. Although she uses a plethora of sources, she highlights the secondary literature of Ernesto Galarza, Richard Craig, Peter Kirstein, and Erasmo Gamboa among other primary documents. I plan to use Driscoll's work as my main source detailing the railroad program, since she focuses on it so extensively. I also want to focus on her analysis of the significant role railroad unions played in the braceros program, since Driscoll repeatedly emphasizes their power, compared to the domination of organized labor in the agricultural program.

Durand, Jorge. "The Bracero Program (1942-1964): A Critical Appraisal." *Second Semester: Migración y Desarrollo.* (2007).

Jorge Durand approaches his overview of the bracero program with the intention of evaluating it objectively, to determine its value in the context of contemporary immigration. His literal 'pro and con' list serves as an obvious response to suggestions of possibly implementing a new contract-labor program to control immigration from Mexico. Although Durand's lists of positive and negative traits of the bracero program generally cover familiar ground (for example, almost no scholar argues that braceros received adequate treatment while in the United States), some of his classifications could be points of contention when compared with other secondary sources (Durand paints bureaucratic control as a factor causing the program to function efficiently in both countries, a point Kitty Calavita in her study of the INS would disagree with). Durand's attempt at an objective analysis has value in that it provides an alternative way to view

the bracero program, especially when so many other authors take the opposite route and try to humanize the program.

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

In *Merchants of Labor*, Ernesto Galarza chronicles the development of bracero labor in California and exposes the rampant abuse of these workers by their agribusiness employers. Galarza, as a union leader, writes from a pro-labor perspective and explains how growers used the holes in the bracero program to take advantage of the contracted workers, using statistics from the federal government to support his claims. Although Galarza left his mark as as one of the most prominent bracero advocates, with *Merchants of Labor* frequently cited by historians as a quintessential text on the bracero program, Galarza's work contains significant flaws. Galarza does not analyze the program with a clear thesis in mind. He also cuts his narrative off at 1960, missing the termination of the program, a weakness he freely admits to in his introduction. Galarza published *Merchants of Labor* soon after the bracero program concluded, perhaps making it too early for any significant analysis of the program beyond exposing the program's shortcomings. I plan to use Galarza's focus on the minutia of the program's policies, and his descriptions of significant negotiations and legislation to inform my narrative. His focus on the institutional factors that gave California growers so much power, and how this impeded braceros' ability to improve their status as laborers would also be valuable to my own pro-labor analysis.

Gamboa, Erasmo. *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

Erasmo Gamboa describes his study as a "straightforward history" due to the fact that in areas other than the Southwest, research on Chicano history, much less the bracero program, has not progressed past an extremely basic level. Although his work explores the bracero program in Washington, Idaho and Oregon, Gamboa does not have as much concrete analysis in his book. He generally presents and organizes information pertaining to the bracero program in the Pacific Northwest, and while Gamboa's work understandably lacks analysis due to the lack of previous scholarship, it also serves as a weakness. However, his work contributes to the field overall by demonstrating that growers followed the example set for them by agribusiness in California, showing the dominance Southwestern farmers had over the bracero program. When discussing the areas of the program that caused friction between growers and laborers, such as wages and working conditions, Gamboa claims that neither farmers nor the federal government maximized either domestic labor or

the potential of braceros. I plan to use this framework Gamboa applies to the bracero program in the Pacific Northwest to the state of labor in the Southwest as well.

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

In this essay, Erasmo Gamboa emphasizes that the bracero program shipped laborers all over the United States beyond just Texas and California. In studying braceros in the Pacific Northwest, Gamboa reflects the conclusion many other scholars reach- the conditions promised to the bracero workers in their contracts generally did not come to fruition. Gamboa's essay contributes to the field by focusing on the Pacific Northwest and the unique problems that braceros in these areas faced due to their geography. For example, homesickness and isolation became magnified for these workers due to the fact that they did not work in a border state, not only lengthening the journey to home, but making them less likely to find a Mexican American community to support them. Braceros in the Pacific Northwest also often struggled climate adjustment, an issue not felt by braceros in the Southwest. This piece would be valuable to my analysis of the bracero program because of Gamboa's examples showing that outside of California and Texas, grower domination, poor living and working conditions, and broken contracts still dominated the bracero experience.

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

Mario Garcia uses his work to study the 'Mexican American Generation', or those Americans of Mexican descent who came of age between the 1930s and 1950s, collectively experiencing the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. The Mexican Americans of this generation, Garcia argues, emerged out of Southwestern barrios to organize the first significant civil rights movement for Mexican Americans. Garcia ultimately seeks to study the relationship between ethnicity to generational change. He focuses on the transition of ethnicity from the immigrant Mexican generation to the succeeding generations as they try to understand their place in the United States, by either incorporating their roots or assimilating. One of the strengths of Garcia's work comes from his thorough study of a variety of Mexican American groups, such as the Spanish-Speaking Congress, the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA), and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Although his work does not specifically focus on braceros, Garcia does mention how each group responded to the issue of bracero labor. I plan to use Garcia's work for background information on each of these significant

Mexican American groups, and as a guide to gauge the scope of influence these groups had during the bracero program.

