

**Mount Holyoke College**

**From Bracero to Mojado to Chicano: Farm Labor, Immigration, and Mexican  
Identity in California Agriculture, 1942-1980**

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## **Introduction**

### **The Pre-Bracero Period: Tracing the Roots of the Chicano Movement**

Beginning in the upper corner of the Shasta Cascades and stretching down the state's broad coastline, California's topography takes travellers on an 840-mile journey of contrasting landscape and geographical diversity. Starting in the heights of the serpentine Klamath mountain range, winding on through the volcanic terrain of the Cascades, and descending down into the dry and treacherous wastelands of the Mohave and Colorado deserts, this circuit ends in a region nestled comfortably between the Colorado river to the east and the Salton Sea to the west. Known as the Imperial and Coachella Valleys, these uniquely fertile regions have been made incredibly productive by large farming irrigation projects. If the Corn Belt that stretches across the Great Plains of North America is our Bread Basket, then the Imperial, Coachella, Mexicali, and San Joaquin Valleys might be considered the nation's "Fruit Basket." The regions' wide variety of soils and unique two-season period, one brief rainy season followed by a long expanse of sunny and rainless days, has allowed California's agricultural productivity to flourish. As go the universal laws of agriculture, however, every field requires a field hand.

The development of California's large scale, diverse, and extremely mechanized farm industry occurred within a relatively short period of time, booming in the aftermath of World War I between 1919- 1928. The critical examination of California's social landscape began in 1939. The journalist Carrey McWilliams classified California's final product as a system of agricultural feudalism, in which "the farm industrialists expanded production, rationalized methods, speeded up labor, consolidated their control, imported

thousands of alien laborers, built up their labor reserves, disregarded all thought of permanent social planning, and created a situation ripe for collapse and disaster.”<sup>1</sup>

California’s successful agricultural mechanization and industrialization operation was held together by the threads of a diverse body of labor originating from China, Japan, the Philippines, the Deep South, and Mexico. In the Imperial Valley today, a multiracial community of Latin-Americans, Africans, east and south Asians, and Europeans represents the remnants of a dynamic and entangled history of migrant labor that formed the social, cultural, and economic landscape of California.

Long before the arrival of these armies of foreign labor, a different ethnic group tended to the soils and harvested the fruits of the nation: they were the Mexican-Americans. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo annexed one-third of Mexico’s territory and extended full citizenship protection under the U.S. Constitution to approximately 100,000 Mexicans. This measure of inclusion, however, was more a formality than a reality. Thousands of Anglo-American pioneers flooded into the previous Mexican territories and confronted a body of American citizens unfamiliar with the language and culture of America. American leaders debated how to reconcile a group that was neither Mexican nor entirely “American” with California’s Anglo dominated social, political, and economic sphere. South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun posed a question to Congress and the American public: “Can we incorporate a people so dissimilar to us in every respect—so little qualified for free and popular government—

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<sup>1</sup> Carrey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: the Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (1939), 183

without certain destruction to our political institutions?”<sup>2</sup> The political and social disenfranchisement of Mexican-Americans began at the point of their induction as citizens. Most members of Congress concluded that Mexican-Americans could not successfully integrate into American society and showed an unwillingness to fully incorporate Mexican-Americans into the mainstream political system. Democratic Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan encapsulated the U.S. government’s general consensus concerning the incorporation of Mexicans into American political institutions:

We do not want the people of Mexico, either as citizens or subjects. All we want is a partition of territory, which they nominally hold, generally inhabited or inhabited at all, sparsely so, and with a population, which would soon recede or identify itself within ours.<sup>3</sup>

In the end, the 1848 treaty gave affected Mexicans the option to exit the territory to south of the new border, retain their Mexican citizenship and become permanent resident aliens, or after one year, automatically become citizens of the United States. As more Anglo-Americans entered the territories, racial prejudice against the local Mexican, and now, and Mexican-American inhabitants became widespread. Gradually displaced from a pastoral and subsistence farming economy, the proliferation of commercial agriculture in California and other areas of the Southwest pushed Mexican-Americans and Mexican aliens into the migrant labor sector. The citizenship choice given by the American government formed barriers between Mexicans who elected to be American citizens and those who chose to retain their Mexican citizenship. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>2</sup> David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican-Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (1995), 16

<sup>3</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 29<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., February 9, 1847, 191, quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 17.

commercial agriculture turned into agro-industrial feudalism and the divisions in California's agricultural labor community widened.

The Immigration "Quota" Act of 1924 created new racial boundaries that falsely portrayed the United States population as predominantly white Europeans. The 1924 Act exempted Mexico (and the entire Western Hemisphere) from numerical quotas and classified Mexicans as "white." American political leaders rationalized these exemptions as noble efforts towards greater Western Hemisphere Solidarity, but the agricultural labor needs of the Southwest served as the actual basis for this exemption. The 1924 Act may have technically defined Mexicans as "white," but upon crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, they did not rate the socio- economic status of Anglo- Americans. In her groundbreaking and thoughtful history, Mae Ngai described immigrants as America's "Impossible Subjects."<sup>4</sup> As American citizens by birth, but Mexican by blood, Mexican-Americans can be considered our nation's not "Impossible, but "Ambiguous Subjects." From 1848 onward, these "Ambiguous Subjects" faced the following enigma: How to construct a racial and national identity that would do justice to both their Mexican and American heritage?

During World War II, other journalists and labor leaders followed the lead of Carrey McWilliams and began to investigate the social repercussions of California's agro- industry. As tensions heightened between American and foreign farmhands during the 1940s and 1950s, criticism of growers and their exploitative tactics frequented the newsroom. In one of the first televised accounts on farm workers, broadcast journalist

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<sup>4</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (2004)

Edward R. Murrow designed an investigative report to show Americans the plight of these migrant workers. Aired on Thanksgiving Day of 1960, Murrow made broadcast history with an opening statement intended to arouse citizen consciousness to the farmworker struggle:

It has to do with the men, women and children who harvest the crops in this country of ours: the best fed nation on earth. These are the forgotten people, the under-protected, the under-educated, the under-clothed, the under fed. We present this report on Thanksgiving, because were it not for the labor of the people you are going to meet, you might not starve, but your table would not be laden with the luxuries that we have all come to regard as essentials. We would like you to meet some of your fellow citizens, who harvest the food for the best fed nation on earth.<sup>5</sup>

They, the migrants, the “workers in the sweatshops of the soil” carried out the harvest of shame that built the agricultural empire of the San Joaquin, Imperial, Coachella, and Mexicali Valleys. Early competitive interactions between Mexican-Americans and migrant foreign labor of all color and creed sowed seeds of discontent within the Mexican-American community. This set the stage for trade disputes that erupted in the 1960s between Mexican-Americans and Bracero workers in the Great Imperial Valley Strike. Therein lies *Harvest of Shame*’s one important flaw: Murrow only referenced citizen migrant laborers and excluded Mexican immigrant laborers from his otherwise thoughtful investigation.

In the 1960s, Mexican workers made up a substantial percentage of workers on California farms. Their continual presence, however, cultivated an anti-foreign bias and resulted in race riots targeted against alien groups. Within this anti-foreign environment,

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<sup>5</sup> *Harvest of Shame*, broadcasted by Edward R. Murrow (1960; Washington, D.C.; CBS News Production Broadcast), DVD.



the Mexican-American occupied an ambiguous middle- ground and felt a continual threat from the influx of “commuter aliens,” “wetbacks,” and Bracero migrant labor. Between World War II and the 1960s, the various member groups of California’s Spanish-speaking community transformed and expanded. The Spanish-speaking community of California extended far beyond the commonly mentioned “Braceros,” “Illegals,” and Chicanos. To avoid affiliation with any suspicion of illegality, Mexican-Americans, Braceros, and green- card workers placed an increased emphasis on their legal identity.

In fact, until the 1960s, Mexican-Americans typically did not refer to themselves as “Chicanos.” Up until the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, being Mexican-American meant something very different from the Chicano pride that emerged in the late 60s and early 70s. In 1928, a group of Mexican-American middle class leaders founded the League of Latin American Citizens. LULAC created the ideal mold of “Mexican-American” for the next 40 years: A patriotic American citizen, separate and socially superior to the Mexican national. In an effort to bring out the *American* in the Mexican-American, integration and assimilation comprised the building blocks of LULAC’s constitution. LULAC limited its members to legal United States citizens of Latin American descent. A 1940 publication of the organization’s newspaper, the *LULAC News*, declared a commitment to “develop within our race, the best, purest, and more perfect type of true and loyal citizen of the United States of America.”<sup>6</sup> Instead of fomenting friendly relations with the Mexican government and unions on the other side

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<sup>6</sup> Craig Kaplowitz, *LULAC; Mexican-Americans and National Policy*, (2005), 21.

of the border, LULAC rejected the political protection offered by the Mexican government and pledged its allegiance to the United States government.

Many Mexican citizens resided in the United States as legal resident aliens and also sought to separate themselves from wetback labor. These were the “transmigrants,” “commuters,” or “green carders, who received a visa I-151 to work in the United States and maintain their Mexican residency and citizenship. Most media and government officials generalized all immigrants under the term “wetback,” but not all Mexican immigrants to enter the United States did so via the “wetback” route. A Mexican immigrant could be either an “*espalda mojado*” or an “*alambrista*.” An “*espalda mojado*” or a “wetback” was an immigrant who entered the United States via the Río Grande or Río Bravo.<sup>7</sup> Many immigrants chose the route of the “*alambristas*,” known sometimes as “line jumpers,” who crossed into the United States somewhere along the “275 miles of mountainous, desert border from Arizona to the Pacific.”<sup>8</sup> Though the media and California public officials generalized all undocumented immigrants under the “wetback” category, most immigrants in California crossed into the United States through the desert. One Mexican-American remembered:

No. In Arizona and California we didn't have *mojados*. Do you know why? We didn't call them *mojados*... *Alambristas*! They were called *alambristas*... Moreover, there wasn't an enticement at this time for the *Alambristas* to be here. The Bracero Program fulfilled the need in the agricultural program. In Texas, they called them *mojados* because of the Rio Grande. We called them “*Alambristas*” (border jumpers because of the fence). *Mojados* came later.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bustamante, *Espaldas mojadas*, 15

<sup>8</sup> Bill Dredge, “Thousands of Mexicans Illegally Cross U.S. Border Each Month,” May 2, 1950, *Los Angeles Times*

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007, Bracero History Archive.

Inconclusive evidence for the *mojados*' effect upon the existing migrant labor community stirred up debates between legislators, growers, and unionists. Furthermore, *mojados*' ambiguous legal status and inexact entry statistics presented legislators, growers, and unionists with new challenges regarding the undocumented immigrant's place in collective bargaining.

Scholarship on the Bracero Program has tended towards an analysis of the program as a homogeneous and static initiative that prospered in the Southwest between 1942 and 1964, its formal years of operation. This is misleading. The United States government resorted to foreign contract labor long before World War II. Most significantly, the Mexican contract worker remained an integral part of the Southwest's agribusiness landscape long after the end of the war. The Bracero Program as begun in 1942, shares few similarities with its more exploitative versions of the 1950s and 1960s. The Bracero Program should not be examined as an isolated program originating from World War II, but rather a multi-faceted American institution that transcends the years 1942 to 1964. Similar forms of foreign contract labor existed prior to World War II and after its recorded end in 1964, prime examples being the World War I labor program and the green-card provisions of the 1960s. The Bracero Program, then, should be examined as a series of initiatives that involved a Mexican labor force and transcends all dates and formalities.

Zaragoza Vargas and many Chicano historians recognize that the Mexican-American labor and civil rights movements that began in 1930s and WWII years served as a precursor to the modern Chicano movement. While this is a correct assessment,

California's World War II migrant labor community also included an expansive community of Mexican Braceros, Alambristas, and Mojados. This points out a problematic gap in scholarship on the Bracero Program *and* the modern Chicano movement. The labor, social, and political experiences of the Mexican immigrant mirrored those of the Mexican-American. Yet, studies on the Bracero Program focus exclusively on Braceros and studies on the development of Chicanismo focus primarily on Mexican-Americans. How, then, did Mexican workers fit into the Mexican-American labor and civil rights movements that took root in the wartime era? In the 20 years between the World War II and the 1960s emergence of Chicanismo, how did Mexican-American and Mexican National relations evolve? How, why, and when did the modern Chicano movement take up the struggle of undocumented immigrant workers and integrate it with their own? Finally, who or what group began the slow process of amelioration between Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals? What factors prevented prior solidarity within the Spanish-speaking community of California?

The following study will examine the Bracero Program in each of its distinct epochs as a separate initiative; trace the causes and effects for the program's exploitative transformations; and draw a line between the end of the Bracero Program with the final 1970s reconciliation between Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants under one Chicano movement. Chapter one will focus on the Wartime Phase of the Bracero Program (1942-1953), in which the Department of Agriculture recruited Braceros as a wartime necessity during World War II and the Korean War. In the Bracero Program's most peaceful and regulated epoch, Braceros and Mexican-Americans co-existed and

collaborated in the wartime Mexican-American trade unions that provided the foundations for Chicanismo. Chapter two will focus on the Post-War Phase of the Bracero Program (1954-1964), at which point agro-business greed (as influenced by price competition and falling profits) tapped into political power and lowered the wages of foreign contract labor. While floods of *mojado* migration threatened Mexican-Americans' unstable position, the post-war complexities of the Bracero Program fortified the barriers between Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals. Chapter three will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the United Farm Workers Movement of César Chavez through the lens of the 1965-1970 period, which resisted unity with Mexican Nationals, while drawing in nationwide attention for the farm worker struggle. Chapter four will trace the foundations of La Raza Unida and C.A.S.A, the founding groups of the unified Mexican front that we know today as *Chicanismo*. Together, the dynamic, complex, and interwoven tales of Braceros, *Mojados*, and Chicanos paint a new picture of California Agriculture; a picture that portrays Mexican Nationals as not a mere afterthought, but integral and constant voice in the formation of ethnic and worker identity in the Southwest.

## Chapter 1

### Braceros and the Mexican Migrant Labor Agreement, 1942-1954

When the United States and the Mexican governments passed the Migrant Labor Agreement in August of 1942 and approved the entry of Mexican National workers, lawmakers advertised the program as a wartime measure that would “continue for one or two years at least after the fighting phase of the war was over.”<sup>10</sup> Publicized under various titles, such as the “Mexican Labor Program,” the “Bracero Work Program,” and “Public Law 78,” a new influx of migrant labor into the fields of California reignited Mexican-American grievances and tested relations within the Spanish-speaking community. Mexican-American workers, whose “sweat developed the vast agricultural lands... whose labor constructed the houses and public buildings... who created the west—for the use, profit and enjoyment of others”<sup>11</sup> felt the threat of displacement from another immigrant community. Yet, Braceros presented an ethical roadblock that the Chinese and Philippine immigration waves of the 1920s did not. Mexican-Americans of the war generation shared a common, national heritage with the contending immigrant community. Many Mexican-Americans, who perceived themselves first as Americans and second as Mexicans, struggled with the following dilemma: How to define a Mexican-American identity and simultaneously reconcile with these new members of their community? Most studies focus on the more conflictive Bracero Program of the 1950s and 1960s and disregard World War II efforts for solidarity between s and

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<sup>10</sup> “Imported Mexican War Emergency Workers and the Community,” *Bulletin of the American Federation of International Institutes* July, 1945, Coll. M224, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Stanford University Special Collections and University Archives (Hereafter cited as Galarza Papers).

<sup>11</sup> Julian Samora, Ernesto Galarza, and Herman Gallegos, *Mexican-Americans in the Southwest* (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, Publishers, 1969), viii.

immigrants. This chapter examines the World War II Bracero Program as a separate, more regulated, and peaceful program. With some exceptions, Braceros and Mexican-Americans coexisted in relative harmony in the 1940s and oftentimes collaborated in farm workers unions. In the 1940s, Braceros workers were integral and instrumental parts of these Mexican-American farm workers movements, which served as a precursor to the later Chicano rights movements. After 1953, the end of wartime necessity turned the program from an emergency solution into a cheap labor source and labor relations began to sour.

In the wartime phase of the program, a total of 230,670 workers were contracted nationwide, with 146,744 Braceros placed in the Southwest.<sup>12</sup> During its 22-year period, program administrators approved roughly 4.5 million work contracts, 2 million of which went towards agrobusiness. Within its 22- year duration, the Bracero Program passed through three distinct phases. The Bracero Program of 1960 was incomparable and dissimilar in every way to the Bracero Program of World War II. The first phase, 1942-1947, encompassed the original World War II measure, where Braceros were recruited under a bilateral agreement that operated initially under the 1917 immigration law. An interim period between 1948-1951 followed. Here, the program operated under U.S. executive rule rather than the bilateral migrant labor agreement with Mexico. From 1951 to 1964, grower exploitation increased and the U.S. government returned to Mexico the

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald Mize and Alicia Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (2011), 3-5.

formal right to regulate certain conditions in regards to citizen Braceros.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of these precautions, conditions for Braceros went into a downward spiral until 1964. Numerous federal agencies oversaw the Immigration and Naturalization Services' management of the Bracero Program throughout its twenty-two years of operation. During World War II, the Department of Agriculture administered the Bracero Program, since the program was a practical means to satisfy increased wartime food and labor needs. With the end of the war, the wartime labor emergency ended, but the Bracero Program continued to run. The Bracero Program transformed from a wartime provision into a reserve of cheap and disposable labor, so administrative and statutory authority for the program was transferred to the United States Employment Service and the Department of Labor.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of foreign agricultural contract workers was not unknown to the Southwest prior to World War II. Starting with the contracting of Mexican migrant workers in World War I, growers commoditized the figure of the "Bracero," who in turn, revolutionized the agricultural and Mexican culture of California. In connection with the ongoing identity crisis in the Mexican-American community, it is important to explore the transformation of the racial and national identity of Braceros. Many Braceros, like Angel Moreno, took out multiple Bracero contracts, regularly reentered the United States, and became American citizens. Born near Mexico City in 1923, Moreno took out his first contract at age 21, renewed his contract twice, married a Mexican-American woman, and

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<sup>13</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar US and Mexico* (2011), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S* (1992), 113.



became an American citizen in 1993.<sup>15</sup> Due to their complex migratory relationship between Mexico and the United States, Braceros can be seen as transnational subjects and citizens. The agricultural industry of California structured all social relationships and fomented a system of inclusion and exclusion in the migrant labor community. No longer residents of Mexico, but relegated to Migrant Labor Camps far from the domestic work camps, Braceros occupied a space of uncertainty in the United States. The misunderstandings that proliferated between American migrant laborers and Braceros “shaped the bracero journey as the space of opportunity that brought about new subjectivities as it tore at the state-citizen alliance in Mexico and furthered the bracero’s claims for recognition vis-à-vis the Mexican State and the U.S. nation.”<sup>16</sup>

In both Mexico and the United States, race and citizenship went hand in hand. In Mexico, race was also understood in terms of the binary, Spanish (white) versus indigenous (dark). The *Mestizos* comprised a majority of Mexico’s working class population. Post 1910, the white aristocracy of Mexico lost its previous influence and *mestizo* nationalism took rise throughout the nation. As neither fully white nor fully indigenous, the Mexican government now regarded *mestizos* as representative of a more modern and un-indigenous Mexico. Sent north as “soldiers of modernity,” the Braceros came into the United States and faced shocking discrimination, where the 1924 Act had made whiteness synonymous to “American. As non- whites in America, the majority perceived Braceros as perpetually foreign. Social outsiders in the United States, this

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Angel Moreno, January 12, 2008, Bracero History Archive. Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, <http://braceroarchive.org> (Hereafter cited as Bracero History Archive)

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, *Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 47.

racial dilemma plagued the identities of Mexican-Americans, since regardless of their American birthright, their Mexican and non- white status automatically linked them with foreignness.

Over the course of twenty years, wartime necessity, economic depression, and agri-business demands formed and remade the agricultural Bracero Program to fit into the Southwest's agricultural landscape. Yet, the official bureaucratic perceptions of the program contrasted drastically with the personal experiences of the Braceros themselves. During World War II, some Braceros were victims of exploitation and some were beneficiaries of program remittances. In the wartime era, Gilardo Sira Sandoval encountered very acceptable working conditions and positive relationships with employers. Sandoval recounted his Bracero experience: " In Coachella, I had a good patrón... This patron sent me money to Mexico to come to work for him."<sup>17</sup> The Migrant Labor Agreement, as amended in 1951, defined a Bracero as, "a Mexican national at least 18 years of age, not a resident of the United States of America, who is legally admitted to that country for temporary employment in agriculture in accordance with the terms of this Agreement."<sup>18</sup> In the post-war era, employers made visible efforts to stem increasingly critical perceptions of the program and maintained that the post-war Bracero paralleled the wartime Bracero. The growers' magazine, *Agricultural Life*, idealized the bracero as labor essential to the farming industry, but overlooked the fact that wartime necessity was no longer of concern:

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<sup>17</sup> Statement by Gilardo Sira Sandoval, San Jose, CA October 25, 1963, Box 17, Folder 2, Galarza Papers.

<sup>18</sup> James P. Mitchell, "Information Concerning Entry of Mexican Agricultural Workers into the United States," June 1957, Container 1, Record Group 174, General Records of the Department of Labor (1907-2001), Records Relating to the Mexican Labor Program, National Archives at San Francisco (Hereafter cited as RG 174)

In Spanish, the word *bracero* means literally arm man. In Mexico, it distinguishes one who works with his arms—or hands. In plain everyday USA farm lingo, it spells ‘lifesaver,’ for los *braceros* are the surplus farm hands of Mexico who first left their homes and crossed the border during World War II. They were brought over to help U.S. farmers meet wartime demands for all-out farm production at a time when Uncle Sam’s own farm workers were busy making and shooting guns.<sup>19</sup>

How, then, did Mexican-Americans perceive the program’s transformation and the gradual distortion of the *Bracero* identity and labor into a disposable commodity? Feliciano Ordoñez, a Mexican-American who grew up in a large agricultural community between 1930-1950, believed that during the war, the *Bracero* Program was indeed essential. He recalled, “in 1942, I heard for the first time about the *Braceros*... I understood that there was a need for the new people.”<sup>20</sup> When Ordoñez reflected upon what the word *Bracero* meant to him, he remembered the *braceros* as humble, yet isolated people:

Los *braceros* wore plain clothes... they were treated very well. They didn’t blend in with the community because they lived separately and were brought in as a group. They didn’t have this attitude of being there unwillingly. They didn’t have an attitude of feeling discrimination because they didn’t know it. They lived separately. They had no relation with the rest of the community to be discriminated upon... They never had to have a verbal relationship with the community to feel discrimination.<sup>21</sup>

During the wartime phase, Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals engaged in limited, but positive interactions. Ordoñez reflected upon his intercultural experiences growing up, recalling how “We [the Chicanos] learned from them. They spoke *una lengua diferente*. The *Braceros* made us realize how little Spanish we spoke. Their

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<sup>19</sup> “How Mexico Lends Its Hands to Save California’s Crops,” *Agricultural Life*, Spring 1957, Vol. 1, Container 3, RG 174.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007, *Bracero History Archive*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,

language had to do with the development of the Spanish language in California.”<sup>22</sup> Early on, then, the presence of Braceros in California and the rest of the southwest shaped the development of the agricultural landscape, impacted the Mexican-American language and culture that prevailed in these areas, and initiated intercultural exchange within the Spanish-speaking community.

Aristeo Ortega Acuña, a Bracero contracted toward the formal end of the program, shared his firsthand perspective of the Bracero Program. When asked what the term “Bracero” meant to him, Acuña recalled that overall, the program was,

A good thing, because we could come without a passport and without papers. In this way, the program was a good thing... My memories from this time, however, are mostly negative. The life of a Bracero was very difficult and isolating, without family, waking up every day at sunrise and sleeping at 1 am, waiting in lines...but, the program changed my life, because I was able to come to the United States legally.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, the identity and role of the Bracero transformed throughout the three main phases of the program. In the first 1942 to 1947 phase, wartime desperation welcomed Braceros into the community. At the same time, growers and the wider labor community designated Braceros as temporary and alien subjects. On major radio stations throughout the state of Colorado, radio broadcasters Randolph McDonough, T.G. Moore, and Henry Lopez attempted to articulate the purpose and indispensable nature of the wartime Bracero Program to an American audience:

You and I can remember those days after Pearl Harbor when there was great national concern about our food needs. We made our first acquaintance with complicated ration books. We worried about food shortages. The armed forces needed unbelievable quantities of food; so did

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Aristeo Ortega Acuña, Tuscon, AZ, January 6, 2008, Bracero History Archive.

our lend-lease friends. Farmers' sons and daughters and the hired help migrated from the farms to the big war plants. The high salaries looked good. Many who didn't leave were drafted. Suddenly, we began to wonder whether or not we had a domestic land army which could meet our wartime food needs. At this point, Uncle Sam began to look around for friends who could help us out. His eyes turned southward and soon we began to hear that citizens of Mexico were going to come across the borders to be of assistance. Now, in November, thousands of them are preparing to leave and their mass exodus is news.<sup>24</sup>

For the Mexican government, the wartime Bracero agreement presented an opportunity to establish greater Pan-American Union and stabilize economic ties with the United States through a base of remittances. On May 13, 1943, Francisco Trujillo Gurriá, the Mexican Secretary of Labor saw off a contingent of Mexican National workers bound for the United States and urged them to not be fearful of racial discrimination:

All the men standing here have paved the way for Mexico to fulfill her promises to aid all Democracies in overcoming the forces of barbarism and retrogression. Cast aside whatever inferiority complex remains within you, for you are bound for our Brother Country, where racial difference has been abolished. You can be assured that there, you will be treated as equals to American workers. Hold your heads high, for you are about to carry out an invaluable service to mankind. Hold your heads high, soldiers of Mexico, for you will fight, fueled by the patriotic spirit that resonates within every Mexican citizen.<sup>25</sup>

In the World War II era, many Braceros fled employment and racial injustice in Mexico for positive experiences in the Bracero Program. Another Bracero, Barocio Ceja, contracted on March 31, 1943, said he received the best treatment in the early years.<sup>26</sup> Angel Moreno, who worked as a Bracero in Arizona from 1944-1947, recalled, "The

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<sup>24</sup> "Freedom for Whom? Our Guests from Mexico," produced by Mrs. Charles B. Kinney, November 8, 1944, Box 17, Folder 8, Galarza Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Speech by Francisco Trujillo Gurriá to an outgoing contingent of Braceros, May 13, 1943, Folder 8, Box 17, Galarza Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Barocio Ceja, June 28, 2008, Bracero History Archive.

camps were in good condition. The Bracero Program was a good program because it changed my life... Life is always better here than in Mexico.”<sup>27</sup>

To exploit tensions between Mexican nationals and domestic workers, growers and ranchers relegated Braceros to separate camps, isolated from contact with the wider Spanish-speaking community. Growers and program administrators rationalized that this separation was simply a way to protect Braceros from outside dangers, but it was more an attempt to prevent Bracero involvement and collaboration with labor unions. The Bureau of Employment Security, responsible for the post- WWII administration of the program, advocated Bracero restriction:

The primary purpose of restricting access to Mexican Labor Camps is the protection of workers from such undesirable persons as pimps and prostitutes, dope and liquor peddlers, gamblers and unscrupulous used car salesmen. We know of no case where persons on legitimate business have been prohibited from entering camps at reasonable hours.<sup>28</sup>

Ten years prior, the United States government had made similar claims during the Japanese internment period, when the U.S. government “relocated” 120,000 individuals of Japanese ancestry to camps in the interior of the country. In reality, labor camp separation encouraged a lack of mutual understanding and impeded positive interactions between Braceros and Mexican-Americans. Feliciano Ordoñez, who supported the Bracero Program at its start, blamed the “lack of technical assistance and the lack of understanding about the difference between the Bracero and the Mexican-American as

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Angel Moreno, January 12, 2008, Bracero History Archive.

<sup>28</sup> Bureau of Employment Security, Region X, “A Report on *Strangers in our Fields*,” Container 13, RG 174.

what led to the failure of the Bracero program.”<sup>29</sup> These gaps in understanding between the Bracero and the Mexican American only intensified after 1964 and persisted into the “Operation Wetback” campaign, wherein “la migra” mistook a number of Latin-American citizens for illegal aliens.

In the early 1950s, a Mexican reporter blamed the Mexican government for neglecting the majority of the rural, mestizo population and shed light on the story that many, Braceros suffered discrimination and exploitation:

I can affirm that the unanimous answer I received upon questioning them was not only that they do not suffer discrimination in the U.S., but that all, in the same or similar words with tear-filled eyes told me, “No sir, where we are discriminated against is in Mexico.”<sup>30</sup>

In the wartime era, due to the isolated location in camps and the novelty of the program, Braceros in most areas felt a different brand of exploitation and discrimination quite different from Mexico. When Braceros did encounter discrimination, it was many times from Mexican-American foremen. In other words, it was a discrimination based on the perceived “superior” legal status and citizenry of Mexican-Americans, as opposed to a racial discrimination towards Braceros.

During the 40s and early 50s, Braceros and Mexican-Americans still coexisted in relative solidarity, but grower exploitation of the program and increased lobbying power in Congress soured these relations. Ironically, the wartime Bracero Program was the most peaceful and encouraged a neighborly social atmosphere between Braceros and the Mexican-American community. Ordoñez stated, “At the beginning, they were restricted

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007, Bracero History Archive.

<sup>30</sup> Jose R. Colin, c.1950, “The Braceros, National Shame,” Container 1, RG 174.

to their camps. They didn't mix too much. But at the end of the term, they started mixing more. Somehow or another, people took them into the community and treated them well. It was not like today."<sup>31</sup> By most accounts, the World War II Bracero Program was a fundamentally transparent and honest program but "it was distorted and misused toward the end."<sup>32</sup> With the formation of growers' associations, the congressional lobbying power of the agricultural industry enabled farmers to decrease foreign labor wages. Protected by labor unions, domestic workers demanded generally higher wages. At this point, the cheapened and weakened Bracero program exacerbated tensions between Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals, which created cleavages within the *comunidad hispanohablante*. This prepared the migrant labor community for the divisive labor disputes that erupted in the Imperial Valley during the 1960s.

Between 1942 and 1964, American labor union critiqued the Bracero Program and Mexican Braceros as an impediment to the successful unionization of agricultural workers. In migrant labor camps, already divided by growers, this belief widened the cultural gap between foreign and domestic workers. For example, Henry Anderson Pope, a sociologist at the School of Public Health in Berkeley, concluded, "The bracero program makes almost impossible the organization of American farm laborers into unions or any other form of instrumentality for collective bargaining. In the absence of such instrumentalities, it is difficult to see how the wages and working conditions of

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007, Bracero History Archives.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,



agricultural employment will improve.”<sup>33</sup> Amongst Mexican-American, black, and white domestic workers, the Bracero became known as the *rompe huelga*. On strike scenes throughout California, labor department officials experienced difficulty discerning whether growers hired Mexican workers at a time before the strike began or whether they illegally added to the bracero work force afterwards.

A few Mexican-American activists set off to combat false accusations that all Braceros were “strikebreakers.” Ernesto Galarza, an immigrant and domestic rights activist and the leading voice of these forward thinkers, aimed to rectify the growing labor dispute problem through worker solidarity and demanded that Bracero workers be granted membership in American unions. Born in the Mexican State of Tepic in 1905, Galarza immigrated to Sacramento with his family, navigated through the discriminatory intricacies of the school system, and progressed to studies at Occidental College and Stanford University. As an immigrant and a product of the American education system, Galarza preserved his ties to Mexico and allied with labor union leaders of the American Federation of Labor to form the National Agricultural Workers Union (also known as the National Farm Laborers Union, NFLU) in 1949. In general, labor unions, like the AFL, in the United States viewed illegal immigration as a plague on the domestic labor market.

In the 1940s, Galarza believed that the Mexican Migrant Labor agreement would bring about cooperative understanding between Mexico and the United States.<sup>34</sup> Galarza

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<sup>33</sup> Henry Anderson Pope, “Health Attitudes and Practices of Braceros: Report of Progress” December 31, 1957, Container 17, Folder 4, Galarza Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, *Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects*, 36

interpreted article 21 of the migrant labor agreement as a clear declaration of the Braceros' right to union representation:

The Mexican Workers shall enjoy the right to elect their own representatives who shall be recognized by the employer and spokesman for the Mexican Workers for the purpose of maintaining the Work Contract between the Mexican Workers, and the Employer, provided that this Article shall not affect the right of the Mexican Worker individually to contact his Employer, the Mexican Consul, or the Representative of the Secretary of Labor with respect to his employment under this Work Contract.<sup>35</sup>

The United States and Mexican government understood the “right to elect their own representatives” as a one Bracero chosen to negotiate a specific group’s interests in the field.<sup>36</sup> This is to say, in the eyes of government officials, Braceros had no business mixing with American unions or strikes.

By aiding Galarza in the foundation of the NAWU, the AFL hoped to establish control over the future decisions of the farm labor movement. In 1955, the AFL and the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) merged into one union after a long period of estrangement. This alliance transpired just three years after the passage of the restrictionist McCarran Walter Act, whereupon the AFL-CIO favored a “reasonable increase” of immigration to 250,000, but opposed a “tidal wave of immigration that would threaten the employment opportunities of American workers.”<sup>37</sup> Once the AFL-CIO became more powerful, Galarza joined other American unions in the national campaign to end the Bracero Program. Galarza was not anti-immigrant, but his domestic focused sponsor (the AFL- CIO) clearly influenced NAWU decisions. The turn against

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Lloyd A. Mashburn (Under Secretary of Labor) to William F. Knowland, May 20, 1953, Container 9, RG 174.

<sup>36</sup> Mireya Lopez, “Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de Mexico en los Estados Unidos,” in *Mexican Braceros and a Re-examination of the Legacy of Migration*, ed. Paul Lopez, 222

<sup>37</sup> Quoted by Mae Ngai in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, 252.

Bracero workers sealed the anti-immigrant bent of the farm labor movement, which became evident in the later Imperial Valley Strikes of 1961.

The National Agricultural Worker's Union was not the only organization that rose up to confront the face of Bracero injustice. On October 2 of 1943, a group of 40 Braceros based in Fullerton, California convened at the first official meeting of *La Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de Mexico en los Estados Unidos de America*: the first social service organization made for and by the Bracero worker. The essential purpose of the Alianza was to provide cultural orientation for members and spread community awareness of the Braceros' indispensable role in the war effort.<sup>38</sup> In the beginning, many Braceros abandoned their contracts for other job opportunities and remained in the United States under undocumented status. At first, the Alianza's propaganda on the Bracero Program drew upon Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and sought to foment patriotism in Bracero workers. The Mexican founder and leader of Alianza, Lara Jimenez, articulated the need for a Bracero-focused organization, since "many braceros do not understand the responsibility we have here in the United States of North America, in these transcendental global moments, in which all countries fight for liberty."<sup>39</sup>

The Alianza's ability to affect labor change was limited by its non-union status. Well-versed in the administrative procedures of unions, Ernesto Galarza played a central role in the formation of the Alianza platform, offered NAWU membership to any bracero in the Alianza and corresponded regularly with the leaders of the Alianza. The support

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<sup>38</sup> Memo of the AFL- NFLU, March 14, 1951, Galarza Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted by Mireya Lopez in "Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de Mexico en los Estados Unidos," from *Mexican Braceros and a Re-examination of the Legacy of Migration*

base of the NAWU enabled the Alianza to combat bracero “strikebreaking” and bracero “skipping” through unionization and education. This NAWU alliance influenced the conditions of the Alianza and prohibited strikebreaking:

1. Agreed that 50 cents of \$2.00 will go to the Alianza [Upon initiation into the Alianza]
2. Agreed that in case of strike, Braceros are to stop work and stay in camps.
3. Agreed that we should set up a delegation under cover on each camp of one delegate and two alternates.
4. We should put out a special bulletin to the Braceros and keep this material separate from that of the locals.<sup>40</sup>

Since the NAWU was an American union, all negotiations, newsletters, and meetings were in English. This was a problematic limitation for Bracero workers, many of whom remained informed of the rights as laid out in the bi-national agreement. The agreement clearly stated that Braceros were not to be used to fill a job unoccupied due to strike or lockout. Many growers, however, threatened Braceros with contract termination in the event they did not work during a strike. The Alianza set out to remedy this situation and conceived the idea of Spanish language newsletters designed specially to inform Braceros of their rights and limitations. Originally, the Alianza was a patriotic and social service organization designed to ensure that program participants act as global ambassadors and representatives of Mexico. In the mid- 1940s, the Alianza took up the responsibilities of a union and attempted to resolve contracting, transportation, salary, and domestic conflicts. The Alianza, however, was a civil rights organization and thereby unauthorized by the terms of the migrant labor agreement to carry out the functions of a union. In 1946, Mexican and U.S. officials temporarily disbanded the organization. The

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<sup>40</sup> Ernesto Galarza, “Program on nationals memo,” Alianza de Braceros Nacionales de Mexico de los EEUU, Box 19, Folder 6, Galarza Papers.

Alianza remained relatively inactive until 1948, at which point the organization restricted their activity to civic engagement and left the matter of Bracero unionization to the NAWU.

When strikes and labor disputes broke out around the Southwest and anti-Mexican sentiment increased, Galarza, travelled throughout Bracero camps in Salinas, Soledad, Watsonville, and San José to conduct field research and learn from the personal perspectives of Mexican workers. Until the early 1950s, Galarza believed that unions could best combat grower use of Mexicans during strikes by enforcing Article 21 of the Migrant Labor Agreement and incorporating Bracero workers into their ranks. Later on, the unstable situation of NAWU- led strikes caused Galarza to solicit the support of the AFL- CIO, compromise his progressive views on immigrants, and turn against the Bracero Program. By publishing a series of exposés condemning the Bracero Work Program, most significantly *Merchants of Labor* (1964) and *Strangers in our Fields* (1956), Galarza ultimately worked for an end to the Bracero Program, but he never resorted to exclusionary tactics in his union or disparaged the persona of the Bracero.

In camps isolated from the Southwest nucleus of the Bracero Program, infrequent camp inspections and government regulation allowed abhorrent living and sanitary conditions to burgeon. In the World War II phase, Galarza travelled to investigate Bracero Camp conditions in Jackson, Michigan. Here, the Mexican nationals were unable to express their grievances and had no real contact with the local labor organizations. After engaging in conversation with some of the Braceros, Galarza concluded that “the leaders of the labor organizations in Jackson, both of the AFL and the CIO, were quite

unaware of the presence of these Mexicans in the community, much less of their problems.”<sup>41</sup> In addition to Bracero disconnect with American labor unions, the men also stated that representatives of the Mexican government visited them “only on very infrequent occasions.”<sup>42</sup> The NAWU’s empathetic brand of opposition to the Bracero Program set union apart from the restrictionist stance taken by his Mexican-American contemporaries. Through intensive research and fieldwork promoting national awareness, Galarza shed new light upon the plight of Mexican Braceros and garnered support for Bracero unionization.

At the time, most unions believed that ridding the Southwest of the Bracero Program would improve the working conditions of immigrant and domestic laborers of the next generation. By the mid 1950s, Galarza altered his plans of Bracero unionization and joined other unions in the anti-Bracero movement. This method of labor resistance, however, had two main shortcomings. One, it overlooked the damaging and divisive ramifications that an anti-Bracero Program campaign could inflect upon future relations within the Spanish-speaking community. Two, published testaments to Bracero misfortune, like *Strangers in Our Fields*, paint a homogenous and inaccurate image of most Bracero camps of the 1940s. The Bureau of Employment Security addressed this propensity towards generalization, specifically in terms of the living conditions on Bracero camps:

Dr. Galarza has adroitly painted an almost totally black picture of the Mexican Labor Camp situation in California on the basis of serious

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<sup>41</sup> “The Mexican Railroad Worker’s Camps at Jackson and Ypsilanti, Michigan: A Report of a Personal Visit by Ernesto Galarza,” February 7, 1945, Box 17, Folder 10, Galarza Papers.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*,

violations allegedly found in 44 out of 200 camps which he selected for inspection... We might just as logically paint a totally white picture of our housing situation by selecting 200 other camps in which we could be sure not to find a single violation of even the strictest standards.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Bracero Program had outgrown its wartime, subsistence phase and seeped into the factories, railroads, and industrial sweatshops of America. In 1950, U.S. entanglement in the Korean War allowed the U.S. government to continue importing Braceros, now under the authority of the Department of Labor. In the case of the Korean War Bracero Program, however, “wartime necessity” was a mere pretense for employers who had long since learned the advantages of an exploitable work force. Unlike the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor’s primary focus concerned domestic labor and foreign labor was a secondary matter. It was at this point that the work, living, and transport conditions of Bracero workers descended into a downward spiral.

In 1954, as the Korean War and wartime necessity for Braceros began to wind down, the NAWU continued to offer support to Bracero Workers in multiple cases of wage, transportation, and coercive injustice. In one particular instance on farms in the Salinas Valley, local growers forced foreign and domestic field laborers engaged in picking, cleaning, and tying carrots to purchase their own supplies. Attorney Shore, a lawyer representing the NAWU, summed up the problematic nature of the “Twistems” case:

The employers require that the tying be done with a patented wire—tape knows as “twistems,” which bears the distinctive trade name

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<sup>43</sup> Bureau of Employment Security, Region X, “A Report on *Strangers in our Fields*” Container 13, RG 174.

of the individual employer...The employers charge the laborers 65 cents per thousand, issuing the “twistems” in whatever quantity the individual worker requests and making deductions from his next pay check for the number charged to him.<sup>44</sup>

In clear defense of Bracero workers, the NAWU condemned the “twistem” situation as “coercive and illegal.”<sup>45</sup> If the Braceros did not buy the wire before continuing onto the field, growers refused to hire the workers. Though NAWU officials put forth enormous efforts to abolish this unfair system, labor commissioner Lloyd Mashburn accused NAWU tactics in the “Twistems” case as in violation of labor union codes and nullified the case. The outcome signified a loss for Mexican-American labor unions, but the NAWU’s determination in the “Twistems” case showcases how, Mexican-Americans initially endeavored to join Bracero and Domestic workers under one union.

Six months after the NAWU challenged growers in the “Twistems case,” cases of Bracero exploitation and neglect were on the rise. In 1953, a number of truck crashes resulted in the deaths of several Bracero workers in the Imperial Valley. Bracero members of the NAWU, bussed daily from their camps to the fields, denounced, “the current system of transport offered to agricultural workers.”<sup>46</sup> The NAWU responded accordingly and brought up accusations against the Imperial Valley Bracero transport system. The early 1950s unionizing efforts of Ernesto Galarza suggest some of the first successful steps towards solidarity between Mexican-American and Mexican National farm workers: “A number of Mexican contract Nationals have joined this Union; that

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<sup>44</sup> “Twistems” Request for Opinion, Dept’ of Industrial Relations, Los Angeles, January 8, 1953, Container 9, RG 174.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>46</sup> Galarza’s report of the NAWU, February 26, 1953, Box 17, Folder 1, Galarza Papers.



they are regular dues paying members in good standing; and that we consider that by the act of joining the Union, these workers have elected to designate the Union as their representative.”<sup>47</sup> In 1953, some Mexican-American members of the NAWU still viewed themselves as equals with their Bracero counterparts, dedicated to “putting forth every possible effort to abolish the injurious transportation system as laid out by contract Braceros.”<sup>48</sup> This early commitment to the unionization of Mexican migrant workers marks the first pockets of solidarity between Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals.

In the first half of the 1950s, the NAWU willingly incorporated Bracero workers into the union, but many Bracero workers were restrained by imminent threat of deportation and unable to join unions. A Bracero at the McCallaum Camp in Salinas summed up this delicate situation “There is no representative in camp of the braceros. No body dares to make any complaints because of the fear of being sent back to Mexico.”<sup>49</sup> In another 1955 conversation with several Braceros based in Soledad, California, one Bracero described the inconsistent air of protection in many camps and pervasive power of growers’ associations:

Sometimes, when we talk things over by ourselves, we think it will be very good when we get back home to tell this to the newspapers, maybe that will change things. But it would not help us now. It won’t help us get better treatment. It might help us if we get another contract next year. But we won’t get another contract if our names were published in the newspaper. The association does not like strikers... It is not really a strike. We just don’t get on the trucks to go out to the fields. We cannot strike. How can you strike when you are already in a Jail?<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Letter from Ernesto Galarza to Anthony Figueroa, May 7, 1953, Container 2, RG 174

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a Bracero (anon.), Salinas, CA, October 4, 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, Galarza Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with 8 Nationals at Government Camp, Soledad, CA, October 5, 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, Galarza Papers

By late 1953, the NAWU was the most active voice on Bracero rights and Imperial Valley growers considered the union a direct threat to their exploitable labor force. In the later, decentralized phases of the Bracero Program, the Mexican government lost their grip on Bracero regulations. American growers won greater control over the extension and revocation of individual worker contracts. Meanwhile, the 1953 protests heightened and the NAWU took up its third case that year regarding injustices against Bracero workers in the Valley. On May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1953, the manager of the D'Arrigo Brothers Fruit Company in Brawley, California "involuntarily repatriated" (i.e. deported) three known NAWU Bracero members, Joaquin Cossio Palacios, Andres Marques Rodriguez, and J. Luz Malagon Terrazas. Their contracts were originally set to end on June 30.<sup>51</sup> A San Francisco Chronicle article described the case regarding the three Braceros:

The AFL National Agricultural Workers' Union charged yesterday that three Mexican farm workers were illegally deported from the United States because of their membership in the union...In a complaint filed with the bureau, Murray alleged that Anthony Figueroa, compliance office for the BES, told the men they were being deported because they were union members<sup>52</sup>

In June, NAWU Attorney, James Murray set off to investigate the politics of Imperial Valley Farmers' Association, in particular their flexibility (or lack there of) towards unions. Murray asked the Association, "if the union ever publicly stated an opinion regarding whether or not Mexican Nationals should join, or be permitted to join, American labor unions" and also, "if the Association ever publicly announced itself as

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<sup>51</sup> Imperial Valley Farmers Association, Official Employer Record for Joaquin Palacios, Container 12, RG 174

<sup>52</sup>"AFL Protest on Illegal Deportations," May 17, 1953, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Container 12, RG 174,

being opposed to the unionization of agricultural workers.”<sup>53</sup> The Imperial Valley Farmers’ Association denied these allegations, but the action taken against the three Braceros in question revealed the Imperial Valley Farmers’ Association’s resistance to Bracero unionization. In the World War II phase of the program, the Department of Agriculture hailed Braceros as an integral part of the war effort. The Department of Labor and the Bureau of Employment Security, heavily influenced by the political power of growers’ associations, came to view Braceros as a disposable labor force unentitled to the rights of domestic workers. A BES officer, Anthony Figueroa, told Andres Rodríguez that, “we had done wrong by joining the union. That the union was nothing, that they had picked us up for the purpose of using us like pigs.”<sup>54</sup> Joaquin Palacios, another of the three Braceros, remembered Mr. Figueroa as saying “that we were going to Mexico because there was no work for us and that they had looked for a job for us and none of the companies wanted our services...And the other reason was that we were in a Union that was only deceiving us.”<sup>55</sup> Ernesto Galarza revealed his early commitment to the right of Bracero unionization and wrote a letter on May 6 to Figueroa expressing his “personal interest” that the claims of the three Braceros be investigated.