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

In *Walls and Mirrors*, David Guitiérrez investigates how and why Mexican Americans feel they way they do about immigration. He concludes that Mexican Americans generally fall into two camps- the first view immigrant Mexicans as a threat, who only create economic competition, reinforce negative racial stereotypes, and prevent any Mexican American progress for civil rights or equality. Mexican Americans on the other side of the divide most likely see themselves as recent arrivals, and see a common origin and culture as a binding ties to immigrants. With this view of the immigration debate in mind, Gutiérrez argues that Mexican Americans' own sense of ethnic and political identity determines their stance on the immigration debate more than any other factors. Gutiérrez uses his theory as a litmus test to measure Mexican Americans' responses to the bracero program as a whole, and the presence of braceros and illegal Mexican 'wetbacks' in the labor force. Instead of focusing on the structure of the bracero program, Gutiérrez profiles the most active Mexican American organizations and individuals at the time and how they perceived the bracero program. He uses primary documents from a variety of archives, secondary source material, and news articles to determine the overall aims of these groups and activists, and how these aims informed their actions and rhetoric. I plan to use *Walls and Mirrors* as a resource to analyze how issues of identity affected Mexican Americans' views on the braceros program, and Gutiérrez's thesis as a lens to interpret other works.

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

Peter Kirstein uses his work to analyze the role of different American governmental agencies during the bracero program, and how they balanced pressure from unions and growers as they advocated for their respective interests. After studying the subject extensively, he adamantly characterizes the bracero program as unnecessary for the United States to enact. He doubts a real shortage of domestic labor existed; big farms just simply wanted cheap, expendable Mexican labor. I plan to utilize his emphasis on the redundancy of the program, one of the strengths of his work. He frames the program as a product of existing frameworks, such as grower control, and argues that if growers presented presented domestic laborers with higher wages and adequate working conditions, a labor

shortage never would have existed. I want to explore the frameworks that oppressed laborers, and how they were strengthened by the bracero program, and Kirstein's work would be a valuable source to this study.

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

Harvey Levenstein, while including a chapter on bracero labor, primary focuses on the general history of Mexican and American labor unions. He refutes the stereotypes of American unions as either tools of the American government that support American political imperialism, or as completely devoted to uplifting their Mexican brothers to the standards enjoyed by Americans. Levenstein writes that the true aims of these unions lies somewhere in the middle, and requires a much more complex explanation. An example of this in the bracero program concerns the discrepancies between the views held by national unions and local chapters of the union. Although national unions might believe in rhetoric that united Mexican and American laborers, for local chapters of unions saw inclusion of braceros as suicide. American unions were also not uniform in their perception of braceros, with the AFL and CIO generally having opposing views, despite their merging in 1955. My own study would benefit from Levenstein's analysis because of his focus on unions as separate bodies with their own agendas, illuminating how identity politics on a local and national level affected how organized labor interacted with braceros.

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

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

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

In *North From Mexico*, McWillams' analyzes the conflicts and struggles of Anglos and Hispanos in the Southwestern United States. He focuses on the journeys of people from Mexico to the Southwest, stating that they did not cross a border so much as they carried their experience to a similar environment. In the chapters I plan on using, McWilliams records the stereotypes of Mexican laborers primarily in California during the 1920s and 1930s. For example, California growers perceived their Mexican workers as having no political ambitions, and that as a labor force, they must be subservient to be productive. Mexican workers, in turn, realized they had been classified as an 'other', evidenced by their poor working and living conditions. McWilliams believes that this, combined with their desire to protect themselves, eventually led to their attempt at unionization. While for the purposes of my analysis McWilliams' book as a whole does not provide much relevant information, the quotes he includes pertaining to characterizations of Mexican laborers and their union efforts will be useful in putting the braceros program into a larger historical context.

Meraji, Shereen. "Documenting the Stories of Bracero Guest Workers." *Day to Day*. Recorded Feb 14, 2006. NPR. Web, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5205763.

This segment appeared on National Public Radio's "Day to Day" show, and profiles both the bracero program and the then-upcoming exhibit on the program at the Smithsonian. The piece includes interviews with former braceros, and soundbites of how Steve Velasquez, curator of the Home and Community Life division at the Smithsonian hopes to present the project. Although a brief segment, Velasquez ties the story of the braceros workers with a larger American identity, and I plan to use his quotes pertaining to this idea in my analysis.