In the early 1950s, activists in both Mexico and the U.S. coordinated to found yet another organizations whose primary purpose was the defense of Mexican Contract Nationals: the *Comité para la Protección de Trabajadores Mexicanos*. In 1953 flyer, the

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<sup>53</sup>Letter from James Murray to the Imperial Valley Farmers’ Association, June 19, 1953, Container 12, RG 174.

<sup>54</sup>Investigation Findings of the NAWU, Container 12, RG 174.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.,

the Comité alerted Bracero workers of their rights as guaranteed by the Migrant Labor Agreement:

During your stay here in the United States, though each one of you has paid medical insurance to cover sickness or accidents, many have been denied medical service. In many cases of sickness, women in the camp without a certified medical title have tended to many Braceros. Please notify your colleagues who have been cheated to speak to our representatives!<sup>56</sup>

This and other publications of the Committee for the Protection of Mexican Workers spoke in defense of Bracero Workers and were always translated in Spanish to include the entire Mexican community.

In the 1950s, The Alianza de Braceros Nacionales continued correspondence with the NAWU and reached across the border to cultivate relations with Mexican trade unions. In 1951, the Alianza and the Méxicali Agricultural Workers Union “cooperatively agreed upon the following conditions” and collectively asserted the “right of unionization of braceros as recognized in the International Agreement.”<sup>57</sup> The NFLU-AFL and the Méxicali Agricultural Workers Union sought to join the struggle for American workers and Mexican agricultural worker rights, through “the protection of the standards of living, legal rights, and civil liberties of farm workers of both countries as they are affected by contracting and improvements of such standards.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, they called for the development of an educational program to build the technical skills of contract workers and support cultural events in Bracero camps.

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<sup>56</sup> Flyer from the Committee for the Protection of Mexican Workers, Brawley, CA, May 1953, Box 18, Folder 2, Galarza Papers.

<sup>57</sup> “Instructivo confidencial y reservado de la Alianza de Braceros,” El Centro, CA May 11, 1951, Box 17, Folder 11, Galarza Papers

<sup>58</sup> Agreement between the NFLU- AFL and the Méxicali Agricultural Workers Union, March 2, 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, Galarza Papers

In the early 1950s, the Mexican government accused the Alianza of communist infiltration and smeared the credibility of the organization. Shortly thereafter, Galarza realized that the Alianza wielded little influence over labor politics in Mexico and began to break off ties with the organization. Without Galarza, the Alianza lost their main union support base and the organization began to unravel. When the Korean War ended in 1953, the Alianza immediately fell out of favor with other American unions, like the AFL-CIO, since labor organizations adamantly opposed the continued use of guest workers. Galarza, no longer optimistic about the possibility of organizing Braceros, channeled NAWU efforts into the ending of the Bracero Program. The Alianza continued their mission of Bracero advocacy, but made little headway without support from the NAWU.

Between 1942 and 1953, the Bracero Program was transformed from a Pan-American initiative of wartime solidarity into a massive economic strategy of agrobusiness labor exploitation. The World War I Mexican contract labor program and Depression-era deportation of Mexican-Americans built up hostilities and social barriers between Mexican workers and Mexican-American workers. During World War II, the AFL-CIO, United Packinghouse Workers of America, and other American unions tolerated the presence of Bracero workers. In the 1940s, the NAWU remained optimistic about the potential of Bracero unionization and enthusiastically incorporate members of the Alianza de Braceros Nacionales into the union. With the end of the World War II, unions and other domestic workers began to perceive Braceros as unwanted threats to American labor and tensions within California's agricultural community quickly

escalated. The pretense of wartime necessity dragged on until 1953, when conflict in Korea dissipated and American unions rose up in vehement opposition of all forms of foreign contract labor. When the AFL and CIO merged in 1955 into America's largest federation of unions, their influence increased by a hundredfold. Galarza's AFL affiliated NAWU gave up the effort to organize Mexican contract workers. In the end, Galarza chose NAWU interests over solidarity within the Spanish-speaking community and publicized his change in sentiment with the 1956 exposé, *Strangers in Our Fields*. Edward R. Murrow's interview with a California farmer encapsulates the subhuman status of post- War Braceros and other migrant workers: "We used to own our slaves. Now, we just rent them."<sup>59</sup> In "Operation Wetback" and lesser deportation campaigns of the 1950s, Latin American unions and organizations were drawn into the anti- Mexican national tone set by the AFL-CIO, UPWA, and NAWU. Each year leading up to the 1964 close of the Bracero Program, xenophobic propaganda fed misunderstanding between legal and illegal Mexican Nationals and Mexican-Americans. Peace within California's Spanish-speaking community remained far away on the horizon.

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<sup>59</sup> *Harvest of Shame*, Broadcasted by Edward R. Murrow.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Post- War Transformation of the Bracero Program, 1954-1964**

With the end of the Korean War in 1953, “wartime necessity” for Mexican labor dissipated and the Bracero Program became a legal means for growers to maintain a source of cheaper labor. This wartime necessity idealized Braceros as patriotic and indispensable “soldiers of Mexico.”<sup>60</sup> Afterwards, agro-business greed remade Braceros into a source of remittances that profited the Mexican economy, a pawn of agro-industrial employers, and bargain on labor for California grower associations, who now exerted a great deal of power and influence over legislative decisions. California agri-business tycoons, the Mexican government, Mexican-American domestic workers, and, of course, the Bracero workers themselves, had their own interests, goals, and opinions regarding the role of Mexican agricultural workers in the United States. This chapter will analyze the post war phase of the program as a separate, more exploitative, and more complex initiative, in which the growers’ associations, *mojados*, and Bracero workers presented individual challenges to the Mexican-American community. The series of tensions that erupted between *mojados* and Braceros, growers’ associations and unions, and the Mexican and United States governments prevented post- War solidarity between Mexican Nationals and Mexican-Americans.

After 1950, the Department of Labor began to see a lesser need for Braceros and reduced quotas in the program. By now, growers had discovered the financial advantages of undocumented Mexican labor and brought *mojados* into the fields. From 1950 to 1954,

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<sup>60</sup> Speech by Francisco Trujillo Gurría to an ongoing contingent of Braceros, May 13, 1943, Folder 8, Box 17, Galarza Papers.

the proliferation of informal *mojado* migration conflicted with the existing Bracero Program. Between 1952 and 1954, Immigration Services initiated widespread deportation campaigns targeting the undocumented *mojado*. Growers and the INS, however, often mistook Mexican-Americans for *mojados*. Up until this point, Mexican Nationals and Mexican-Americans coexisted in relative harmony. The increased threat of deportation, however, complicated these relations and Mexican-Americans distanced themselves from the Mexican immigrant community. By the time Operation Wetback was rolled out in 1954, growers realized that to keep their store of Braceros, they would need to support the campaign. When the campaign ended, labor unions switched their focus to eliminating the Bracero Program and growers united under “growers’ associations” to protect their access to the Bracero work force. Between 1955 and 1964, growers’ associations and farm workers’ unions clashed over the extended use of the Bracero Programs. Growers’ associations simultaneously defended their use of Braceros and used their political power to cheapen the price of foreign labor. Mexican-Americans rechanneled hostilities from *mojados* to Braceros, which culminated in the early 1960s, when labor disputes erupted throughout the Imperial Valley over the illegal use of Braceros in strikes. At this point, the NAWU of Galarza also worked towards the end of the Bracero Program, but nonetheless recruited willing Braceros to aid the strike effort.

The Bracero agreement between Mexico and the United States endured for twenty years, but post-war state regulation and public perception of the program changed in two important ways. First, the extended entry of Mexican workers into the United States severed the fragile 1940s peace between Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals.



Also, outspoken opposition from Mexican-American political organizations, like LULAC, reinforced the social segregation of Mexican workers from the wider community of migrant laborers and factory workers in the Southwest. Second, the renewed Bracero Labor Agreement of 1951 granted increased authority to the Secretary of Labor and placed limitations on the role of the INS. The new program forced the Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to share power and cooperate on new decisions regarding the Bracero Program.

On one hand, the Bracero Program fomented a demand for Mexican labor by agro- business growers interested in keeping labor costs to a minimum. On the other hand, the program generated a desire on the part of Mexican labor to gain entry into the United States for higher wages and standards of employment. The stricter regulations on Braceros induced the entry of illegal workers for two reasons. First, growers unwilling to go through the hassle of contracting legal laborers encouraged illegal immigration. Second, the number of workers seeking to gain entry into the United States via the Bracero program exceeded the program quotas, so many workers took the simpler, “wetback” route.<sup>61</sup> Between 1954-1964, the United States government simultaneously imported foreign labor as a “wartime measure” and deported thousands of Mexican immigrants unable to obtain a legal Bracero work contract in the United States. These contradictory measures and preferences encouraged divisionism within California’s Spanish-speaking community. Post 1954, the INS deported some 1.6 million in the Southwest undocumented immigrants were returned to Mexico by bus, car, and boat. At

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<sup>61</sup> Bustamante, *Espaldas mojadas*, 28

the same time, employers contracted approximately 3.6 million Braceros on American farms.<sup>62</sup>

The post-war Bracero Program was a government-sanctioned excuse for growers to keep importing cheaper labor. In the eyes of domestic labor and government officials, the “Bracero” was “just another “Mexican” and lost his original affiliations with the Migrant Labor Program. The deportation campaigns of the early 1950s made little distinction among the diverse members of California’s Spanish-speaking community, including Mexican-Americans, commuter aliens, resident aliens, Braceros, and “Alambristas.” Over time, this separation cultivated basic cultural misunderstandings and public officials made few distinctions between a Bracero and a “wetback.” Gladwin Hill, a *New York Times* editorialist who reported extensively on Mexican workers in the Southwest, recalled that on many large ranches raided by the INS, undocumented workers are “superficially indistinguishable from Mexicans legally in the United States who work in the valley by the thousands.”<sup>63</sup> Even the Mexican government appeared unaware of these important identity distinctions and nonchalantly interchanged the terms “wetback” and “Bracero.” In a 1966 telegram to the U.S. Department of State, Mexican embassy officials reported, “During the recent weeks, there has been a noticeable and possibly significant increase in Mexican newspaper comment discussing the bracero problem. The central theme has been that the number of illegal *braceros* (i.e. *wetbacks*)

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<sup>62</sup> *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964: A Review of Government and Politics in the Postwar Years* cited by Ngai in *Impossible Subjects*, 157

<sup>63</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Mexicans Convert Border into Sieve,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1950.

in the U.S. has increased sharply owing to the expiration on December 31, 1964 of the Bracero Agreement.”<sup>64</sup>

A Mexican-American who grew up in an agricultural community of rural Arizona observed how in greed, growers sought to lower the prices of labor and “killed the bracero program because when the border started getting open, there was no need for the bracero program.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, California growers grew impatient with the slow process of contracting Braceros and turned to undocumented “wetbacks” and “alambristas.” The Immigration and Naturalization Services responded accordingly and poured funds into a revitalized Border Patrol. Under the watch of Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr., the Border Patrol grew from “a small guard to a small army”<sup>66</sup> and launched the Operation Wetback campaign in the summer of 1954. By the end of 1954, Immigration Services deported or pressured approximately 1,300,000 Mexican immigrants into leaving the United States. From 1950 on until June of 1954, relations within the migrant labor community deteriorated as the media spread denigrating images of the “mojado.” Gladwin Hill, of the *New York Times* Los Angeles bureau, covered the “wetback problem” in the Southwest in the early 1950s. In 1951, Hill pointed to the refusal of growers’ associations to comply with deportation campaigns and observed, “Although ‘wetbacks’ are fugitives from justice, Southwestern cotton, citrus, and vegetable growers have come to the fixed view that there is nothing wrong in employing

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<sup>64</sup> Telegram from the Mexican Embassy to the Department of State, March 11, 1966, Container 19, RG 59.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007. Bracero History Archive.

<sup>66</sup> Jorge A. Bustamante, *Espaldas mojadas: Materia prima para la expansion del capital norteamericano*, (Mexico D.F: El Colegio de Mexico, 1976), 51

them, harboring them or even in actively recruiting them across the international border.”<sup>67</sup>

Deportation campaigns were not unknown in the history of the INS in the Southwest and other areas of the nation. The first nationwide deportation campaign occurred in response to the Great Depression. In the early 1950s, two southwest campaigns collectively known as “Operation Fresno,” “Operation Salinas,” “Operation Stockton,” and “Operation Sacramento,” border patrol apprehended some 200,000 undocumented immigrants.<sup>68</sup> Media coverage of these and smaller campaigns in 1952 portrayed a disease-ridden snapshot of the *mojado* and set the stage for the Operation Wetback campaign by fomenting an atmosphere of paranoia. A majority of the 1,300,000 estimate for wetbacks deported in the 1954 campaign was made up of *mojados* that voluntarily departed the United States before the drive began. In reality, apprehensions and deportations during the official Operation “Wetback” campaign comprised a small percentage of this 1.3 million.<sup>69</sup>

In response to intense scrutiny regarding their use of *mojado* labor, 100 growers joined the ranks of the powerful Imperial Valley Farmers Association to preserve their right to use *Braceros*. Throughout the 40s and 50s, California growers formed a united front under growers’ associations such as the Imperial Valley Farmer’s Association and the United Cotton Growers. The United States Department of Labor, the Mexican Embassy, and NAWU of Ernesto Galarza actively expressed their disdain for these

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<sup>67</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Southwest Winks at ‘Wetback’ Jobs,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1951.

<sup>68</sup> Samora, *Los Mojados*, 50

<sup>69</sup> Juan Ramón García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954*, (1980), 227.

“fugitives from justice.” Yet, without the concerted efforts of the press to disseminate “wetback paranoia” throughout the United States, growers’ associations would not have taken steps to stem undocumented labor on California farms. The media and growers’ associations cooperated in a strong relationship of reciprocity and growers now favored the Operation Wetback roundup. Since major media institutions like the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* held financial ties to growers’ associations, newspaper coverage tended to side with their newly established anti-wetback platform.<sup>70</sup>

In effect, Gladwin Hill’s reporting in the *New York Times* fed the negative image of the *mojado* as an individual prone to criminality, and compared the employment of a *mojado* as “tantamount to harboring a fugitive.”<sup>71</sup> Stereotypic coverage such as this encouraged racism and denigration from domestic migrant workers and perpetuated divisions amongst members of California’s labor community. Though the *Los Angeles Times* took a decidedly anti- wetback stance, editorialist Bill Dredge shied away from negative generalizations and portrayed undocumented immigrants as key contributors to California’s flourishing agricultural industry. The Mexican immigrant was a crucial member of California’s booming agricultural industry. Dredge maintained that the state required a “great labor force, obtained one way or another.”<sup>72</sup> Gladwin Hill and the *New York Times* sided with the nationalistic and anti- immigrant rhetoric propagated by LULAC and depicted wetbacks as incapable of integrating with the domestic migrant labor community composed of whites, blacks, and Mexican-Americans. The *Los Angeles*

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<sup>70</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 194

<sup>71</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Mexican ‘Wetbacks’: A Complex Problem,” *NYT*, January 18, 1953.

<sup>72</sup> Bill Dredge, “California Labor History and the ‘Wetback’ Case,” *LAT*, August 12, 1950.

*Times* perceived Mexican immigrants as good, potential citizens of the United States with “the spunk that has made good American citizens.”<sup>73</sup> In 1951, the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* renewed public support for the anti-wetback drive and spread a new argument. Both newspapers began to report on the “real hazard” of *mojados* and how they contributed to the “public health burden of America.”<sup>74</sup> Now, not only did *mojados* threaten the job security of domestic migrant laborers and hinder the social progress of the Mexican-American community, but they became America’s scapegoats for tuberculosis, dysentery, syphilis, malaria, typhoid, and increased infant death rates.

After Gladwin Hill published a series of articles in 1953 entitled “Mexican ‘Wetbacks’ a Complex Problem,” “Wetback Problem is Attacked Anew,” and “Wetback Influx Near the Record,” Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr. conducted an in-depth investigation in direct response to the exaggerated outcries of the media. Brownell, who worked with Eisenhower from the 1916 Punitive Invasion of Mexico until World War II<sup>75</sup>, told the *New York Times* that he was convinced “illegal Mexican immigration was becoming one of the nation’s gravest law- enforcement problems.”<sup>76</sup> By 1954, the joint efforts of the AFL-CIO and the press won and convinced Attorney General Brownell and Eisenhower of the seriousness of the “wetback” problem. On June 9th, Brownell announced that the border patrol would begin a large-scale deportation operation on June 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>77</sup> According to an Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor, the INS recorded the expulsion of over 1 million undocumented immigrants. Each year after 1954, the number

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>74</sup> Robert Harris, “Illegal Immigrants Pose a Grave Health Menace,” *LAT*, July 26t, 1951.

<sup>75</sup> Samora, *Los Mojados*, 52

<sup>76</sup> “Wetbacks Called a Major Problem,” *NYT*, August 17, 1953.

<sup>77</sup> Samora, *Los Mojados*, 52.

of undocumented immigrants reported by the INS decreased. When the Bracero Program ended, this trend took a sharp upturn. Between 1963 and 1964, undocumented deportations increased by 5,000.<sup>78</sup>

During the two years building up to the “Operation Wetback” campaign, domestic organized labor increased pressure on the United States Department of Labor to prioritize the concerns of American workers. In 1952, the Department of Labor remained sympathetic to the *mojado*, whose “depressed working and living conditions characterize his economic life.”<sup>79</sup> The administration did, however, begin to concede to American union pressure and spread the popular stance that Mexican wetbacks inhibited the progress of domestic migratory workers. Most significantly, the Department of Labor recognized early on that Mexican-Americans most directly felt the consequences of *mojado* influx. Yet, in the end, efforts to deport *mojados* and protect domestic workers backfired, as many Mexican-Americans were mistakenly deported. William Tyson, the solicitor of the department, wrote:

“Texas-Mexicans” (Texans of Mexican or other Latin- American origin) today constitute the largest element in our nation’s domestic migratory labor force. Until recently, this group primarily confined its activities to the Texas area, but during the past few years, the pressure exerted by the influx of illegal Mexican- Aliens has made it increasingly necessary for Texas-Mexicans to migrate further afield in search of better wages and greater employment opportunities.<sup>80</sup>

By 1953, Southwest representatives from National Labor Relations board spoke out in support of *mojado* unionization and pushed for government support from Kenneth

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<sup>78</sup> Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor, 1942-1960 cited by Samora in *Los Mojados*, 46

<sup>79</sup> William S. Tyson, “Migratory Labor: Some Legal, Economic, and Social Aspects,” Box 1, RG 174.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Robertson, the Regional Attorney of San Francisco. The Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley declared that the “wetback is a menace to society unless he is organized. If he is a union member, he is no longer a menace, but a worker entitled to government recognition.”<sup>81</sup>

The post-Korean War decrease in Bracero Quotas did not lessen grower demand for Mexican labor. After 1953, undocumented migration rates increased, which interfered with the functionality of the Bracero Program. Lying just 200 kilometers south of the U.S. Mexico Border, the Bracero recruiting station at Monterrey became a departure point for the illegal migration of thousands of un-selected Bracero candidates. When the Mexican government closed the recruiting station, the Department of Labor disputed the closure of the station, which “aggravated the situation” of *mojado* migration by 100,000.<sup>82</sup> The economic interests of each side in the post-war Bracero Program differed, the United States Department of Labor and the Mexican government became ensnared in a power struggle. The Mexican government sought a wage increase in Bracero earnings because, as provided by the migrant labor agreement, they received a certain percentage of the wages. Since the Mexican government gained no direct profit from *wetback* labor, it was in their best interest to halt the entrance of *wetbacks* through the closing of the migratory station. The DOL attempted to satisfy grower demand that the Bracero Program remain in existence, while simultaneously limiting *mojado* labor and resisting the Mexican government’s moves to harness control over the Bracero Program:

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<sup>81</sup> Memo to Kenneth Robertson, “NLRB Decision Concerning ‘Wetbacks’,” January 16, 1953, Box 2, Record Group 174, General Records of the Department of Labor.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Secretary of Labor Martin P. Durkin to Secretary of State on April 23, 1953, Container 9, RG 174.



The recent demand of the Mexican government for a 10% increase in wages for Mexican Nationals contracted for agricultural employment in this country is a repudiation by Mexico of the agreement reached in June 1952 with Señor Tello and is without any authority under the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951 as amended.<sup>83</sup>

The regulated and government sanctioned entry of Mexican workers into the United States brought on a series of unforeseen tensions within the Spanish-speaking community and impeded coexistent relationships with the wider community of migrant laborers and factory workers in the Southwest. As the United States and Mexican governments battled over dominance of the Bracero Work Program, Ernesto Galarza of the NAWU continued unionizing Bracero workers, but now prioritized the interests of Mexican-American workers above Mexican nationals. Throughout the early 1950s, Galarza travelled over to Bracero camps in California and recorded instances of grower transgressions against domestic workers. On one occasion in the Salinas Valley, a carrot grower and Bracero employer refused work to Mexican-Americans:

On Thursday, August 28, Vidal Garcia, domestic carrot tier, and two others asked for work on a field supervised by Jesus Garcia. Garcia refused to give these applicants numbers to tie carrots. Garcia is a World War II veteran. At the time, Garcia had a mixed crew of wetbacks and Nationals on that field.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, NAWU dismissal of Mexican wetbacks essentially widened divisions within Salinas' Spanish-speaking community. On another occasion in Salinas, Mexican-American farm labor contractors, Jesus Garcia and Modesto Urdiquez employed a substantial number of "wetbacks." After Urdiquez was caught in October with several

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>84</sup> Ernesto Galarza, "Violations of the International Executive Agreement and Individual Work Contracts of Mexican Nationals in the Salinas Valley," Container 2, RG 174.

wetbacks, yet continued to receive Bracero workers, Galarza announced, “This award for violation of Federal law is also a violation of the International Agreement.”<sup>85</sup>

In 1953, Galarza increased his efforts to unionize Bracero workers and excluded undocumented workers from the NAWU. Although Galarza was fundamentally against the Bracero program and campaigned actively for its discontinuation, he stigmatized wetbacks and elevated the Bracero figure by advocating his unionization. The unionization of Braceros in El Centro, California serves as a good example of these problematic contradictions:

An insubstantial number of Mexican nationals, when compared with the usual work force of nationals in the Valley, had joined the union. Based on such membership, Mr. Galarza was asserting the right under Article 21 to represent such workers in maintaining the agreement and in demanding recognition by the employer for such purpose. Investigations recently conducted in the Valley in connection with other matters would indicate to me that the membership of contract nationals in the NAWU is very spotty.<sup>86</sup>

The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 invoked more stringent requirements for naturalized citizenship and sanctioned the deportation of immigrants suspicious of un-American activities.<sup>87</sup> It strained coexistence within the wider immigrant community and became an unpopular stance as groups like LULAC and GI Forum designed their party platforms to address the concerns of the Mexican-American. Some Mexican-Americans entertained a “policy of frank and open rejection of the other types of Mexicanos,” whilst

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth Robertson, “Correspondence Relating to the Interpretation of Article 21 of the Migrant Labor Agreement,” June 10, 1953, Container 9, Record Group 174.

<sup>87</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 241.

“other Latino groups are breaking the power of this weak and naïve structure.”<sup>88</sup> After McCarran-Walter, Mexican-American coexistence with the wider immigrant community became an unpopular stance. Chicano organizations like LULAC and GI Forum designed party platforms strictly pertaining only to American citizens of Latin American ancestry and portrayed the Mexican-American as a good and loyal citizen of the United States.

To counter stereotypes that the Mexican-American exclusively worked in the migrant labor industry, LULAC elevated middle- class Mexican-Americans as the ideal and devalued the hardworking, farmworker image of the Mexican-American.<sup>89</sup> LULAC’s patriotic, middle-class, and anti- immigrant sensibility helped reinforce the already prevalent divisions within America’s Mexican community and worked against the Bracero unionizing efforts of the NAWU. This favored a trend toward citizen exclusivity in Mexican-American organizations and unions for the next 40 years. The wartime entry of Mexican National workers forced LULAC to reevaluate their image of national identity with the Braceros. The 1957, the Mexican American Convention in Southern California spoke to the ongoing struggle between ideologies of assimilation and nationalism, which “rendered into the struggle for the right to draw from both historical experiences and to adapt them to fit the needs of the Mexican-American who is born and undoubtedly will die in these United States.”<sup>90</sup> Unlike the NAWU, which initially spoke out in support of Bracero unionization, LULAC was an organization geared towards the empowerment of middle-class Mexican-American professionals and showed very little

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<sup>88</sup> Saul Solache, “Mexican Migration: Three Cyclical Periods to U.S.A,” presented in 1973, Box 27, Folder 5, M0325, Centro de Acción Social Autónomo Records, Stanford University Special Collections and University Archives (hereafter cited as CASA Records)

<sup>89</sup> Mario T. García, *Mexican-Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (1993), 27.

<sup>90</sup> “Mexicano-Americanos in the U.S.,” 1957, Box 25, Folder 7, M0325, CASA Records.

interest in Bracero or Mexican-American farmworker problems. When Galarza turned against Braceros in 1956, LULAC followed suit. Since LULAC did not hold any significant ties with Bracero or Mexican-American farm workers, their reasons for opposition differed from the NAWU. As a movement for political enfranchisement, LULAC was more concerned that the Bracero Program would potentially damage the political and social progress of the Mexican-American middle- class.

LULAC's span of political influence went far beyond the barrios, commanding "a strong symbolic position not only in the Mexican-American political community, but in the political system as a whole."<sup>91</sup> Attorney General Herbert Brownell, the orchestrator of the Operation Wetback campaign and key player in its success, relied heavily on the political and financial backing of growers' associations. He also reached out for the support of LULAC and GI Forum in the anti- wetback drive. The District Director of the INS in San Antonio followed Brownell's example and convinced GI Forum and LULAC that the wetback drive would eliminate the major cause for the Spanish-speaking community's economic distress and political disenfranchisement.<sup>92</sup> LULAC responded to the District Director with vigor and numerous published pieces in *LULAC News*, which applauded the Border Patrol as a respectable and reliable service. An August 1954 issue of the newspaper appraised Operation Wetback "as a means of sparing the wetbacks further sufferings and exploitation in that endless Odyssey that leads to an economic

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<sup>91</sup> Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican-American Political Organization*, 89

<sup>92</sup> Juan Ramón García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954*, (1980), 210.

nowhere.”<sup>93</sup> Though LULAC opposed deportations that would adversely affect the lives immigrants married to American citizens and aliens who had U.S. born children,<sup>94</sup> the league prioritized the interests of American citizens in all political decisions.

The period between the end of Operation Wetback and 1964 marked a new era: Union organizers shifted their gaze from *mojados* and turned to phasing out Braceros. The 1951 Migrant Labor Agreement allowed the recruitment of Mexican agricultural laborers “for the purpose of assisting in such production of agricultural commodities and products as the Secretary of Labor deems necessary.”<sup>95</sup> By 1954, however, growers did not use the Bracero Program on a need basis, but rather for financial advantage. From this point on (until 1964), the Braceros were the focal point of domestic opposition, tensions between business and local growers, and the competing interests of the U.S. and Mexican governments.

At the time, most newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, remained financially dependent on growers’ associations and thus shied away from critical coverage of the Bracero Program. Television showed American viewers a different side of the migrant labor story. Many televised and radio shows countered growers’ associations’ idealized version of the Bracero Program with pictures of broken-down labor camps and testimonies of extreme exploitation. In 1954, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers partnered with an independent film company and brought the unionization efforts of Mexican-American mine workers to the big

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted by Garcia in *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954*, 56.

<sup>94</sup> Márquez, *LULAC*, 50.

<sup>95</sup> Information Concerning Entry of Mexican Agricultural Workers into the United States, Published June 1975 by Secretary of Labor, James P. Mitchell, Box 1, RG 174.

screen. The motion picture, *Salt of the Earth*, showed the effect of the Taft- Hartley Act on an actual strike that occurred in the zinc mines of New Mexico. When mine owners invoked the provisions of Taft- Hartley and prohibited the miners from striking, their wives took over the picket line and circumvented the anti-union law.<sup>96</sup>

In 1956, broadcast journalist Bill Stout of Los Angeles went one step further and gave a new face to the Bracero Program and launched a “Farm Labor Exposé” visualizing the harsh and exploitative realities of the post- War Bracero Program. The report was a direct response Galarza’s *Strangers in Our Fields*, which Stout stated, “reveals a shocking condition of these human beings.”<sup>97</sup> At the same time, the broadcast perpetuated divisions within California’s Mexican community and demonized the undocumented immigrant, since Stout “did not want to refer to the Mexican ‘wetback.’”<sup>98</sup> In short, 1954 to 1964 can be characterized as an intermediary period of increased regulation of the Bracero Program, coupled with increased vigilance and degradation of undocumented labor. Reports, like Stout’s, led growers’ associations and the Department of Labor to distribute propaganda that proffered an outdated and idealistic view of the Bracero Program as an agricultural education program.

After Operation Wetback, broadcast journalists’ new focus on the plight of Braceros caused contention with the administrators of the program. As the U.S. government struggled to reconcile labors unions and growers’ associations; television stations and newspapers illustrated the extremely divided positions over the drive to

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<sup>96</sup> *Salt of the Earth*, directed by Herbert Biberman (1954; Los Angeles: Independent Productions Corporation) DVD.

<sup>97</sup> Memo from H.R. Zamora to A.J. Norton, “Televised News Report on Mexican National Labor Program,” August 10, 1956, Container 12, RG 174.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*,

unionize Mexican-American and immigrants between 1954 and 1964. After viewing “Farm Labor Exposé,” the head of enforcement of the Migrant Labor Agreement in California, brushed aside the accusations and said that he only received complaints of “minor nature” from Bracero workers.<sup>99</sup> In reality, many Braceros feared deportation and felt unable to complain to their employers. In the words of one Bracero contracted in 1955, “We cannot strike. How can you strike when you are already in a jail?”<sup>100</sup>

In the post-war era, the Bracero Program morphed into an under-regulated and exploitative wage-reduction system, which the Department of Labor desperately tried to reign in after an outbreak of labor disputes over the unnecessary use of Braceros. As discussed in the first chapter, Bracero management passed from the Department of Agriculture to the United States Bureau of Employment Service and the Department of Labor. This meant that Braceros were no longer justified as a way to prevent food shortages, but rather cheap fill-ins for domestic labor. Dr. Henry Anderson Pope, a harsh critic of the program and friend of Galarza, likened the California agro-industries 1950s use of Braceros to the military industrial complex:

The former chief of the California Farm Placement Service is now manager of the Imperial Valley Farmer’s Association. The Department of Labor field man for Imperial Valley resigned his job to organize a second association of bracero-users in that area. The former manager of the Coachella Valley Growers’ Association now manages the bracero recruiting station at Empalme, Mexico. The former supervisor of the Farm Placement service in Ventura County is now managing a bracero-users’ association in that county. And so on. The ties that bind are reminiscent of those in the industrial-military complex.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>100</sup> Interview with 8 Nationals at Government Camp, Soledad, CA, October 5, 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, Galarza Papers.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted by Calavita in *Inside the State*, 117.

The 1950s establishment of wealthy growers' associations (i.e. The Arizona Cotton Growers' Association, the Coachella Valley Farm Labor Association, and the Imperial Valley Growers) allowed growers to control the decisions made in California's "agro-industrial complex." At the beginning of 1955, the chief of the California Farm Placement Service, Edward Hayes, spoke on the problems with growers' associations that originated after the Operation Wetback Drive and post war reformation of the Bracero Program. A prevalent concern of certain state officials concerned the formation of specialized associations "attempting to sell membership to growers on the assurance that this will get them Mexican Nationals."<sup>102</sup> As growers struggled to cling to their remaining source of foreign labor and the NAWU of Ernesto Galarza fought back in opposition, this development escalated tensions between growers' associations and farm workers' unions.

A few months later, immigration officials made yet another attempt to reign in the broken down and corrupted brand of Bracero Program. On July 26, 1955, the INS announced that identification cards would be issued to Bracero workers that "would serve as the basis for such workers to re-enter the United States for agricultural work when and if the United States were recruiting from Mexico."<sup>103</sup> Most significantly, the Bracero ID card system widened the gap between Bracero labor and *mojado* labor. The issuance of these cards made Braceros a more valid and attractive labor alternative to growers, who now faced stringent penalties from the Department of Labor for the intentional or accidental employment of *mojados*. Mexican-Americans also entered into the ID card

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<sup>102</sup> Minutes of the Regional Foreign Labor Operations Advisory Committee, Meeting No. 2, January 13, 1955, Container 1, RG174.

<sup>103</sup> Regional Foreign Labor Operations Advisory Committee, Meeting No. 5, July 29, 1955, Container 1, RG174.



problem, since growers were oftentimes unable or unwilling to distinguish the difference between *mojado* and Mexican-Americans. The ID card system further disadvantaged a Mexican-American community already unsure how to identify with the recently expanded and more complex Spanish-speaking community in the agricultural regions of California. Efren Pacheco, a Bracero in 1956, spoke to these deteriorating relations between Mexican-Americans and Braceros towards the end of the program: “There was not discrimination with everyone, just a few... The foremen changed. Some regarded us as though we were tools of labor, similar to a tractor or hoe. These men were always the Mexican-Americans.”<sup>104</sup>

In short, Operation Wetback can be seen as a direct response to the increasingly negative view of the Bracero Program. Growers saw their cheap, Mexican labor force threatened and sought to resolve this problem by agreeing to deport the most docile and vulnerable contingent of Mexican national workers: the *mojados*. Up to the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, California growers had one goal in mind: keep the Bracero Program in place by ridding the Southwest of the “wetback problem.” Yet, in a community of *Mojados*, Braceros, and Chicanos, “school districts may be segregated, job opportunities limited, on the assumption that everyone of Mexican extraction has just stepped off the boat.”<sup>105</sup>

In 1956, the secretary of the California Farm Bureau Federation, which included 60,000 farm families in its membership, spoke to the *San Francisco Examiner* about new

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Efren Pacheco, Phoenix, Arizona, February 21, 2008, Bracero History Archive. Center for History and New Media, George Mason University.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Anderson Pope, “Health Attitudes and Practices of Braceros: Report of Progress” December 31, 1957, Container 17, Folder 4, Galarza Papers.

immigration policies that would facilitate the entry of foreign contract workers into the United States. Conceding to growers' new anti-wetback public posture, Secretary Owens spoke for California farmers: "We would much rather have the legal workers than the 'wetbacks'."<sup>106</sup> By this time, growers, oftentimes "not able to tell whether the laborers are Mexican nationals or Spanish- Americans,"<sup>107</sup> were well aware that immigrants caused problems for Mexican-American farm laborers. Instead of taking measure to prevent Mexican-American discrimination, the secretary placed his hopes in the revival of the Bracero Program and told the *Examiner*, "This season, we expect to get all the legal Mexican labor we need. This will take a big burden off our shoulders and at the same time, eliminate the need for the wetbacks."<sup>108</sup>

Between 1955-1956, labor unions and Bracero, Mexican-American, and undocumented workers made strides towards a cooperative Mexican-American and immigrant movement. Organized growers responded by also forming a united front. In reaction to the ongoing push to terminate the Bracero Program, growers looked to the protection of specialized contract labor associations to "protect you, your 'bracero' work force, and the Association."<sup>109</sup> The San Diego County Farmer's Inc., was one such contract labor company responsible for importing, assigning, rotating and contract Mexican Nationals, issued an open letter to all member farmers. The manager of the company lent his loyalty to San Diego Country Farmers, instead of the Braceros he employed:

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<sup>106</sup> Mike Stein, "New Rules at Border," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 6, 1956, Container 3, RG 174.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>109</sup> Open Letter to Members of the San Diego County Farmers Inc. from Ivan A. Wood, July 20 1956, Container 3, RG 174.

As manager of the association, I do not intend to enter into an argument which might place the Association between large or small farmers or between grower-shippers and farmers. The association will not enter into a dispute between farmers who may legally pay wages that range from 70¢ and 90¢ per hour and those operators who pay \$1.00 or more per hour. If the Association is placed in a position where it must take a stand, then it will be in behalf of farmers who look to this office for their supply of unskilled labor.<sup>110</sup>

As the Bureau of Employment Security and Department of Labor tightened restrictions on grower access to Braceros, the Bracero Program instigated tensions and competition between large and small farms. Local farms hired Mexican-American and domestic workers at higher wage rates, while large farms profited from cheaper Bracero workers. Small-scale farmers, unable to bear the process of obtaining contract laborers, were thereby placed at an economic disadvantage.

To keep the Bracero Program in place as long as possible, farm worker employers subsidized publications that glorified the Bracero and denigrated the *mojado*. Publications whose circulation depended upon the endorsement of growers' associations and the Department of Labor portrayed legal, contract labor as a viable and legitimate alternative to illegal, "wetback" labor. In the spring of 1957, the magazine *Agricultural Life* argued that the Bracero Program should continue, since it was an establishment crucial to the agricultural industry of California. This and other growers' publications combatted the anti- Bracero arguments made in the same year by Ernesto Galarza in *Strangers in Our Fields*. Growers believed that publicly supporting the elimination of wetback labor would allow them to keep the Bracero Program, since much of the public

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.,

“has had trouble distinguishing between the illegal ‘wetback’ and the legal contract worker who has now entirely replaced him on most farms.”<sup>111</sup>

The unprotected nature of *mojado* labor allowed growers to cut corners in migrant labor camps, so growers painted a utopic image of Bracero camps as well-run and clean institutions. One Mexican-American grower, Ezequiel Villaseñor appraised the Goleta Camp in Santa Barbara:

I don’t think any other camp can touch our dormitory units, washroom, shower and toilet facilities for cleanliness and convenience. We have as well equipped kitchens and dining halls as there are in the business, and I don’t know of any camp that serves more and better food.<sup>112</sup>

Conditions in Bracero camps varied from region to region and depended on growers and inspectors, but the migrant labor camps of Mexican-American workers were subject to none of these government-sanctioned regulations. The inequality between Bracero and domestic migrant labor conditions prompted the media to advocate for equal treatment for “the native American farm worker who picks our fruit and vegetables and to whom we deny the protection of labor laws our taken-for-granted industry lacks.”<sup>113</sup>

As unions such as the AFL-CIO, NAWU, UPWA, and AWOC gained momentum in the anti-Bracero campaign, the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* adjusted to union interests and featured more articles on the negative effects of Braceros on the migrant labor community. No longer were Braceros the solution to the “wetback problem,” and oftentimes, arguments made against Bracero workers paralleled the many

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., page 6.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., page 17.

<sup>113</sup> David K. Webster, “Importing Farm Labor: Program Using Mexican Nationals Declared Harmful to Our Workers,” *NYT*, September 9, 1959.

exposés written on the criminality and sickness of “wetbacks” in the early 1950s. In 1959, a reporter of the *New York Times*’ Los Angeles bureau, published an article listing a number of criticisms by labor unions of the Bracero Program, citing Braceros as a threat to domestic labor, infrequent regulation of Bracero Camps, and the lowering of the prevailing wage for domestic workers in areas where Braceros are employed. The *New York Times* reflected the widespread doubt that deep-seated corruption within the Bracero Program could possibly improve due to competition between growers in California, Texas, and Arizona. By this time, unions and domestic workers had lost their faith in the Bracero Program and believed with competition between growers in California, Texas, and Arizona, widespread abuse would only increase. The *New York Times* accepted this belief and said, “Federal steps to put the states under the same ground rules have been suggested, but there is admittedly little prospect that they can produce results.”<sup>114</sup>

Soon afterwards, the *New York Times* published a Los Angeles resident’s letter to the editor on the Bracero Program’s damaging impact on the migrant labor community. Daniel Webster challenged the authority of growers’ associations and declared:

That a nation as rich as ours should take advantage of its neighbor’s poverty to procure at taxpayer’s expense cheap foreign labor willing to work for far less than Americans (and often underpaid, overcharged for meals, and taken advantage of in a myriad of different ways) to sustain and enrich a minority of our largest farms, often to produce crops subsidized by the taxpayers, is one of the worst disgraces of our times.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> “Farm Labor Evils Stir Coast Action,” *NYT*, August 30, 1959.

<sup>115</sup> David K. Webster, “Importing Farm Labor: Program Using Mexican Nationals Declared Harmful to Our Workers,” *NYT*, September 9, 1959.

Although the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other major newspapers took the side of labor unions and pushed for an end to the Bracero Program, not all venues of media took this stance.

By 1960, domestic labor opposition to the Bracero program reached its apex, demanding the preferential hiring of American workers prior to the employment of any Mexican National, legally or illegally in the U.S. Once domestic worker strikes increased in the Central, San Joaquin, and Imperial Valleys, many growers realized that the demands of labor unions to cut Braceros and incorporate Mexican-Americans could not be ignored. As the AFL- CIO and LULAC and GI Forum exerted pressure on Congress, the power of growers' associations went in a downward spiral and some farmers began to advocate labor unionization to maintain stability. The California Director of the Bureau of Employment Security urged the Salinas Valley Growers' Association of the necessity to address the demands of these groups, specifically the AFL- CIO:

One cannot close his eyes and ignore them, for they are here and they appear to be sincere and determined. Moreover, they have the moral and financial backing of a large segment of the national and State movement. This is the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL- CIO. These, then, are the contending forces who are playing for huge stakes in what truly is an economic life and death struggle.<sup>116</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and on into 1961, most growers continued to cling to their Bracero work force and vehemently resisted the unionization of domestic workers. A strike on the Lara Brothers Ranch in the San Joaquin Valley further illuminates Mexican-Americans intensified backlash against the Bracero worker. In this case, a representative of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee told the Department of Labor that

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.,

most of his domestic workers “had not been able to get work all winter because Mexican Nationals were used.”<sup>117</sup> As strikes and labor disputes involving opposition to Braceros became more frequent, growers justified their use of foreign labor by appraising the “government regulated” nature of the program.

The spokesman for the California Council of Growers, O.W. Fillerup, reminded readers to not forget that the Bracero program “is administered and inspected by the government. If there is any cheating, if a fly-by- night contractor fleeces them and an inspector hears about it, that’s all. The contractor is out of business.”<sup>118</sup> Growers outweighed the negatives of the Bracero Program and argued that domestic migrant labor could have drastic social repercussions on California. California’s farm worker community developed rigid racial divisions and growers, like Fillerup, often favored Mexican national workers over black migrant workers from the South: “If 85,000 Negroes suddenly come into California from the South, we’d have another ‘Grapes of Wrath.’ For when the harvest was over, they wouldn’t go back home.”<sup>119</sup>

By 1960, various agricultural regions in California could be described as a “seething cauldron of resentment and discontent.”<sup>120</sup> The Imperial Valley, the oldest lettuce producing area of the United States for commercial plantings of winter lettuce, provided direct employment to over 12,000 individuals. 7,000 Braceros, 2,000 domestic workers, 200 Japanese workers and an undetermined number of *mojados* formed part of

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<sup>117</sup> Notes Regarding the Trade Dispute, Lara Brothers Ranch, Grayson, California, May 26, 1960, Container 14, RG 174.

<sup>118</sup> Wes Willoughby, “Braceros Vital to State Farms,” *News-Call Bulletin*, August 18, 1960, Container 14, RG 174.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>120</sup> Jackson Down, “Farmers Plan Showdown Union Fight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16, 1960, RG 174.

this expansive labor community.<sup>121</sup> At the time, agricultural workers were paid a bare wage of 90 cents an hour. As explained by Robert Montgomery, Democrat and member of the California legislature, “If the farmers had not opposed—and defeated—a \$1.25 minimum wage bill sponsored by Governor Edmund G. Brown at the 1959 Legislature, the farm union drive may not have gained steam this year.”<sup>122</sup> In January of 1961, AWOC, the UPWA, and NAWU coordinated strikes and walk-offs on over 17 of the Imperial Valley’s major lettuce farms. The worst strikes involved J.J. Crosetti Compay, Danny Danenberg, and the Salinas Valley Vegetable Exchange in El Centro and D’Arrigo Brothers of Brawley. To raise the low wages, which continued mostly due to the 1950s exploitation of the Bracero Program, unions went after growers’ supply of Braceros and growers continued to resist unionization.