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

Sánchez uses this work to study how Mexicans who migrated to the United States balanced assimilation and retaining their cultural identity. He finds that Chicano history has embraced a bi-polar model of cultural identity- either one acculturates into mainstream American society or finds avenues for cultural continuity. Sánchez believes this model impedes a full exploration of the complex process of cultural adaptation, which he attempts in this book. Sánchez studies the history of Mexican immigration for almost the first half of the 20th century and cultural identity issues through assimilation programs, the role of the Mexican government's 'Mexicanization' initiatives, and the political action of second generation Mexican Americans. Sánchez provides a strong history of Mexican and

Mexican American identity issues before the bracero program, and would provide valuable context to trace the continuation of these identity issues during the bracero program.

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

Barbara Schmitter Heisler states that in her article, she intends to give historical perspective to the development of Mexican migration to the United States. She uses the bracero program as an example of the profound effect mass immigration has on the economies and politics of both nations. Furthermore, she argues that initiatives such as the braceros program only create and institutionalize social and political issues that are still felt in contemporary immigration. Although only a brief overview of the program, Schmitter Heisler effectively analyzes the bracero program according to other theories such as the 'sojourner thesis', which essentially argues that even temporary migration encourages permanent settlement. I plan on using Schmitter Heisler's analysis of the bracero program to supplement my own analysis, and make use of some of her quotes describing the program.

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

In this essay, Michael Snodgrass analyzes the bracero program through the lens of Mexican policymakers, anti-emigration critics, and migrant communities. Although he does not attack other scholars directly in this work, Snodgrass comes to a variety of conclusions that contradict other writing on the bracero program. For example, while Deborah Cohen believes that the Mexican government perceived the bracero program as a way to uplift a formerly war-torn nation, Snodgrass characterizes the program as a source of shame and symbolic of dependence on the United States. Snodgrass also writes that braceros showed more agency than often given credit for, and repeatedly proved their willingness and ability to protest and strike. While not a strong narrative thread in his essay, Snodgrass also measures America's interpretation of labor with media as a litmus test, from sympathy brought out by *The Grapes of Wrath* (novel and film) to pressure on Congress to end the the bracero program thanks to "Harvest on Shame", an exposé on CBS likening the program to slavery. Although Snodgrass presents many of the same facts as other scholars on the bracero program, his conclusions provide a useful alternative analysis of the bracero program.

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

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

Chapter Nine: Research Plan/Calendar

Schedule for Senior IS: History 451/452

Summer 2012

May: Finish researching, reading, and taking notes on sources identified as valuable during Junior IS, but that I was unable to study due to time constraints.

June: Study the political histories of Mexico and the United States before and during the bracero program, the history of agriculture in California, agricultural labor histories, and environmental histories of California to provide a deeper historical context for the bracero program.

July: Focus on the oral history component of my project. This includes researching models on how to successfully take an oral history, and listening to oral histories of braceros archived online for information related to my study. I plan to use this as preparation for my visit to Texas to record my grandfather's testimony as a railroad bracero.

August: Focus on collecting and analyzing primary sources available in online archives such as the Smithsonian and the National Archives. I will also be using Copeland Funds to travel to Stanford University for a week to visit their archive dedicated to Mexican American labor leader Ernesto Galarza. Other possibilities for archival research include visiting the LULAC and George I. Sánchez archives at the University of Texas at Austin (while I am in Texas to visit my grandfather), or making a trip to the United Farm Workers of America archive at Wayne State University in Detroit before school starts.

First Semester, 2012 (1-16 weeks)

Week 1: Initial meeting with Professor Roche to refresh the trajectory of my project, as outlined in my Junior Prospectus. A more concrete and detailed plan will be constructed on how to jump in to Senior IS.

Weeks 2-5: Annotated bibliography will be updated from summer research. Write initial draft of first chapter.

Weeks 6-9: Write rough draft of second chapter, make edits to first chapter. Continue to refine notes and research.

Weeks 10-13: Edit second chapter, write third chapter.

Weeks 14-16: End of the semester, including finals week. Edit third chapter, stay on top of research and notes.

Winter Break (17-20 weeks)

Weeks 17-20: Write fourth chapter, in addition to finishing any work I have contractually promised Professor Roche I would do.

Second Semester, 2013 (21-30 weeks, IS Monday week 31)

Weeks 21-23: Turn in fourth chapter, begin writing fifth chapter. Make edits to fourth chapter as it comes back to me.

Weeks 24-26: Turn in fifth chapter. Begin introduction and conclusion. Last weeks to present any new material, include them in my first full rough draft.

Weeks 26-30: EDIT!!! Try not to freak out, turn in final product to the Registrar.

Week 31: Early Cinco de Mayo!