As the strike situation worsened on the Imperial Valley Lettuce Fields, major newspapers, who previously aligned with grower interests in support of the program, published articles that sided with labor unions and denounced grower manipulation of Bracero workers to break strikes. Gladwin Hill, who published extensive stories in opposition of the “wetback flood,” shifted focus towards the termination of the Bracero Program. Hill, who previously supported the Bracero Program as an alternative to wetback labor, wrote an article in 1963 that questioned the contemporary need for Braceros and the humanity of their labor camps:

In human terms, the bracero program has meant compounds, some resembling army camps, where the braceros sleep in barracks, eat in mess

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<sup>121</sup> Special Economic Report to CA Governor Edmund Brown Pertaining to the Production- Harvesting- Transportation Marketing Current- 1961 Imperial Valley crop, January 26, 1961, Container 15, RG 174.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted by Down, “Farmers Plan Shutdown Union Fight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.



halls, and are dispatched out by the day by growers' associations to farms that have provided themselves, weeks or months before, with Government certifications of 'a shortage of domestic labor.'<sup>123</sup>

Throughout January, tension and unrest built up in union picket lines as growers transported Mexican national workers onto the fields. Norman Smith's AWOC was primarily responsible for the orchestration of the domestic strikes and picket lines that disrupted the Imperial Valley's winter lettuce harvest. Ernesto Galarza, who compiled records on the exploitation of Braceros as early as 1945, reached out to the AFL- CIO for help in a national campaign to organize domestic workers in 1956. The AFL- CIO responded by chartering the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee in 1960. The AFL- CIO's newfound investment in California farm workers prompted Secretary of Labor Mitchell to take measures to enforce Article 32 of the Migrant Labor Agreement, which prohibited the use braceros in strike zones.<sup>124</sup> AWOC and its leadership in the 1961 Imperial Valley Lettuce Strike, as well as smaller scale labor disputes, gave the farm workers the political leverage they needed to push the order to terminate the Bracero Program through Congress. During the strike, AWOC allied with the United Packinghouse Workers of America in the Imperial Valley Lettuce strike. In February, these unions brought the strike drive to asparagus fields in Stockton and Sacramento.<sup>125</sup> The scale and seriousness of Imperial Valley Strike, therefore, prompted agricultural unions like AWOC and the UPWA to put aside their differences and unite in a cooperative union drive against the Imperial Valley Farmers Association.

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<sup>123</sup> Gladwin Hill, "Bracero System Believed Doomed," *NYT*, May 31, 1963.

<sup>124</sup> Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 162-166

<sup>125</sup> "Union Will Seek More Funds in Farm Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1961, Container 12, RG 174.

In the midst of the Imperial Valley Strike, leadership of the Department of Labor transferred from James Mitchell to Arthur Goldberg, who endeavored to prevent Mexican Nationals from impeding the strikes of domestic workers. Both secretaries sided with unions and worked diligently to prevent growers from filling the spots of striking workers with Braceros or made limited attempts to hire domestic workers before hiring contract nationals. Most growers, however, continued to defend their use of Bracero workers in a strike and disapproved of domestic unionization, let alone allowing Bracero participation in a union strike. In the height of the Imperial Valley Strike crisis of Winter 1961, the secretary issued a news release to clarify article 22 of the Migrant Labor Agreement relating to strikes and lockouts, which “prohibits the use of braceros to fill any job which the Secretary of Labor finds is vacant because the occupant is out on strike or locked out in the course of a labor dispute.”<sup>126</sup> One spokesman for the California Growers’ Association called the new restrictions “Ridiculous... It means that if I hire three U.S. workers and 160 Mexicans, I lose all my braceros if two domestic workers strike.”<sup>127</sup> The First National Association of California blamed Secretary of Labor, James P. Mitchell, for permitting that “fruit rot on the trees and other products decay, because of lack of harvesting, for the reason that people that want to work and save the loss of millions—are not permitted to work.”<sup>128</sup>

Though AWOC worked actively with the AFL-CIO and NAWU to end the Bracero Program, reports of labor disputes throughout the Imperial Valley show a high

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<sup>126</sup> “Illegal to Use Mexicans as Strikebreakers, warns labor department,” January 24, 1961, Container 15, Record Group 174, General Records of the Department of Labor (1907-2001).

<sup>127</sup> Kirk Smith, “Braceros Removed in Farm Strike,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1961

<sup>128</sup> Letter from the First National Association of California to James Mitchell, June 21, 1960, Container 14, Record Group 174.

percentage of Bracero participation in strikes. Many times, in fact, Bracero participation in AWOC-UPWA strikes exceeded domestic participation. On January 28, 1961, a strike broke out at the D'Arrigo Brothers Ranch in Brawley over wages, working conditions, and union recognition of Bracero lettuce worker rights. This particular ranch had a long history of union opposition and involuntarily repatriated Bracero union members, Cossio Palacios, Andres Marques Rodriguez, and J. Luz Malagon Terrazas in 1953.<sup>129</sup> At the time of the strike, no domestic laborers were employed there. AWOC and UPWA reached out to 68 Mexican Nationals employed at the ranch and formed a picket line on the fields.<sup>130</sup> Though AWOC, the UPWA, and the NAWU opposed the continuation of the Bracero Program, they were not anti- Mexican and continued to incorporate willing Bracero workers in their strike effort. As summed up by the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor, "Objection to imported, underpaid labor is **not** an objection to Mexicans. The domestic labor force represents different racial and cultural groups."<sup>131</sup> When given the opportunity to unionize, many Braceros actively contributed to the 1961 strike effort and helped to improve working conditions for the thousands of workers involved in the Imperial Valley Lettuce industry.

Some growers did advocate unionization to maintain stability. A fifth generation farmer in San Joaquin County, Frederick S. Van Dyke, illuminated other growers of his firm belief "that unionization of farm labor will prod farmers into organizing on their

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<sup>129</sup> Imperial Valley Farmers Association, Official Employer Record for Joaquin Palacios, Container 12, RG 174

<sup>130</sup> Report of Labor Dispute in Agriculture at D'Arrigo Brothers Ranch, U.S. Department of Labor, January 30, 1961.

<sup>131</sup> "The Plight of American Farm Workers," National Committee on Farm Labor," C.1960, C.14, Record Group 174.

own behalf in order to receive high prices for their products. This would be a revolutionary step in the history of agriculture—and one of the most desirable.”<sup>132</sup> However, most growers continued to resist unionization of farm workers and insisted they used all available domestic laborers. In the height of the Imperial Valley strike at the end of January, a telegram Thomas Bunn of the Salinas Valley Vegetable Exchange insisted that “we have hired all domestics that have been sent to us, and as far we are concerned, there isn’t an existing union and there isn’t a strike in our fields.”<sup>133</sup> Attitudes like these, that disregarded the union and continued to ignore the demands of Mexican-American domestic workers, are what led to the demise of the Bracero Program.

As domestic workers realized that most Imperial Farmers would not concede to their union drive, certain members of AWOC resorted to acts of violence against Bracero workers. Tensions and unrest over the manipulation of Braceros to break strikes culminated in a domestic demonstration outside the labor camp of Danny Danenberg in El Centro on February 2, 1961, at which approximately 1,150 Mexican national workers were housed.<sup>134</sup> At this point, the Mexican Government intervened on behalf of its citizens. The very day of the demonstration in El Centro, the Minister of the Mexican Embassy sent a letter to Secretary of Labor Goldberg voicing the position of the Mexican government to assert “its sovereign right to protect its nationals when it requests that they be removed from the struck places in order to assure the safety of its own

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<sup>132</sup> F.S. Van Dyke, “An Open Letter to my Fellow Farmers,” 1961, Container 15, RG 174

<sup>133</sup> Thomas M. Bunn, Western Union telegram, January 31, 1961, Container 15, RG 174

<sup>134</sup> Department of Labor Record of the Imperial Valley Strike, Glenn Brockway, February 7, 1961, Container 14, RG 174.

countrymen.”<sup>135</sup> At the request of the Mexican government, Bracero managers evacuated 400 Mexican Nationals from the Danenberg camp. One week later, a similar demonstration against Bracero workers broke out at the Corona Camp near Brawley, where “fifty AWOC organizers followed John Sorio [head organizer] into camp, attacking domestics, Braceros, property...Two Braceros hospitalized at Pioneer Hospital Brawley at 10:15 am, multiple abrasions, black eyes, etc. Names are Isabel Dalenzuela Florez and Manuel Ramirez Lopez.”<sup>136</sup> By February 18, the Secretary of Labor understood the gravity of the anti- Bracero campaign and ordered the removal of all Braceros (totaling to over 2,800) from 15 struck lettuce farms.<sup>137</sup> The Imperial Valley Strike dragged on into early march, at which point Superior Judge of California, Elmer Heard, barred union pickets at all fields and labor camps. On March 10, 1961, AWOC and UPWA called off their strike, but the struggle to raise wages in the area did not end here, nor did the agitated drive to end the Bracero Program.

In September of 1961, Congress defied labor union demands one last time and passed the last extension of Public Law 78, under conditions that specified, “No bracero shall be made available for employment in other than temporary or seasonal operations or operate or maintain certain power driven machinery.”<sup>138</sup> After the confrontations of Imperial Valley Strike, Mexican-American frustrations with the Bracero Program reached an all time high. In 1962 to 1963, positive relations between Mexican-Americans and Bracero workers in the Imperial Valley were all but impossible. On December 13, 1962,

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<sup>135</sup> Letter to Goldberg from Azorena, February 2, 1961, Container 3565, RG 16

<sup>136</sup> Telegram from John Strickland (Information Officer) to U.S. Department of Labor, February 9, 1961, Container 15, RG 174.

<sup>137</sup> “Noakes Praises Removal of Farm ‘Strikebreakers’,” *Labor*, February 18, 1961, RG 174.

<sup>138</sup> Memorandum from Edwin E. Vallon to Mr. Woodward, September 26, 1961, Box 3565, RG 16.

four Mexican-American farmworkers in Brawley, Maria Nieblas, Tomasa Jaramillo, Josefina Garcia, and Felipa Landoros sued the Desert Growers' Association for \$195.00, for violation of Public Law 78, which requires that domestic farmworkers be given work prior to imported Braceros. A union newsletter recounted "many people have come back from the North to their homes in Brawley and other parts of the Valley, but are being refused work by the growers."<sup>139</sup> Corresponding with the general Mexican-American line of argument in the area, the four women said that growers "want the imported braceros whom they can easily swindle on wages and working hours, feeding of food and places to stoop."<sup>140</sup> Oftentimes, though, growers did not want Braceros either, because as a government subsidized program, Bracero camps were subject to inspection and certain standards. Feliciano Ordoñez, a Mexican-American from Phoenix, addressed this move towards illegal labor: "The word lobbyist ruined that program. The lobbyists lobbied the government to keep the borders open, because if the bracero program was cheap, they could get cheaper labor if there was illegality."<sup>141</sup>

Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz took over the Department of Labor in 1962 and oversaw the final 2 years of the Bracero Program. The labor union drive reached its climax with the Imperial Valley Strike. Still, the department continued in its struggle to reconcile the hotbed of tensions that had developed between organized labor and organized growers on the use of Mexican nationals. Between 1962 and 1964, small pockets of dissent arose in California fields. On May 1, 1961 in the strawberry fields of

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<sup>139</sup> Workers Accuse Desert Growers' Association of Violation of Public Law 78, December 14, 1962, Container 15, Record Group 174, General Records of the Department of Labor (1907-2001).

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007.

the Salinas Valley, a dispute emerged involving the illegal use of Mexican Nationals between the UPWA and the Salinas Strawberries Association.<sup>142</sup> On August 23, 1963, AWOC of Stockton formed a picket line at the Coit Ranch in Mendota, CA relating to the wages, hours, and working conditions in the cantaloupe harvest. The cantaloupe harvesters in question constituted 371 Mexican Nationals and only one domestic worker, showing AWOC's continued efforts to incorporate Mexican immigrant workers and prevent divisionism.<sup>143</sup> In the fields of Patterson, famous for its reputation as the "Apricot Capitol of the World," the Patterson Produce Company faced scrutiny from the Department of Labor for their use of Bracero workers. On October 30, 1963, Glen Brockway withdrew all the Mexican Nationals employed by the Patterson company and suspended their further authorization to employ such workers. Brockway came to this decision after discovering that A.C. Shoemake, the company's general manager, was in violation of article 9 of PL 78, which required that employers give preference "to domestic agricultural workers while still employing Mexican national contract workers."<sup>144</sup>

The series of strikes and labor disputes that unfolded throughout the Imperial, Coachella, San Joaquin, Central, and Salinas Valleys put final pressures on the Bureau of Employment Security and the Secretary of Labor to rid California's fields of the Bracero in favor of the domestic migrant laborer. What began in the mid 1950s as a regional California labor controversy had turned into a national issue and members of Congress

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<sup>142</sup> Telegram to Kenneth Robertson from Irving H. Perluss, May 1, 1961, Container 16, RG 174.

<sup>143</sup> Teletype to M. Johnson from the California Department of Employment, August 30, 1963, Container 15, RG 174.

<sup>144</sup> News release from Willard Wirtz, "Bracero Workers Withdrawn from Patterson Produce Company," November 1, 1963, Container 15, RG 174.

took positions for and against the continuation of Mexican foreign contract labor. Henry B. Gonzalez, a Texas Democrat and member of the House of Representatives, voiced the concerns of the Mexican-American community and recommended to President Johnson that his administration not permit the further extension of “this odious law and the program it created”<sup>145</sup>:

In light of these facts, and in light of the incontrovertible evidence that the operation of the bracero program has caused much needless suffering to American farm workers while being of little or no benefit to the Mexican workers, there can be no benefit to their this country or to Mexico by again extending this program.<sup>146</sup>

Gonzalez was the first Mexican-American Representative from Texas and served in Congress for 38 years, longer than any other Latin American. In the 1950s, Gonzalez worked with LULAC and GI Forum, to politically mobilize Mexican-Americans and resist all threats of discrimination, including the Bracero Program.

On January 31, 1964, the Bracero Program’s twenty-year reign over the Southwest’s agricultural industry ended, but its legacy of worker exploitation through divisive tactics persisted. The end of the Bracero Program, however, only caused further complications in relations within California’s Spanish-speaking labor community. As summed up by Ordoñez, “Had they managed to keep a guest worker program, we wouldn’t have the undocumented problem today.”<sup>147</sup> With the end of the Bracero Program and the 1965 Immigration Nationality Act’s imposition of a western hemisphere ceiling, the “Bracero Problem” turned into a “wetback problem.” The end of the Bracero Program in 1964 also marked the first true victory of domestic workers and labor unions

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<sup>145</sup> Letter from Henry Gonzalez to Lyndon B. Johnson, February 10, 1964, Container 15, RG 59.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007.



against the organized and politically influential force of grower associations in the Southwest. It is important to remember, however, that this was not just a victory on the part of the California and Arizona centralized NAWU and the UPWA, but also of unions spanning throughout the entire continental United States.

Ernesto Galarza was an instrumental voice in the anti- Bracero campaign. Few studies, however, recognize how collaborative efforts between Mexican-American organizations LULAC and GI Forum, Southwest labor unions, and the AFL- CIO brought a final end to the Bracero Program. The 1964 end to the contract labor program brought unions together under a common cause for exploited domestic workers in the agricultural and factory industries. These cooperative efforts were at first exclusive to rights for domestic workers, but this gradual amelioration between union lines paved the way for the inclusion of immigrant workers in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.

### Chapter 3

#### César Chavez and *La Causa*: The Rise and Fall of the United Farm Workers, 1962-1970

In the post- Bracero era, a series of restrictionist immigration laws encroached upon the rights of citizen Latin- Americans. Certain Mexican-American labor unions and coalitions looked past their own self- interests and the barriers that once divided domestic and immigrant workers gradually began to fade. The United Farm Workers of César Chavez proved to be a problematic exception to a wide effort of Mexican-American organizations to ease these tensions and foment a more unified workers' movement. Though the UFW claimed it helped "Mexican citizens with immigration problems," the UFW was first and foremost a domestic farm workers' union. Chavez followed the lead of the NAWU and incorporated Mexican *culture* into the union while simultaneously barring Mexican *people* from the union. Their sophisticated use of ethnic organizing strategies and Mexican symbolism during strikes caused many to confuse the UFW with the rising Chicano movement. Into the 1970s, Chavez continued to rationalize UFW policy and proposed that a distinction "be made between those who came to the U.S. to live and work and those who cross the border only to work a short time in the U.S. and return to Mexico."<sup>148</sup> This proposition, however, only led to further discrimination and scapegoating of Mexican workers. Moreover, Chavez overlooked the new reality of restrictionist immigration laws, which indiscriminately perceived all Mexican "looking" individuals as potential *mojados*. This chapter will focus on the development of César Chavez's United Farm Workers Union from its founding in 1962, to its involvement with

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<sup>148</sup> "Wirtz Visits Chavez," *El Malcriado*, November 1, 1968, Vol. II, No. 17.

AWOC in the Delano Strike, through its downward spiral of the late 1970s. Notwithstanding its shortsightedness on immigration issues, the UFW made groundbreaking progress in ethnic organizing and garnered nationwide support for the labor struggle of Mexican-American farmworkers in a way accomplished by no other movement. The Chicano and “Raza” movements of the 1970s harnessed the techniques perfected by the UFW and refashioned them to contemporary immigration issues.

From the 1965 Delano Strike on into the early 1970s, Chavez openly supported deportation, excluded Mexican nationals from the UFW, and warned Chicano workers of the Mexican strike. Fueled by the remarkable charisma of Chavez and the financial backing of the AFL-CIO, United Farm Workers of America “inspired devotion from church leaders, liberal politicians, and many reporters throughout the nation.”<sup>149</sup> Just as Galarza solicited backing from the AFL-CIO in the 1961 Imperial Valley Lettuce Strike, Chavez reached out to the AFL-CIO for support in the Delano strike in 1966 and gained favor in Congress. In this way, the AFL-CIO ensured a voice in farm worker decisions of the 1960s. The 1961 Imperial Valley Lettuce Strike ultimately failed, but Galarza’s cooperation with AWOC and the AFL-CIO started the slow process of erasing the barriers between local farm workers unions and larger national unions. César Chavez continued the legacy of Ernesto Galarza and championed the cause of Mexican-American farmworkers in the post- Bracero era. Through worker organizing, grassroots pressure, and directly linking farm worker strikes to customers, Chavez and the organizers of the UFW brought the labor and economic struggles of poor, Mexican-American farmworkers

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<sup>149</sup> Winthrop Griffin, “Is Chavez Beaten?” *New York Times*, September 15, 1974.

into American living rooms throughout the nation. In the mid-1970s, Chavez moved away from divisive tactics and called for the unionization of undocumented workers. Yet, Chavez's new position changed according to the interests of the UFW. When tested by the Carter administration's restrictionist Immigration Bill, UFW solidarity with immigrants proved short lived and the UFW backed the AFL-CIO's support for the Carter Plan.

By the mid-1960s, LULAC, the Mexican-American political leader of the 1950s, lost the interest of younger members drawn to the allure of the budding Chicano movement on college campuses around the nation. The politically pro-active student body provided a support base for the Chicano movement and outgrew LULAC's conservatism for this new brand of Mexican-American ethnic and political pride. The UFW of Chavez was certainly the most vocal and nationally recognized farm workers movement. Smaller, community-based organizations, such as the Comité Nacional Organización Sindical de Trabajadores and the Comité Pro-Sindicalización de Trabajadores Inmigrantes, provided farm workers with local and engaged support. This intricately knit system of small and medium ranged organizations enabled larger organizations to function and tackle national issues on immigration, voting, and worker rights.

At this point in time, LULAC's conservative political ideology began to lose the interest of younger members, who were attracted more to the active Chicano movements that erupted on college campuses throughout the 1960s and 1970s. LULAC President Albert Armendáriz alluded to this loss of interest and told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1963,

“Some of the younger LULACs feel, however, that the Mexican-Americans have not been aggressive enough in their fight for civil rights, especially in the Southwest, where LULAC is the strongest.”<sup>150</sup> In 1954, he began a campaign to liberalize the organization and articulate the Mexican in the Mexican-American. Moreover, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 signified a detrimental political loss in influence for LULAC. While Eisenhower briefly recognized LULAC through a presidential address, Kennedy surpassed previous executive efforts. During his short presidency, Kennedy campaigned for Mexican-American votes, appointing an increased number of Mexican-Americans to the government, and gave public Mexican-American rights by attending and speaking at the LULAC State Director’s Ball in Houston on November 21, 1963.<sup>151</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, LULAC continued to resist the aggressive stance taken by Chicano activist groups, who advocated a political and cultural ideology that would separate Chicanos from America’s two party political system. In 1964, LULAC members George Roybal and Roberto Ornelas attempted to cling to political power by reaching out to Latin-American workers and creating LULAC- sponsored employment programs. In 1973, newly elected LULAC national president Joseph Benetes made a last effort to revitalize LULAC through increased membership. Benetes tried to increase funds through more active participation in governmental programs and higher membership dues, but this expansion of activities failed and LULAC incurred a \$200,000 debt, which the organization did not fully pay off until 1980. By this time, Chicano activist movements

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<sup>150</sup> Kaplowitz, *LULAC; Mexican-Americans and National Policy*, 83-84.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.,

had moved onto center stage and taken the place of LULAC in national Mexican-American politics.

In the post- Bracero era, the new Mexican-American generation became disillusioned with LULACs assimilationist standpoint and sought out the *Mexican* in the Mexican-American. At this point, the terms *Chicano* and *la raza* became key components of separate political and self- identity for Mexican-Americans. *La raza* did not just translate to “the race,” but came to encompass all cultural and ethnic elements of the Mexican *pueblo*. This new *raza*, the “principle of a cosmic Chicano existence,”<sup>152</sup> embraced Mexican-Americans’ historical ties with Mexican-Indian and Spanish culture. The United Farm Workers interpreted *la raza* in more limited terms: for Chavez, the scope of *la raza* ended at the U.S.-Mexico border and excluded all immigrants and Mexicans south of the border.

The Mexican-American focused NAWU of Galarza used ethnic organizing strategies to include Braceros and incorporated Spanish language, Mexican folklore, and Aztec symbolism into the movement. Chavez recognized the potential of this method and followed suit. In homage to the Aztec and Mexican descendants of Chicanos, the black and red Aztec eagle logo became the icon and symbol for the rising farm workers movement. Contrary to the NAWU, the UFW used ethnic solidarity for limited purposes and made few attempts to include Mexican immigrants. The UFW brand of ethnic organizing was not an opportunity for greater cultural unity in the Spanish-speaking community, but a union marketing strategy to appeal to the new generation of s. This

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<sup>152</sup> Armando B. Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972) 9.

enabled the UFW to maintain a union platform geared primarily towards the enfranchisement of Mexican-Americans, while limiting their acceptance of immigrants to legal Mexican green-carders.

Born in Yuma, Arizona into a family of migrant farm workers, Chavez spent his childhood working on large agro- business farms and experienced firsthand the exploitive and divisionary tactics of growers. In order to keep farm workers from organizing in labor solidarity, growers kept Filipino, Black, Mexican National (Bracero), and Mexican-American farm workers apart and working in separate crews. After working for several years with Fred Ross' important California Latino civil rights group, the Community Service Organization, Chavez broke away from the group in 1963 and began building his own organization for migrant labor: the United Farm Workers.<sup>153</sup> The contributions of Chavez's Chicano contemporaries are in no way less significant or noteworthy, but Chavez's union was the first to successfully gain the attention of middle and upper class America. Through the Delano Strike and Boycott, which lasted between 1965 and 1970, the UFW won union contracts from major table grape growers in California, including Jack Padol, Martin Zaninovich, DiGiorgio, Perelli-Minetti, and Guimarra.

The end of the Bracero Program in 1964 translated to increased hardship upon poor, Mexican farmworkers. In 1965, another important shift took place in U.S. immigration policy and altered the immigration prospects of Latin American Immigrants. While AWOC and the NAWU fixed their attention upon the Bracero "problem," Representative Emanuel Celler of New York and Senator Philip Hart of Michigan

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<sup>153</sup> *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker's Struggle*, directed by Ray Telles (2007).

formulated a bill that would change the fundamental elements of American immigration policy and seal the border to Western Hemisphere immigrants. The Hart- Celler Act replaced the 1924 Quota system with a global ceiling on annual immigration and preference categories (related to skills and family relations) that applied only to non-Western hemisphere immigrants.

The Hart Celler Act codified “Western Hemisphere Immigration” as “Mexican” and indefinitely sealed the border for Mexican farm and factory workers seeking legal entry into the United States. During congressional debates on the Hart-Celler Bill, legislators overlooked the ceiling on Western Hemisphere immigration that accompanied the elimination of the quota system and underestimated the long-term effects. The 1924 Act excluded Western Hemisphere citizens from the quotas and granted preferential status to Mexican immigrants. At the time, many Americans disagreed with Western Hemisphere exemption. The *Saturday Evening Post* posed the question to Americans: “How much longer are we going to defer putting the Mexican Indian under the quota law we have established for Europe?”<sup>154</sup> In the Bracero Period, the increased anti-Mexican sentiment that swept the nation pushed legislators to solve the “immigrant problem.” In 1965, Congress presented the “solution” to the *Saturday Evening Post*’s concerns and shifted its focus of discrimination from Eastern European immigrants to Latin American immigrants.

Numerical limitations on the Western Hemisphere did not end the United States’ desire and demand for Mexicans as a disposable labor force. The limitations demarcated

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<sup>154</sup> “Time to Put up the Bars,” *Saturday Evening Post*, November 24, 1928, quoted in *Impossible Subjects*, 52-53.



Mexican workers as individuals incapable of achieving immigrant or citizenship status. With a global ceiling of 290,000 and a country cap of 20,000 (which was not fully imposed on the Western Hemisphere until 1976) the motives behind the 1965 Act aimed to treat all nations equally. Still, the 1965 Act overlooked hemispheric realities and grower demand for labor the United States. This and the end of the Bracero Program had a combined effect on illegal immigration. In 1966, the State Department noted a 35,000 increase in the INS apprehensions of illegal entrants.<sup>155</sup> Historians and policymakers largely overlook the significance of the 1965 Act:

We rarely, if ever, question the principle embedded in Hart- Celler that we should treat every country the same. It is based on a logic of equality and fairness and was meant to replace the patently inequitable and discriminatory system of national origin and racial quotas that had governed immigration policy since the 1920s.<sup>156</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, growers and industrial employers used their leverage over Congress to ensure that the U.S. Mexico- Border remain permeable. Policymakers downplayed the 1965 Act as a minor and inconsequential plan to equalize immigration for all nations. The anti- Mexican climate from the Bracero and Operation Wetback era continued to play out in all immigration decisions in the post- Bracero era.

Just as the Bracero debate drew out contentions within the U.S. government, the interests of federal agencies clashed in respect to a Western Hemisphere Ceiling. The Department of State considered the ceiling a diplomatic blunder and aimed to maintain friendly relations with the Mexican government, whereas the Department of Labor

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<sup>155</sup> Selected Data Relating to Proposed Border Development Commission, September 9, 1966, Container 19, RG 59.

<sup>156</sup> Mae Ngai, "The Civil Rights Origins of Illegal Immigration," *International Labor and Working- Class History* 78(Fall 2010): 93-99.

sympathized with union demands to limit Mexican immigration. Policy makers at the time foresaw the problematic and long-term effects of a 20,000 cap on Mexican immigration. Secretary of State Dean Rusk opposed the limitation of Western Hemisphere immigration right up until President Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Act in October of 1965. Well aware that the end of the Bracero Program dealt a severe economic blow to Mexico the year before, Rusk lobbied for Latin Americans' right to unlimited entry, asserting, "An overall ceiling on Western Hemisphere Immigration would not eliminate any problem since none exists."<sup>157</sup> In an effort to amend the severed Pan-American union between the U.S. and Mexico, Rusk maintained that the favored position of natives of the Western Hemisphere was "simply a recognition of Western Hemisphere solidarity, which has been and is the firm policy of the U.S."<sup>158</sup>

Secretary of Labor Wirtz refuted the State Department's concerns for Pan American Union and declared that the "unskilled, uneducated immigrant"<sup>159</sup> should not be admitted under the law. Though its supporters defended the 1965 Act as a plan for greater global equality in the realm of immigration, the Department of Labor's decision to support the Western Hemisphere ceiling suggested apparent anti-Mexican sentiment. The Secretary of Labor's closing statement epitomized the agency's unwavering support for Western Hemisphere limitation and ambivalence toward immigrant labor:

It would be a mistake for them to come, and under a proper interpretation of the law, again, unless there are additional elements in that situation, I

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<sup>157</sup> Insert page 198A of Secretary Rusk's Testimony to Subcommittee No.1, Proposals For Amendment of the Immigration Laws, March 11, 1965, Box 2, RG 59.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>159</sup> Subcommittee No. 1, HR. 7700: To Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act and for Other Purposes, July 23, 1964, Box 3, RG 59.

would think that kind of person would be excluded because of the possibility that he would become a public charge.<sup>160</sup>

The federal government imposed the country cap upon the Western Hemisphere in phases and did not reach the 20,000 goal until 1976. Nonetheless, an initial 120,000 ceiling on Western Hemisphere immigration in 1968 significantly hindered Mexican mobility. This new legislation passed due to “a belief by the majority of Senators that continuation of nonquota status was discriminatory against the Eastern Hemisphere,”<sup>161</sup> but the overall intention was to seal the U.S.- Mexico border. As the Western Hemisphere country cap increased each year, steady grower and employer demand for Mexican laborers caused illegal immigration to soar. Mexican nationals were most directly affected, but the Western Hemisphere Ceiling crippled the social and economic mobility of the entire Spanish-speaking community. Pro- restrictionist legislators responded to this yearly increase in undocumented immigration with a series of unsuccessful bills in the 1970s that aimed to combat undocumented immigration by placing stringent, legal penalties on employers.

In 1965, AWOC (the AFL-CIO’s Filipino based affiliate and NAWU partner in the Imperial Valley Strike) challenged California grape growers on their work and labor conditions. On September 8, 1965, 1500 members of AWOC went on strike over wages and working conditions in the vineyards of Delano, California. Situated in Kern County, the climate of Delano parallels that of the San Joaquin Valley. Hot and dry during the summer and cool and damp in the winter, this semi-desert region is the perfect climate for

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>161</sup> Annual Ceiling, Telegram from Dean Rusk to all American Diplomatic Posts in Other American Republics and Ottawa, September 23, 1965, Box 1, RG 59.

grape growing. Likewise, Delano proved to be the ideal environment for the growth and prosperity of Chavez's farmworker organization efforts. When asked his reasons for making Delano the hub of UFW, he shrugged and replied:

A lot of people have asked me- why Delano? And the answer is simple. I had no money. My wife's family lived there, and I have a brother. And I thought if things go very bad, we can always go and have a meal there. Any place in the Valley would have made no difference.<sup>162</sup>

Viticulture is incredibly labor-intensive process and requires a very large number of very skilled workers. Performed entirely by hand, "vines have to be pruned, tied, and girdled. The developing grapes must be thinned and tipped. Finally, just before harvest, some of the leaves must be pulled off so that the grapes will be exposed to the sun and become sweeter."<sup>163</sup> Keeping in mind the Delano growers' dependence on such a large and skilled labor force, California growers were particularly wary of any increase in workers' wages.

This dependence increased exponentially when, between 1919 and 1925, growers in California planted 128 million new grape vines and, combined with the Depression, many grape growers went bankrupt. Moreover, grape growers entangled in the Delano dispute, like Giumarra, Zaninovich, and DiGiorgio, also came from first generation immigrant families who "defended their turf as the ground on which they, as immigrants, had struggled to create a business and a way of life."<sup>164</sup> On September 15, the eve of Mexico's Independence Day, the United Farm Workers collectively decided to join AWOC in the strike against the DiGiorgio Corporation, Schenley Industries, and others.

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<sup>162</sup> Chavez, "Why Delano," in *César Chavez, an Organizer's Tale: Speeches*.

<sup>163</sup> Frank Bardacke, *Trampling out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (2011).

<sup>164</sup> Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (2012).

News of the AWOC-UPWA and NAWU 1961 strike in the Imperial Valley reached Congress mostly due to the AFL-CIO's hasty support for the NAWU. At first, AWOC and the UFW also had limited success with the strike effort, but Chavez did not turn to the AFL-CIO until later on. Between the winter of 1965 and the spring of 1966, they shifted their focus towards California store managers and convinced them not to sell grapes. New York City was the largest and most important market for grapes in North America. To facilitate the boycott effort on the Eastern front, Chavéz dispatched Dolores Huerta to direct the community boycott of the "forbidden fruit" in Manhattan. A *New York Times* editorial typified the city's appeal to the grape boycott:

Not eating grapes is an easy way of "doing something" for the poor and downtrodden- like giving \$10 to a civil rights organization. Indeed, the grape strike has become chic. You aren't really 'in' the New York liberal scene until you've been up to a fund raising party for the union at George Plimpton's apartment."<sup>165</sup>

LULAC, GI Forum, and MAPA shied away from ethnic organizing strategies and sought to distinguish themselves from the civil rights movement of African Americans in the south. As an organization for the Mexican-American middle class, LULAC made minimal efforts to support Chavez's farm workers' movement. The UFW of Chavez, as a union for and by the farm worker, likened the struggle of farm workers to that of blacks in the south and included black migrant farm workers in the union. Chávez became known as a "Mexican Martin Luther King and the most charismatic union leader in the country."<sup>166</sup> Through their successful boycott of grapes (and later, lettuce) and pilgrimage to Sacramento, the UFW drew upon the example set by the civil rights movement and

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<sup>165</sup> Steven Roberts, "Grape Strike: Still a Hard Road to Settlement," *New York Times*, June 29, 1969.

<sup>166</sup> Steven Roberts, "Grape Boycott: Struggle Poses a Moral Issue," *New York Times*, November 12, 1969.

modified it to work to their favor within the labor and agro- business sphere. Still, the UFW faced several unseen challenges as compared to Blacks, including the American unawareness of farm workers relative to the South's Blacks; the social construction of Mexican-Americans as "alien"; and the isolation of migrant labor camps from rural communities as compared to the black neighborhood of a southern town.<sup>167</sup> The UFW overcame these challenges and appealed to the middle-class in East Coast cities through effective advertising methods (as seen in issues of the *New York Times*), door-to-door personal contact, volunteer recruitment, and leadership development. The UFW faced significant obstacles in their effort to cultivate national awareness of the farm worker struggle, but the sweeping success of the boycott would not have been possible without solidarity efforts towards African Americans. In an interview during the 1966 pilgrimage to Sacramento, a black marcher said that he chose to march because "the Mexican-American cause and the negro cause are one in the same."<sup>168</sup>

During the 1966 pilgrimage to Sacramento, the UFW incorporated Mexican history and culture, carrying at the head of the pilgrimage "La Virgen de Guadalupe because she is ours, all ours, Patroness of the Mexican people."<sup>169</sup> Once again, the UFW used Mexican symbolism, including the Virgen de Guadalupe and the Aztec Eagle, for limited and ungenune purposes of union promotion. The "Plan of Delano" shows how the UFW did advocate farm worker unity, but was only willing to support *Americans of Mexican descent*:

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<sup>167</sup> Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 170

<sup>168</sup> *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker's Struggle*, Ray Telles

<sup>169</sup> "The Plan of Delano," *El Malcriado: Voice of the Farm Worker*, Vol. 1. No. 32, 1966, Bloom M3, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

We know that the poverty of the Mexican or Filipino worker in California is the same as that of all farm workers across the country, the Negroes and the poor whites, the Puerto Ricans, Japanese, and Arabians. In short, all of the races that comprise the oppressed minorities of the United States. *The majority of the people on our Pilgrimage are of Mexican descent*, but the triumph of our race depends on a national association of all farm workers. The ranchers want to keep us divided in order to keep us weak.”<sup>170</sup>

Even during the final years of the Bracero Program, the NAWU continued to protect Bracero workers. The UFW platform differed from its predecessor in many ways and supported immigration and border restrictions as part of a larger strategy to build the power of the Mexican-American farm worker. At the same time that Chavez opposed the fundamental principles behind ethnic solidarity currently circulating in the young Chicano community, Chavez appropriated some of the terms and symbols from Chicanismo and used them in the union. *El Malcriado*, the UFW’s underground paper, employed the term “la raza,” in speeches and articles, but staunchly rejected the Chicano movement’s unified *raza* of Mexican immigrants and Americans of Mexican descent. Chavez’s denunciation of “Mexican-American leaders who stress the idea of La Raza, or race”<sup>171</sup> caused him to run into problems with Bert Corona of the Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, who believed that undocumented immigrants should be organized and represented rather than deported. Throughout the Delano strike, *New York Times* coverage illustrated the UFW’s anti-immigrant bend. Reporters addressed the plight of Mexican-American farm workers and disregarded the similar, if no worse, working conditions of undocumented workers. Some blamed the unsettled status of the Delano strike on the fact that growers utilized “a huge pool of cheap labor living just across the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>171</sup> Steven Roberts, “Grape Boycott: Struggle Poses a Moral Issue,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1969.

border in Mexico,”<sup>172</sup> which reinforced divisions between Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants in California. In reality, immigrants were not to blame, but rather the political influence of grape growers in state and national legislatures.

The UFW’s influential newspaper, *El Malcriado*, translated as “ill-bred or mischievous.” Named after a newspaper that existed during the Mexican revolution, the UFW manipulated certain elements of Mexican history in order to resonate with farm workers and the new generation of Mexican-American youth. After 1965, Chicanos began to construct a self-identity and needed a dissemination point for *la raza* thought and political action, so several Chicana newspapers began circulate in the community. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales founded the Crusade for Justice, an urban civil rights and cultural movement for Chicanos, in April 1966 and soon after, published *El Gallo*, one of the first Chicano newspapers.<sup>173</sup> The Mexican American Political Association, initially founded in 1960 to advance Mexican American political activity and defend against abuses of farm workers in the San Joaquin Valley, set an example for the numerous Chicano movements that emerged in the late 1960s. With their focus on middle-class citizens and disinterest in farm worker concerns, MAPA took up the role of LULAC and ran campaigns in California for Mexican-American candidates. MAPA’s newspaper, *The Voice of the Spanish Speaking People*, however, was short lived and did not reach the wide audience its publisher, Manuel Ruíz Jr., anticipated. Though United Farm Workers was not a Chicano organization, but rather a union. Still, the UFW followed certain trends and ethnic organizing methods of the wider Chicano movement and rejected

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<sup>172</sup> Steven Roberts, “Grape Strike: Still a Hard Road to Settlement,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1969.

<sup>173</sup> Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto*, 167.



others, such as the new *raza* identity. First published and distributed in Delano in 1964, the *Malcriado* helped build momentum for the pending strike and boycott drive in 1965. Between 1965 and 1971, the prime years of the grape boycott and UFW's primary years of influence, issues of *El Malcriado* reveal Chavez's changing views on braceros, green card workers, undocumented immigrants, and the UFW's interpretation of *la raza*.

Post 1965, the informal vestiges of the Bracero Program shaped California's agricultural landscape. A frequently overlooked provision of the 1952 McCarran Walter Act sanctioned the importation of foreign agricultural workers under extenuating circumstances. Even though the Bracero Program did not exist, growers could still obtain Bracero workers. The UFW simultaneously worked to get the strike in Delano off the ground and combatted this intermittent entry of Bracero workers. In the summer 1965, the Department of Labor dispatched 2,687 Braceros to asparagus and strawberry fields in the San Joaquin Valley and Salinas.<sup>174</sup> In 1965, the direct aftermath of the Bracero Program and very middle of debates surrounding the 1965 Hart-Celler proposal, this measure was generally overlooked. The year afterwards, Governor Brown approved the entry of 1000 more Braceros for the Salinas harvest. By 1966, the UFW and other unions concluded that the Post Bracero Program use of Braceros had to stop and portrayed Braceros as enemies, reassuring Mexican-Americans of its commitment "to prevent Mexican 'braceros' from coming here and taking away our jobs."<sup>175</sup> Perspectives of state and national leaders on the post-1965 use of Braceros varied. Between 1965-1966, California governor Pat Brown sanctioned the entry of up to 22,500 provisional Braceros

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<sup>174</sup>State Department Memo: Return of Mexican Braceros, June 23, 1965, Container 15, RG 59,

<sup>175</sup>"Growers Demand Braceros Again," *El Malcriado*, Vol. 1 No. 35, 1966.

and the UFW condemned the governor as “a liar and a traitor to the Mexican-Americans and farm workers who voted for him.”<sup>176</sup>

The Department of Labor under Willard Wirtz relented to pressures from domestic labor unions and barred further Bracero importation because “the growers were not paying decent wages or trying to get American workers and their ‘labor problems’ are their own fault.”<sup>177</sup> Though the Bracero Program ended, the influence of grower associations upon California state decisions lingered. This conflicted with efforts in Congress to meet the demands of Chavez’s rapidly growing farm workers movement. As the Chicano movement made headway, the UFW’s underlying anti-immigrant principles generated discord among the younger Chicano generation. Many youth believed that the UFW’s portrayal of the Mexican “scab” countered the Spanish-speaking community’s organizing efforts against the unified growers front. José Alvarez epitomized the gradual change in sentiment of Mexican-Americans toward Mexican workers:

In edition 36, *Malcriado* reported on the arrival of a thousand Mexican Braceros; I personally cannot believe that we have so many here that so intensely hate the Mexican worker... It is inhuman to call them slaves from Mexico; they are protected by the government and more often than not, many have contributed to our nation’s strength. They are not at fault for being granted the opportunity to come, since they also have family to maintain and I believe they deserve the same rights as American workers.<sup>178</sup>

Once the remnants of the Bracero Program were done away with, the UFW returned its primary efforts into the burgeoning strike on grape growers. Chavez recognized that the 1961 Imperial Valley strike succeeded due to the AFL-CIO’s

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<sup>176</sup> “Brown Buys Braceros,” *El Malcriado*, Vol 1. No. 36, 1966.

<sup>177</sup> “Better than Braceros,” *El Malcriado*, Vol 1. No. 37, 1966.

<sup>178</sup> Jose Alvarez, Letters to the Editor, *El Malcriado*, Vol. 1 No. 39, 1966.

intervention on behalf of the NAWU and AWOC. To strengthen the Delano strike, Chavez set off to form coalitions with long established unions, such as the AFL- CIO and the United Autoworkers. The UFW merged with the AFL- CIO in 1966 to “make us even stronger to fight the growers.”<sup>179</sup> By forming ties with the AFL- CIO, the UFW opted for political leverage over the interests of the farmworker community of American immigrant workers. This alliance with the AFL- CIO gave the UFW “enough power in Washington to push through Congress laws which aid farm workers.”<sup>180</sup>

In 1966, the UFW made a commitment to “organize ALL THE FARM WORKERS’ brown, white, and black, because we cannot divide ourselves into separate races and call ourselves ‘Mexicans,’ or ‘Filipinos,’ or ‘Americans,’ only.”<sup>181</sup> *El Malcriado*’s portrayal of undocumented “scabs” and temporary green-card workers, however, contradicted this pledge against divisionism. The UFW helped spread the myth that all Mexican nationals “scabbed,” telling readers “almost all strike-breakers are now from South of the Border.”<sup>182</sup>

After the Department of Labor finally barred the provisional use of Braceros, the United Farm workers shifted their focus towards eliminating green-card workers, holders of I-151 “Alien registration” forms. The UFW collaborated with the INS for the removal of green card workers and alleged, “growers have in effect used the green carders to replace the outlawed bracero program.”<sup>183</sup> As the Chicano movement gained footing, the UFW slowly began to accept the new trend in Mexican-American thought.

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<sup>179</sup> “Farm Workers Unite,” *El Malcriado*, Vol. 1, No. 41.

<sup>180</sup> “The Hands that Have Built America,” *El Malcriado*, Vol 1, No, 49.

<sup>181</sup> Response to Letters to the Editor, *El Malcriado*, Vol.1 No. 41, 1966.

<sup>182</sup> “Four ways to break a strike,” *El Malcriado*, November 15, 1968, Vol. II, No. 18.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*,

In comparison to Braceros or *mojados*, the UFW was slightly more amenable to green-card workers. In a statement on the official policy on green-card workers, the UFW maintained that they supported immigrants, but vehemently opposed strikebreakers:

The union helps Mexican citizens with immigration problems and helps them arrange to bring their families to this country. We help them on legal problems; we have notary publics to serve them; and we help them get drivers licenses. We provided assistance with tax returns and other paperwork. These and all other benefits of union membership are available to green carders on the same bases as any other members.<sup>184</sup>

Juanita Herrera, a Mexican green-worker and member of the UFW, feared that since the union did not effectively articulate their more open policy towards green card workers, they would lose worker loyalty. Herrera recalled a conversation with a strikebreaker who believed, “The union is against green-card workers.”<sup>185</sup>

As the Delano boycott intensified, the farm workers movement exposed the class and ethnic stratifications within the community of grape growers, which led growers to form cooperative relationships. Once again, the powerful force of growers’ associations rose up to challenge the unionizing efforts of Mexican-American farm workers. Growers Jack Padol and Martin Zaninovich joined with growers DiGiorgio and Perelli-Minetti to found the South Central Farmers Committee. Described as “the leading self- help organization for growers,”<sup>186</sup> this unified growers’ association strengthened the economic advantage of growers and represented a significant threat to the boycott. To counter these developments, the UFW stretched its boycott budget in 1968 and looked forward to 1969

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<sup>184</sup> “Union Vice President Speaks Out: The Union and the Greencarder,” *El Malcriado*, June 15, 1968, Vol. II, No. 8.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>186</sup> Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 58

as a key year for the success of the movement. The UFW came through with its promise and the boycott reached all corners of North America. Indeed, the mayor of Toronto declared November 23, 1968 as “Grape Day”<sup>187</sup> and urged citizens not to buy or sell grapes. By 1969, the UFW built boycott houses in 31 cities, with plans to expand into the South and mountainous territories of the West. In the midst of the 1969 heyday of the farm workers movement, the *New York Times* reflected the wide scope of the UFW community organizing:

In San Francisco, demonstrators staged a candlelight vigil in front of the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange...In Atlanta, demonstrators were greeted by counter-pickets from the John Birch Society... In New York, Assemblyman Andrew Stein gave a chic party to raise money for the grape strike and it was attended by such luminaries as Mrs. Anne Ford Uzielli and Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy.<sup>188</sup>

In 1969, the United Farm Workers gained one more union ally in the Delano drive and Walter P. Reuther of the United Auto Workers pledged his loyalty to the United Farm Workers. Reuther additionally contributed a new 30 room, \$85,000 boycott headquarters to the UFW. Continuing their sympathy to the United Farm Workers, the *Times* reported that Reuther’s appearance at the dedication ceremonies was “a move to bolster the United Farm Worker’s in its four-year battle with table grape growers” and quoted Reuther as saying that he “considered the farm labor struggle a cause for all of organized labor.”<sup>189</sup>

Upheld by the support of political icons, the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO, the consumer directed campaign of the United Farm Workers finally yielded results

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<sup>187</sup> Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 78

<sup>188</sup> Steven Roberts, “Grape Boycott: Struggle Poses a Moral Issue,” *New York Times*.

<sup>189</sup> “Reuther Opens Farm Union’s Center,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1969

and increased pressure on growers. By May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970, the Delano strike was almost over and the first grapes bearing the red and black UFW label were shipped to market, marking a “turning point here in the lush farmlands of central California.”<sup>190</sup> In July of 1970, twenty-six grape growers relented to the pressures of the union and signed with the United Farm Workers, making almost 65 percent of growers unionized. How, then, did the lives of farm workers improve after the Delano signing? First, the abusive system of contract laboring ended and jobs were assigned by a hiring committee, which guaranteed seniority and hiring rights. Second, the contracts protected workers from the menacing fertilizers and farm chemicals that posed “a serious threat to the health of the public in general and farm workers especially.”<sup>191</sup> After the final Salinas growers signing with the United Farm Workers, Chavez received nationwide praise for his efforts to “organize the poor migrants, most of them Mexican-Americans who pick the nations fruits and vegetables.”<sup>192</sup>

In the period after the Delano Strike, the United Farm Workers shifted focus from resistance through public involvement to working with the AFL-CIO to establish a collective bargaining law for farm workers in California. The UFW’s increased involvement with the AFL-CIO and legislative matters isolated union organizers from members, but disillusioned members of the UFW “indicated that they wanted no more a part of Mr. Chavez or ‘La Causa,’ his almost mystic crusade to achieve social and

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<sup>190</sup> Steven Roberts, “First Grapes with Union Label Shipped to Market from Coast,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1970.

<sup>191</sup> “The Threat of Chemical Poisons,” *El Malcriado*, Vol. II, No. 22, January 1969.

<sup>192</sup> Steven Roberts, “26 Grape Growers Sign Union Accord; Boycott Nears End,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1970.

economic justice for Chicanos through the power of trade unionism.”<sup>193</sup> By June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the joint efforts of the AFL-CIO and UFW obtained sufficient power to push the California Labor Relations Act through the state legislature, which established collective bargaining rights for farmworkers (something previously only available to other types of labor). The effects of the act were short-term and as the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act weakened, the Teamsters union moved into the fields and took over ninety percent of the grape contracts previously held by the UFW.<sup>194</sup> Competition with the Teamsters Union enveloped the concerns of Chavez, who lost sight of the farmworkers struggle and became preoccupied with the intricacies of union bureaucracy, rather than the interests of the union as part of a greater Mexican-American community.

By the mid-1970s, the new generation of Mexican-Americans began to lose faith in the “Causa” of Chavez and drifted towards the rising Chicano movement. The UFW declined due to its inability to accept undocumented workers, “eagerly hired by American growers and accepted by farm- labor contractors and the Teamsters.”<sup>195</sup> Instead of making union policy blind to the legal status of immigrants, the UFW responded to its drop in membership by weakening the Teamsters union. In the Salinas Valley, an area taken over by the Teamsters, the UFW funded the creation of the Civic Committee in Defense of Salinas Farmworkers. A primary purpose of the committee involved convincing local workers that the Teamsters’ “attack against the UFW are an attack

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<sup>193</sup> Philip Shabecoff, “Chavez Union Struggling for Survival,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1973.

<sup>194</sup> *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker’s Struggle*, Ray Telles

<sup>195</sup> Winthrop Griffin, “Is Chavez Beaten?” *New York Times*, September 15, 1974.

against all unions and the growing workers movement.”<sup>196</sup> The Salinas committee reinforced divisions in the Spanish-speaking community and wrote that the Bracero Program impeded the organization of the farm workers movement. On the contrary, AWOC, the NAWU, and other farm workers unions thrived during the wartime and post war Bracero eras. Forward-minded leaders and members of these unions, like Ernesto Galarza, routinely incorporated Braceros into the union.

Traditional striking and boycotting methods were not enough to win the support of a nation ignorant of the struggles of West Coast farm workers. The red and black eagle of the United Farm Workers became the 1960s symbol of worker solidarity and emulated an image of strong ethnic consciousness. To attract national attention and membership, Chavez crafted a unique brand of trade unionism infused with a strong sense of ethnic identity. This ethnic identity, however, misled members and the majority of Americans to believe that Chavez to be an advocate of unconditional unity and peace within the entire farm worker community. Once the euphoria from the Delano Strike wore off, UFW members, especially youth, realized that the hesitancy of the UFW to collaborate with other Mexican-American organizations damaged social mobility for the entire Spanish-speaking community, since restrictionist immigration laws affected all Mexican “looking” people, regardless of legal status. The new generation of Mexican-Americans saw that assimilationist and anti-illegal attitudes of LULAC, MAPA, and the UFW no longer applied to the contemporary social and political climate. Just as Chicano youth became disillusioned with the conservative politics of LULAC in the 1950s, Chavez’s

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<sup>196</sup> Pamphlet by the *Comité Civico de Salinas en Defensa de los Campesinos*, July 1973, Box 26, Folder 9, Bert Corona Papers.



reluctance to welcome Mexican immigrants into his union weakened the UFW and prevented cooperative efforts made by Mexican-American immigrant activists. The Chicano rights movement that took shape in 1970s drew upon the ethnic organizing strategies of UFW and used them to find common ground between Mexican Immigrants and Mexican-Americans.

#### Chapter 4 “La Lucha de La Raza Unida,” 1971-1978

Now we are faced with a chance to make the movement for working Chicanos’ rights link up with that for Mexicanos rights. Again, it will be painful, and will be antagonisms and partial setbacks like we see in California’s fields. But 85% of us are in cities, living and working beside millions of undocumented people who are not scabbing. They are working to survive, to escape the neo-colonialism our country has passed onto them. And they often share that pity check with Chicano familia!<sup>197</sup>

In the 1970s, the United Farm Workers strategy for Mexican-American empowerment through trade unionism did not find support with contemporary political and labor dynamics. The United Farm Workers alignment with the AFL-CIO increased their political power. However, in the 1970s, mainstream politics and labor unions no longer responded to the concerns of Mexican-Americans or Mexican immigrants. When the Hart- Celler Bill went into effect in 1968, undocumented immigration rates skyrocketed and America saw the full-blown effect of the new ceiling on Western Hemisphere immigration. Between 1971 and 1978, pro-restrictionist legislators at the state and national level responded to the wave of undocumented immigration by enacting laws that placed fines and penalties on the *employers* of undocumented immigrants. To skirt these fines and penalties, many employers simply refrained from hiring any worker of Latin- American descent. Laws that placed every Spanish “looking” worker in jeopardy forced Mexican-Americans to reevaluate their position on immigrant workers. When the UFW contract with Delano growers expired in 1972, the Teamsters Union swept in and signed what Chavez called “Sweetheart contracts” with Delano growers.

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<sup>197</sup> “National Lawyers Guild Conference Report: No deportations,” *Justicia...O?* (La Raza Student Newspaper of Loyola University, Los Angeles) Vol. 2, No.2, 1976, Box 28, Folder 21, Coll. M248, Bert Corona Papers (Hereafter cited as BC Papers).

With the rise of the Teamsters Union, Mexican-American farm workers also lost their voice in labor union matters. Since labor unions could no longer satisfy the needs of farm workers, Mexican-Americans searched for a new political and social movement that could address their grievances.

The solution came in the form of “La Raza Unida” Party and the Centro de Acción Social Autónomo. Disillusioned Chicano students on California college campuses joined Bert Corona, Soledad Alatorre, and José Angel Gutierrez, in the foundation of these two Chicano movements with a comprehensive sense of unity. My final chapter will trace the 1970s development and coordination of La Raza Unida Party and El Centro de Acción Social Autónomo; the two main organizations responsible for the successful political emancipation of Mexican-Americans and the breaking down of citizenship barriers that perpetuated divisions within the Spanish-speaking community from 1940 to 1970. Like the United Farm Workers movement, CASA and LRUP took pride in their Mexican heritage. These organizations effectively harnessed ethnic organizing strategies laid out by Chavez and worked in harmony to erase the deeply entrenched racial and citizenship barriers between immigrants and Chicanos. While LRUP worked towards Chicano political involvement at the state and national level, CASA dedicated their principal platform to community-based inclusion of Latin- American immigrants in the work- place.

Youth were indispensable in LRUP’s and CASA’s late 1960s effort to organize Chicanos and undocumented immigrants under one movement. LULAC, GI Forum’s, and MAPA’s approach to political emancipation focused heavily on middle-class

concerns and shirked a more “Mexican” identity. Young Chicanos understood that this did not respond to the current political climate. In 1970, one young Mexican-American spoke to the changed perspective of the new generation of Chicanos:

You see, I am a fellow Chicano, I grew up in East L.A., I come from a poor family... I love my fellow Chicano and I love my fellow- man, no matter what color or creed. I admire the people from Mexico who come here to work like dogs for such low wages. But I am not an old person. I am of this young generation.<sup>198</sup>

CASA and LRUP’s active political campaigns on college campuses transformed the meanings of the terms “Chicano” and “La Raza” to encompass the entire Mexican community. Oftentimes, the older generation of Mexican-Americans of the Chavez era disapproved of the new political implications of the word Chicano. Feliciano Ordoñez, a traditional Mexican-American who grew up in an Arizona agricultural community between 1930-1950, spoke to the sentiment of this anti- Chicanismo contingency: “This will give you light on how the word Chicano came about...the word Chicano came from the ancient word *Mechicano*... It didn’t come from Chicanery or all the bologna you hear today.”<sup>199</sup> To many youth of the 1970s, however, Chicano “was *the* term and *the* litmus test for a political frame of mind.”<sup>200</sup> It was this understanding of Chicanery that came to characterize the increasingly confrontational, and ethnically conscious nature of most Mexican-American movements.

La Raza Unida Party garnered statewide support for the repeal of restrictionist immigration laws. However, Bert Corona and other CASA leaders took the first steps

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<sup>198</sup> Letter to the Editor from “A Fellow Chicano,” *Eastside Journal*, August 6, 1970, Box 26, Folder 3, CASA Papers.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007, Bracero History Archive.

<sup>200</sup> Quiñones and Vasquez, *Making Aztlán*, 71.

towards organizing Mexican-Americans to defeat the first restrictive laws that deny undocumented immigrants the right to work. By incorporating immigrant workers, CASA and LRUP solidified the support base for the Chicano movement. The survival of the new *Raza* movement depended largely on developing cooperative relationships with conservative Mexican-American coalitions MAPA and UFW. Corona saw the support of MAPA as invaluable to the progress of La Raza Unida, due to its “eleven years of history, experience, and know-how.”<sup>201</sup> CASA had a working class *barrio* focus, but lacked the political power to affect systemic change, so Corona turned to the experiences of MAPA, CSO (Community Service Organization) and G.I. Forum to develop voter registration campaigns in Chicano neighborhoods.

In Los Angeles, 1968, Mexican-American activists and labor organizers Bert Corona and Soledad Alatorre founded the first organization that gave top priority to Mexican immigrants. The Centro de Acción Social Autónoma, Hermandad General de Trabajadores (the Center for Autonomous Social Action, General Brotherhood of Workers) responded directly to “the need for the building of independent workers’ organizations to deal with general trade union problems and trade union organizational problems related to Mexican workers, especially the organization of the unorganized and of undocumented workers.”<sup>202</sup>

From the beginning, the content of CASA’s national agenda pertained to the working class and paved the way for the expansion of Chicano perspective that accompanied La Raza Unida in the 1970s. At the time, most Chicano groups made

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<sup>201</sup> Bert Corona, “MAPA and La Raza Unida Party,” 4.

<sup>202</sup> History of CASA, 1, 1978, Box 29, Folder 8, BC Papers.

minimal efforts to understand the link between the struggle of the domestic working class struggle and the struggle of Mexican people in the United States. CASA worked against inflammatory anti-immigrant statements the UFW and AFL-CIO, maintaining that immigrants were not a separate working class category and “like other workers, they can be an integral and militant force in the trade union struggles.”<sup>203</sup> CASA collected funds for the creation of a strike support committee in 1971 dedicated to the organization and support of rural and industrial immigrant workers. Between 1968 and 1974, CASA built up a support system of young Chicanos who drifted away from conservative and anti-Raza unions, such as the UFW. Through forums and peaceful protest, the Chicano student movement distributed CASA’s message on college campuses and called for the formal establishment of Chicano Studies as a discipline. The Cal State Chicana student movement, where Bert Corona taught for 12 years, regularly distributed flyers on the campus in support of the nearby struggle in California fields. One read:

To counter chauvinistic propaganda, which seeks to confuse and divide workers along national lines, the Anti-Deportation Committee is of Cal. State LA is sponsoring two forums to explain the recent deportation attack, to inform about alien’s legal rights, and to organize and fight for jobs for all workers, undocumented or not!<sup>204</sup>

At the 1969 Chicano Youth Conference in Denver, Chicanos called for the establishment of a Chicano independent party, known as El Partido de la Raza Unida.<sup>205</sup> La Raza Unida Party was founded after a conclusion that Chicano political pressure groups like MAPA (California), PASSO (Texas), and ACCPE (Arizona) perpetuated “the

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<sup>203</sup> History of CASA, 4, 1978, Box 29, Folder 8, BC Papers.

<sup>204</sup> “Un fin a las deportaciones! Luchar por empleos!” Flyer of the Anti-Deportation Committee, C.1970, Folder 1, Box 7, BC Papers.

<sup>205</sup> Ricardo Santillan, “Partido de la Raza Unida,” *El Obrero*, October 31, 1972, Box 8, Folder 6, BC Papers.

‘hip pocket’ vote for the Democrats”<sup>206</sup> and could not achieve political or social justice for Chicanos within a two party system. 1969 marked a turning point for Chicano politics, at which time “the Chicano looked at the American political system and found that the Chicano after almost 120 years did not have any real political voice.”<sup>207</sup> By the late 1960s, a number of factors, including the sophisticated organization of growers’ associations, racial separation of workers on farms, and the competing interests of the Mexican and United States governments brought citizenship divisions to an all time high. Conservative Mexican-American leaders clung to their outdated strategy of pitting Chicanos against immigrants and failed to realize that most Americans placed little to no importance on the citizenship status of a Spanish-speaking person in the United States. La Raza Unida Party understood that an erasure of these deeply entrenched racial and citizenship barriers required a break with mainstream politics. The wider Mexican-American community’s political isolation and dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party in the Southwest “weakened the group’s interest in political activity and its influence on public affairs.”<sup>208</sup> As legislators developed laws that encouraged racial generalizations of Mexican-Americans and immigrants, Chicano rights movements harnessed the concept “Una Raza” (one race) to forge Latin- American solidarity.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>207</sup> Santillan, “Partido de la Raza Unida,” *El Obrero*, October 31, 1972, BC Papers.

<sup>208</sup> Leo Grebler, *The Mexican-American People: the Nation’s Second Largest Minority*, (1970), 542-548.

<sup>209</sup> The British ethnographer, Anthony D. Smith, laid the foundation for nationalism and interethnic studies and analyzed how an ethnic minority population forms a collective identity. His observations on the effect of discrimination on minority groups help illuminate Mexican-American and immigrant unity in the 1970s: “Colour helps to dissolve local fragmentation and to unify the identified and defined. This is particularly apparent where group conflicts polarize members of different colour [or cultural] communities. The need for self- defense, for organization and leadership, in the face of threat or attack inspires a desire for some rationale for the community, some set of justifications and explanations for their need to unite and mobilize.” Anthony Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (1979), 105.

In the first step towards dissolving “local fragmentation” within the Mexican community, organizers of CASA and LRUP set off to modify the hardline immigration policies of organizations, like LULAC and MAPA. Bert Corona, a veteran immigrant rights activist of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the original 1960 co-founders of MAPA. Once the organization began to mirror the anti-immigrant leanings of LULAC, Corona left the organization. In 1970, Corona used his ties with the organization to integrate MAPA with LRUP. Corona considered the 1970s potentially the most politically significant decade for America’s Spanish-speaking community. This was because La Raza Unida implemented the protest strategies of the United Farm Workers to address “the growing resistance of non- documented Mexican people from Mexico to the inhuman and brutal harassment of the Immigration Service, the Border Patrol, and the exploitation by employers.”<sup>210</sup>

La Raza Unida Party replaced LULAC, GI Forum, and MAPA and reformed Mexican-American political thought into a vehicle to “bring forth all the leaderships, all the thoughts all the feelings, and also attack the issues that would change the lives of our people” (Corky González).<sup>211</sup> La Raza Unida Party certainly stood up against the exclusion of immigrants, but they focused primarily on Chicano political involvement at the local, state, and national level. Mexican-American organizations GI Forum, LULAC, PASSO (the Texas based Political Based Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations) and MAPA were unable to relate to the local Mexican-American *barrios* in large cities

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<sup>210</sup> Bert Corona, “MAPA and La Raza Unida Party: A Program for Chicano Political Action for the 1970s,” c. 1970, Box 26, Folder 7, BC Papers.

<sup>211</sup> Santillan, “Partido de la Raza Unida,” *El Obrero*, October 31, 1972.



like Los Angeles. Corona sought to reconcile the old Mexican-American Association with the new *Chicanismo* of the 1970s. In Corona's mind, the political and legal influence of MAPA would help LRU form labor unions and defend Chicanos against employer layoffs, abuses and discrimination:

MAPA can, by being part of La Raza Unida Party, help to establish and carry out the maximum Chicano political control of local governments whenever possible and establish and carry out the maximum bargaining power for Chicanos against the political and government structures in this nation.<sup>212</sup>

As laid out in the last chapter, the Western Hemisphere ceiling on immigration led to a 1970s increase in undocumented immigration. 1971 marked a new era of discriminatory immigration laws, both at the national and state level, which all called for employer sanctions to prevent the hiring of undocumented immigrants. After the passage of the Dixon Arnett Bill, California Chicanos completely broke away from the mainstream, two- party system. Under this law, any employer to knowingly hire an undocumented immigrant and deny a job to a "legal" resident of California would be subject to a \$500 fine. At the same time, the United Farm Workers were in the midst of the "Salad Bowl" strike of lettuce in the Salinas Valley. To protect their new strike effort, the UFW maintained their pointed stance against the hiring of undocumented immigrants and quietly backed Dixon- Arnett. La Raza Unida Party used the Dixon- Arnett Bill as a rallying point to proclaim the new Chicano position against divisionism, which places blame on U.S. imperialism in Mexico and not the "scabs":

The effect of this imperialistic raping of Mexico is the intentional level of underdevelopment in which Mexico is kept by the U.S. in order to keep

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.,

her from producing her own products, thus creating mass unemployment and driving our brothers northward in search of jobs only to be exploited, degraded, and pitted against Chicanos in the old capitalist game of divide and conquer.<sup>213</sup>

MAPA recognized the danger of immigration laws that discriminated based on color and radically changed their position during the California assembly's debate on the Arnett Bill. In late 1971, the California president of MAPA, Armando Rodríguez, publicly expressed his disapproval of all legislation that harassed Mexican-Americans, whether they held legal, illegal, or citizenship status.<sup>214</sup> With the birth of La Raza Unida, concepts of identity within the Chicano community expanded and accommodated a greater number of people. In 1973, the president of La Raza Unida, José Angel Gutiérrez spoke to this transformation, observing how "Many Chicanos—or North Americans of Mexican origin—who do not have their papers properly in order are often detained, and sentence to deportation, fines and prison."<sup>215</sup>

LRUP used the new ideology of *Chicanismo*<sup>216</sup> as the rallying point for the coalition against the Dixon-Arnett bill. *Chicanismo* brought together the 1970s Mexican community and Chicano status was extended to all Mexicans in the United States, regardless of whether they had their papers yet. At the *Mi Raza Primero* conference in

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<sup>213</sup> "Dixon Arnett and the Role of La Raza Unida Party," *El Obrero*, 1971, Box 8, Folder 6, BC Papers.

<sup>214</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 195.

<sup>215</sup> Fausto Fernández Ponte, "Al Bracero se le Veja en México Como en EU: el Líder de la 'Raza Unida'," April 4, 1973, Box 5, Folder 4, BC Papers.

<sup>216</sup> Early on, the term "Chicano" was a euphemistic alternative for individuals of Mexican ancestry born in U.S. The Chicano movement, which began to take root in 1966, mobilized around the eclectic ideology of *Chicanismo*, which according to Alfredo Cuéllar, sought to "reconstruct the Mexican Americans' concept of themselves by appeals to pride of a common history, culture, and race."

Alfredo Cuéllar, "Perspective on Politics," in *The Changing Mexican-American: A Reader* ed. Rudolph Gomez (1970), 205.

1972 in Muskegon, Michigan, Bert Corona synthesized the overarching racial effect of the Dixon- Arnett Bill on thousands of Chicanos in California:

Now the patron calls all the *Mexicano* workers together and says ‘Look I don’t know which of you is legal or illegal. I want every Mexican worker to show her or his birth certificate or green card. And then what happens to the person who doesn’t have one, who was born, say, in Texas? In many of the counties in Texas there are no records.’<sup>217</sup>

While Bracero program had its many faults, the program forced legislators and the wider migrant labor community to make distinctions between Braceros, “wetbacks,” commuter aliens, green-card workers, or otherwise. Through restrictive legislation, like the Dixon-Arnett Bill, legislators erased these carefully drawn lines and encouraged employers to view all persons of Mexican descent as one, homogenous population. This change in immigration policy forced Mexican-Americans look past citizenship barriers and accept an identity of one cosmic race united under the vision of Aztlán.

Based on past cases in the Great Depression Era, Bert Corona and Soledad Alatorre of CASA understood that the looming economic crisis would encourage nativist elements to scapegoat immigrant workers as the cause of unemployment and, by association, Mexican-Americans. Corona and Alatorre’s fears turned into a reality and the overused argument that immigrants steal jobs from American workers rose from the ashes. With CASA, Corona and Alatorre worked to counter rumors about the “silent invasion” of illegal immigrants who spread disease and unemployment. In 1971, Paul Montgomery of the *New York Times* warned the public of this invasion:

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<sup>217</sup> Bert Corona, “La Raza Unida Party and the Illegal Alien Scare,” January 22, 1972, Box 8, Folder 6, BC Papers.

They come on the commercial jet from Bogota, nervous and silent among the tourists, they come stuffed three together in the truck of a Mexicali smuggler's sedan... The influx of illegal aliens has many social and economic ramifications. Although employers argue that the aliens do necessary jobs that Americans would not take, it is apparent that in some areas—farm work in California, for example—the braceros compete directly with American labor and are a significant factor in unemployment.<sup>218</sup>

To a certain extent, media dissemination of paranoia prompted the INS to carry out a series of neighborhood sweeps in the Southwest in 1972 and 1973.<sup>219</sup>

As state and national legislatures adopted restrictionist policies, labor unions could no longer push bill, like the California Labor Relations Act, through legislatures. Also, previous farmworkers unions attempted to seamlessly incorporate Mexican immigrants into union activities and did not differentiate between immigrant and domestic members. In the 1970s era of restrictionism, organizations like CASA were better fit to address the needs of domestic and foreign workers. After Bert Corona harnessed the political support of MAPA, CASA was better able to adopt on a community-based strategy. Members of CASA, especially students, worked in Los Angeles and surrounding communities to amend the divisions that governed social and work relations in the agricultural and industrial spheres. One of CASA's main strategies involved the educational outreach and involvement of immigrants in the ongoing campaign for workers' rights.

After California's Dixon- Arnett Bill, undocumented immigration continued to rise and restrictionism rose to the national arena. Early in 1972, an immigration subcommittee, headed by Democratic congressman of New Jersey, Peter Rodino,

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<sup>218</sup> Paul L. Montgomery, "Illegal Aliens Pose Ever- Deepening Crisis," *New York Times*, October 17, 1971.

<sup>219</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 188-189.

proposed a series of restrictionist recommendations to the Judiciary Subcommittee.<sup>220</sup> Known as the “Rodino Bill,” these recommendations aimed to fine employers who hire undocumented immigrants. As federal legislation, the effects of Rodino Bill would extend beyond the Southwest region and take a nationwide toll on all Spanish “speaking or looking” persons. Upon the introduction of the Rodino Bill, CASA organizers jumped into action and launched an involved national campaign that united immigrant and Mexican-American workers.

The next year, Representative Joshua Eilberg<sup>221</sup> introduced HR 981, which built upon the restrictions enacted by Hart-Celler in 1965. Passed by the house in December, but defeated in Senate, the bill attempted to deny immigrant visas to the parents of citizen minors and reduce *specifically Mexican* immigration to 20,000. The Eilberg Bill was the first overt legislative attempt on the part of national legislators to cut off Mexican immigration. This direct attack upon Mexican immigrants convinced Chicano organizers of the urgent need for greater Latin-American solidarity. To recruit more allies in their crusade, CASA organized a national immigration conference of unions and Chicano rights groups. Realizing the need for a council well versed in immigration law, conference participants formed the National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices.<sup>222</sup> Throughout the 1970s, this coalition educated Chicanos on their shared heritage with Mexican immigrants and informed the wider public on the Mexican-American community’s revised position on immigration reform. In the winter of 1973,

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<sup>220</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 189.

<sup>221</sup> Joshua Eilberg was a Pennsylvania member of the House of Representatives and chair of the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization

<sup>222</sup> History of CASA, 4, 1978, Box 29, Folder 8, BC Papers.

the coalition implored Chicanos and unions to take action against attempts by Nixon administration, which “would place in doubt every Latin-American and Spanish-speaking or ‘looking’ worker thus leading to a greater intensification of the injustices caused by our immigration laws and practice... on and off the job.”<sup>223</sup> CASA and La Raza Unida’s campaign against the Rodino Bill spread endured for three years and was ultimately defeated in the bill in 1975.<sup>224</sup> Though the Rodino Bill never went into effect, many employers took preemptive measures to protect themselves against legal repercussions and fired all both documented and undocumented Latin-American employees. The National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices assessed the failed bill’s lasting effect on the entire Spanish speaking and “looking” community:

Even before it became law, **employers began to fire or question many workers of brown skin, no matter what credentials were displayed.** Many others extracted a deposit of from \$300 to \$500 from each employee who was working or who wanted to work so as to offset any future fine. Now, Cesar Chavez, of the United Farmworkers Union, AFL- CIO, and many other unions oppose this law.<sup>225</sup>

After the massive uprising in opposition to the Dixon Arnett Bill, the young Chicano movement began to lose momentum and some Mexican-American organizations became enticed by the monetary and political power of the UFW, Teamsters, and AFL-CIO. CASA took on the difficult task of accruing the support of Chavez’s farm workers union, which worked against efforts towards a United Chicano front. In 1974, Bert

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<sup>223</sup> “A Call for action against Nixon’s anti-labor, racist, and unfair immigration policies, practices, and legislation,” National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices, December 1973, Box 25, Folder 4, BC Papers.

<sup>224</sup> Between 1972-1975, Rodino made two attempts to pass his bill. In 1973, the House of Representatives passed HR 982 (Rodino’s first attempt at passing the bill), but Senate voted the measure down.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.,

Corona warned the National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices to maintain their inclusive and unified vision for *Chicanismo*:

When we ask for the deportation of all the workers that have no visas, we are attacking many good union brothers and sisters that have no visas but would never break a strike... Thus, call on the U.S. Immigration is to fall into the bosses' trap of pitting workers against workers on the basis of immigration status under an oppressive law which was put on the books by the very group of Nixon- type of Watergaters in 1952.<sup>226</sup>

In 1975, Peter Rodino made a last attempt to outlaw the hiring of undocumented immigrants and introduced HR 8713 to Congress, which mirrored the 1973 version of the Rodino Bill. Supporters of the revitalized 1975 bill advised the INS enact an ID card system for immigrants, which brought on new debates regarding the constitutional rights of all citizens. Now, restrictionist immigration reform threatened to infringe upon the rights of non-Latino citizens and nationally recognized organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union stepped in and lent their support to CASA and other Mexican-American legal associations. CASA rebuked the ID card proposal as unconstitutional and self-incriminating for all Americans, since “once the rights of foreigners are repressed, the rights of the entire population are endangered.”<sup>227</sup>

In 1973, the Southern California ACLU, in conjunction with MALDEF (the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) filed a law suit against the INS for the “indiscriminate and unconstitutional arrests and deportations of persons of Latin American appearance, including American citizens and legal residents who by virtue of

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<sup>226</sup> Corona, CASA Letter to the National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices, July 20, 1974, Box 29, Folder 7, BC Papers.

<sup>227</sup> CASA Roster on HR8713, Box 5, Folder 13, BC Papers.

appearance, have been and continue to be subject to arrest without probable cause.”<sup>228</sup> In subsequent years, restrictionist lawmakers continued to push for national identification cards and ACLU organizations lashed out in opposition of legislation that “so seriously compromises the right to privacy and freedom of movement that it is an unacceptable price to pay for the attempt to solve an immigration problem.”<sup>229</sup> The ACLU was also not the sole nationally recognized organization to dispute the discrimination of “Latin-looking” peoples. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Amalgamated Meat-Cutters and Butchers, United Auto Workers, and International Longshore and Warehouse Union foresaw the potential threat that restrictionist immigration laws posed to non-Mexicans and joined the anti-Rodino drive.<sup>230</sup>

Mexican-American student coalitions remained loyal to the solidarity efforts of CASA and politicized campus populations (especially in the Southwest) against the Rodino Bill. In 1974, Estudiantes Campesinos Trabajadores (the student outpost of CASA) began a National Campaign in Solidarity with Immigrant Workers. A large contingent of CASA student members opted out of the demonstration and field strike strategies of the UFW. These young Chicanos affected change through legal rights classes and legal services, immigration services, English classes, organizing workers with union problems, and mediating films and speakers at weekly meetings.<sup>231</sup> Chicano youth, however, did not limit themselves to the campus setting. Groups like the Movimiento

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<sup>228</sup> ACLU of Southern California News Release, “ACLU Sues Immigration and Naturalization Service,” June 1973, Box 27, Folder 14, BC Papers.

<sup>229</sup> ACLUSC “Report of the Committee on Immigration Policy to the Board of Directors,” July 28, 1977, Box 27, Folder 13, BC Papers.

<sup>230</sup> Trade Union Resolution on Unfair Immigration Laws and Practices that Divide and Weaken All Workers, 1974, Box 25, Folder 5, BC Papers.

<sup>231</sup> CASA Pamphlet to the Estudiantes Campesinos Trabajadores, 1974, Box 29, Folder 4, BC Papers.



Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán became actively involved in local community efforts to block the legislation. In the coalition against the Rodino Bill, CASA harnessed the public protest and demonstration strategies of the UFW and rebranded them to work for greater unification with immigrants. On November 22, 1975 the National Coalition Against the Rodino Bill organized a march in East Los Angeles. Here, some 800 members of M.E.C.H.A. flooded to the barrios and marched alongside Mexican-American and undocumented workers.<sup>232</sup>

As Mexican-Americans channeled their energies into forming bonds with Mexican and Latin American immigrants, violent and interracial tensions broke out in working class neighborhoods between Chicano and African- American workers. Booker Griffin, a black community activist, criticized Chicano workers as “alien encroachers” upon black neighborhoods. Griffin encouraged divisionism between blacks and Chicanos in working class neighborhoods and warned the black community, “Industrial jobs in the heart of the black community are being overrun by Chicanos when blacks who live within walking distance are denied jobs. These Chicanos, many of whom are not citizens of this country, are infiltrating our neighborhoods and overloading our schools.”<sup>233</sup> Mexican-American community groups MALDEF, CASA, LRUP encouraged unification with black movements.

The heightened tensions between the Los Angeles “barrios” of Chicanos and the “ghettos” of blacks threatened to renew divisions within working class community and

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<sup>232</sup> “800 March Against the Rodino Bill,” *Prensa Estudiantil* of M.E.C.H.A. Cal State, November 1975, Box 8, Folder 2, BC Papers.

<sup>233</sup> Booker Griffin, “Black- Chicano Cooperation Termed One- Sided Ripoff,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 31, 1974, Box 20, Folder 1, BC Papers.

destroy the new and fragile unanimity between immigrants and Mexican-Americans. To overpower restrictionism in California State and national legislatures, CASA needed the support of California's entire working class community in the national campaign against the Rodino legislation:

Even if you organize the entire Mexican and Latin American community in this country, it would only involve some 15 to 18 million people. This is not enough to prevent the enactment of the Rodino Bill. We need the support of workers of all races, specifically and primarily of white workers in the unions and of black workers in and out of the unions.<sup>234</sup>

As the restrictionist legislation of the seventies impinged the rights of all non- white citizens, Mexican-American movements encouraged unity between all minority workers. 1975 marked the Chicano community's first steps towards establishing a cooperative relationship between black workers and Mexican-American workers. In 1975, there were 11 isolated incidences of violence against Chicanos by Black citizens in various LA neighborhoods. The LA-based Chicano Ad Hoc Committee concluded that these hostilities were more a result of cultural misunderstanding and frustration with poverty than "a conscious effort to attack Chicanos by Blacks."<sup>235</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee extended the following invitation to leaders within Los Angeles' black community:

Brotherhood, between Black and Brown Americans, is a goal to which we are working towards in our Mexican American community, but this co-existence can only come out by a mutual misunderstanding of each others problems, and a willingness to see just and equitable programs implemented in their solution.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> "Corona Hits Rodino- Kennedy Bill- Why all workers should oppose illegal alien laws," CASA newsletter, Box 29, Folder 12, BC Papers.

<sup>235</sup> Letter from the Chicano Ad Hoc Committee On Black Violence, 1975, Box 26, Folder 5, CASA Records.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.,

Regardless of CASA and La Raza Unida's sustained efforts to unite the Spanish-speaking community, many older Mexican-Americans remained less amicable to Mexican immigrants and sustained LULAC's nationalistic philosophy throughout 1970s. The Rodino heated conflict brought forth the other end of the spectrum in Chicano immigration thought. By 1975, many Chicanos felt unwelcomed by immigrants in the Southwest. One Chicano citizen pinpointed the primary source of resentment for many Mexican-Americans: They "stand out like sore thumbs in areas where there are no Chicanos...so they come here, where they can blend in with at least part of the population."<sup>237</sup> Magallanes stated that he was not ashamed of his Chicano identity, but considered himself first and foremost an American: "I sympathize with their [immigrants] problem, but first, I sympathize with my family and families of many like me."<sup>238</sup>

Up until 1975, the United Farm Workers of César Chavez quietly supported the views of the old generation of Mexican-Americans. In 1975, CASA made a final plea to the UFW to denounce their racist and divisionist position against undocumented workers and join the overwhelming Chicano coalition against growers:

Brother of the U.F.W.A, your family who comes from Mexico does not bring venereal disease; defend the Mexican woman with dignity and respect, you are a child of that great woman, the Mexican woman... You, brother Farmworker, have in your hands and voice, and in your actions, to put a stop to this divisionist policy and unite with all the working class to struggle for the democratic and human rights of ALL workers. An injury to one is an injury to all!<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Alfred C. Magallanes, "The Illegal Alien: A Chicanos Point of View," Letters to the Editor, April 1975, Box 26, Folder 15, BC Papers.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>239</sup> CASA Flyer, "To Farmworkers Members of the U.F.W.A.- All Workers in General to the American People," 1975, Box 27, Folder 1, BC Papers.

The 1975 Rodino Bill presented a national threat to Mexican-Americans, so the UFW gradually began to give in to looser immigration reform. Chavez accepted that a domestic worker focused trade union strategy did not correspond with the current restrictionist climate. In 1975, after a decade long crusade against undocumented workers, Chavez opened his eyes to the harmful reality of his anti-immigrant platform and called for unity amongst Blacks, Mexican, Filipinos, Whites, and all workers, “whether they be citizens or immigrants.”<sup>240</sup> For the first time, Chavez publically concurred with the position of LRUP, CASA, and local community Chicano organizations: the similar origins, difficulties, and experiences of Mexican-Americans and immigrants far exceeded their differences. Chavez’s commitment to “correcting our errors and overcoming the divisiveness of the past”<sup>241</sup> appeared to mark a new epoch of unrestrained unification for the Chicano movement.

César Chavez and the United Farm Workers’ path to unwavering immigrant acceptance, however, passed through periods of affirmation and doubt far into the late 1970s. The UFW’s ten-year alliance with the AFL-CIO inhibited the union’s ability to completely sever ties with the immense anti-immigrant bloc in state legislatures and national legislatures. In 1977, the Carter administration made one last attempt at immigrant restriction and introduced a four-point plan to “solve” the immigrant problem. This solution entailed a \$1000 fine on employers of illegal aliens, a \$100 million budget increase to the Border Patrol, amnesty provisions *only* for undocumented immigrants who

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<sup>240</sup> “An Open Letter to Farm Workers from César Chavez,” *El Malcriado Leaflet Series*, No. 11, July 7, 1975, Box 14, Folder 7, BC Papers.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*,

could prove 7 years of residency, and an aid package aimed at controlling population growth to prevent further immigration.<sup>242</sup> CASA and La Raza Unida Party took a definitive stance against the Immigration Plan, but the AFL- CIO tendered a sympathetic outlook on Carter's new restrictions. Two short years after Cesar Chavez made his landmark pledge for citizen and undocumented solidarity, the AFL- CIO's support for the Carter immigration bill tested the resolve of the United Farm Workers and threatened to reopen the recently healed partitions between Mexican-American labor unions and the new Chicano community.

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<sup>242</sup> Ed McCaughan and Peter Baird, "Immigration Plan- for People or Profit," 1977 Paper by the North American Congress in Latin- America, Box 13, Folder 7, BC Papers.

### Conclusion

In 1974, Marisa de los Andes, a Mexican resident of San José wrote a poem directed to the United States Immigration Officer:

Immigration Officer...  
 Listen...reflect...understand,  
 immigration officer.  
*Why* did I *have* to leave my sun, my plains, my mountains  
 and come to this nation,  
 where for little reason, you imprison me,  
 hammer away at my dignity,  
 insult *la raza mia*,  
 and my nationality is attacked by  
 your hunting packs  
 because of the discrimination  
 advanced from day to day  
 in the U.S. Immigration Service.  
 In the balance of time, this is also my nation  
 a nation full of other people also in search of liberation.  
*For Mr. Corona, the persevering and persistent voice of those who suffer  
 away from their home in Mexico.*<sup>243</sup>

Though Andes addressed this letter to the INS, the indiscriminate, invasive, and color-biased reality of 1970s immigration situation described above also entreated American citizens of Mexican and Latin-American descent to listen, to reflect upon, and to understand their relationship with Mexican immigrants. The political, social, economic, and ethnic inequality of Mexican-Americans commenced in 1848, when the

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<sup>243</sup> Marisa de los Andes, "Agente de Inmigración," 1974, Folder 16, Box 25, BC Papers.

United States government half-heartedly naturalized thousands of the Mexican inhabitants in the annexed territories. From the very beginning, Mexican-Americans suffered the same plight as immigrants to the United States. The question, then, remains: *How* and *why* did Mexican-Americans choose to push aside the entrenched prejudices in the 1970s and work towards Spanish-speaking solidarity? This process did not happen overnight nor did emerge out of nowhere in 1970, when the proponents of restrictionist immigration turned their gaze to the Latin- American population and deported *mojados*, *alambristas*, *los de tarjeta verde* [green-card], *Chicanos*, *Tejanos*, and *Latinos* alike. The tumultuous road towards a unified Mexican ethnic identity began in 1942, when the United States scrambled to meet wartime food needs and “Uncle Sam began to look around for friends who could help us out. His eyes turned southward and soon we began to hear that citizens of Mexico were going to come across the borders to be of assistance.”<sup>244</sup>

In some ways, the “Bracero solution” to World War II agricultural and labor demand turned out to be a solution for the identity struggle of Mexican-American inhabitants in the Southwest. The Mexican-American, Feliciano Ordoñez, stated that he learned “una lengua diferente”<sup>245</sup> from the Braceros. In the end, though, the Braceros contributed to something much greater than “the development of the Spanish language in California.”<sup>246</sup> *Las manos* [hands] de los Braceros harvested the fields of the Southwest and assisted in the foundations of the modern Chicano movement. Chicano historians are

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<sup>244</sup> “Freedom for Whom? Our Guests from Mexico,” produced by Mrs. Charles B. Kinney, November 8, 1944, Box 17, Folder 8, Galarza Papers.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Feliciano Ordoñez, Phoenix, AZ, January 9, 2007, Bracero History Archive.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*,

correct in their assertion that the Mexican-American labor and civil rights movements of the 1930s and World War II years served as the precursor to the modern Chicano movement. But, why did movements like the NAWU and LULAC not arise until the 1930s and World War II years? The answer was, the Braceros.

The Bracero Program of World War II proved to be both a blessing and a curse for the Mexican-American inhabitants of the Southwest. The Wartime Bracero Program brought 150,000 Mexican workers into the Southwest and awakened Mexican-American consciousness to their shared struggle for ethnic and labor rights. The studies that mention the participation of Braceros in unions do so as a side note. On the contrary, the Bracero workers of the wartime era cemented the Mexican consciousness of the National Agricultural Workers Union and worked towards equitable working conditions for all farm laborers.

In 1960, a California resident, Pauline Capell, spoke about her perception of the program in a letter to the Secretary of Labor: “Have you ever seen the way they are taken to work? The trucks should be condemned. The farmers to whom they belong wouldn’t haul their cattle in anything that bad.”<sup>247</sup> The post war Bracero Program described by Capell was the one most well remembered by historians and non-Mexican inhabitants of the Southwest. The Post-War Bracero Program, however, cannot be held as representative of the Bracero Program, the Braceros themselves, or the Mexican-Americans who reached out to Mexican Nationals in the interest of greater ethnic inclusivity. Later on, labor unions rallied around the Bracero institution and called for its

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<sup>247</sup> Constituent Letter from Pauline Capell to Secretary of Labor James Mitchell, August 11, 1960, Container 14, RG 174.



termination. Without a Bracero Program to protest or accounts of Bracero workers to publicize as victims of agro-industrial exploitation, would Ernesto Galarza have been able to organize the most sophisticated Mexican-American labor union of his time?

The Bracero inspired ethnic organizing of the NAWU fashioned a model for César Chavez to found the ethnically focused United Farm Workers. Overlooking the contradictory policy and faults of the UFW, Chavez reinvented the Mexican-American farm workers movement and enlightened Americans around the nation to the farm workers struggle in a way accomplished by no man before him. Not all Chavez's ideas, however, worked towards the benefit of the Mexican-American community and with the rise of restrictionist immigration, the strategies of the UFW became outdated.

Once again, the new Chicano movement that replaced Chavez drew upon his ethnic organizing strategies and molded them around the concept of a unified "raza." La Raza Unida incorporated Mexican Nationals on a level incomparable to the 1940s and 1950s strides in solidarity made by Galarza. However, the Bracero era panorama of immigration policy was not as somber for Mexican-Americans. The collaborative steps taken by Ernesto Galarza, Mexican-American members of the NAWU, and los Braceros satisfied contemporary needs. Following the Bracero era, the same debates in the Mexican-American community arose from *mojado* migration. After the era of *mojado* migration, the invasive nature of immigration helped Mexican-Americans solidify an ethnic identity. This was the modern Chicano movement. Over the course of a 40-year journey beginning with the Bracero, continuing with the *Mojado*, and ending with the

Chicano, the intertwined struggles for farm labor rights and immigration rights reached a 1970s meeting point of Spanish-speaking solidarity.

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