

Archived thesis/research paper/faculty publication from the University of North Carolina at Asheville's NC DOCKS Institutional Repository: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/unca/>

University of North Carolina at Asheville

“They call him Bracero...”

The Quest for Economic Stability through the Bracero Program

A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in History

Submitted by  
Candice Workman  
April 15, 2016

Come labor for your mother, your father, and your brother  
For your sister, and your lover, bracero  
Come pick the fruit of yellow, break the flower from the berry  
Purple grapes will find your belly, bracero  
Oh, Welcome to California  
Where the friendly farmer will take care of you...<sup>1</sup>

In 1942 the promises set forth by the Bracero Program appeared like paradise in comparison to the conditions in Mexico. For many poor farm workers in Mexico it was their best opportunity at achieving economic independence and those who decided to engage in this upward economic mobility were known as Braceros. The term Bracero stems from the Spanish word for arm, *brazo*, and directly relates to manual labor. The men that were attracted to the program knew how to work with their hands because the majority were farmers. These men were also desperate for change and security in many aspects, but most importantly, a financial one.

Among reasons why men were so desperate to join the Bracero Program was because of events such as the Mexican Revolution and the Great Depression. The Mexican Revolution between 1910-1920 completely decimated the country. The estimated death toll in the ten year period is vague but was anywhere from 1 to 2 million.<sup>2</sup> Presidents and other government officials were often assassinated leaving little improvement in reform and infrastructure was left deteriorating. This period was followed by the Great Depression, Mexico remained an economic wasteland. Regular citizens were often the ones who suffered most while the country continued to fall behind the rest of the industrial world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Phil Ochs, *Bracero*, Elektra Records, 1966, Accessed January 5, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrmNDZNmxIk&list=RDNrNDZNmxIk>  
[http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/Phil\\_Ochs:Bracero](http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/Phil_Ochs:Bracero)

<sup>2</sup> Robert McCaa, "Missing Millions: The Demographic Costs of the Mexican Revolution," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 367-400, Accessed January 12, 2016.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/msem.2003.19.2.367>.

After the December 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United States' entrance into World War II in both the Pacific and European fronts, Mexico, also declared war on Germany. The major issue that Mexico faced with their involvement in World War II was the risk of a physical conflict. The United States offered an outlet of support which essentially prevented Mexico getting involved in the war militarily but still allowed them to help with the Allied War Effort. Since many American men went to fight overseas the farm industry was in a bind. They were ready for harvest but no one was left to pick the crops. The United States sent officials to Mexico City to negotiate a plan for Mexico to provide labor to farmlands in the United States. The Mexican government agreed to this proposition but not without stipulations.<sup>3</sup> The agreement became known as the Bracero Program.

The Mexican government expressed reservations with the agreement due to the uncertainty of treatment towards the braceros. Jim Crow laws were in place in much of the South so Mexico was reluctant to send braceros to work there. Animosity lingered between Mexico and Texas for various reasons this essentially caused a major delay in Texas receiving braceros, making it until 1947 before the first braceros would arrive in that state.<sup>4</sup> In the official agreement Mexico said the employers of braceros would have to provide adequate housing, medical treatment, insurance, and fair wages, and they should never be forced to face discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Any violation of this would give Mexico the right to investigate the situation and pull braceros from those places.

Out of the 31 Mexican states all of them sent braceros to work in the United States. The states of Jalisco, Durango, Guanajuato, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas would send

---

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Bracero: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill, : University of North Carolina Press, 2011): 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer R. Najera, "An Accommodated Form of Segregation," *The Borderlands of Race: Mexican Segregation in a South Texas Town* (Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press, 2015): 83-106.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, 21-28.

the majority of braceros and in the United States 32 out of the 48 states would receive braceros.<sup>6</sup> The six majority sending states flow through the center of the country and are some of the larger states in Mexico (Appendix 1). The northern states of Chihuahua and Coahuila also sent many braceros who would work in the railroad construction portion of the program and also provide an example of what braceros did with their income from the United States. These big sender states are not analyzed for a complete view of the bracero experience. For Mexico this was a quest to reach modernity and to have a viable workforce fit for the world stage. But for the braceros themselves it was about reaching economic stability with the perk of serving their country in the war against the Axis Powers.

While there were provisions set up to protect braceros from exploitation, many of these were tossed aside before they could even leave Mexico. Despite hardships these push and pull factors did not stop them from seeking economic independence. The single most important personal motivator for the individual bracero was to earn money and be financially stable. In return this established a cyclical migration due to the potential for upward economic mobility.

In the time since the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 several narratives have been constructed to both preserve the heritage of the program and demean the basis on which it was founded. Two of the greater themes within these narratives are economics and immigration. These two narratives go hand in hand in that the economics behind the program increased the incidence of cyclical immigration and further settlement into the United States. Many braceros eventually did settle in the United States and it was the economics that increased their chances of staying.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ruben J. Garcia, "Labor as Property: Guestworkers at the Margins of Domestic Legal Systems," *Marginal Workers: How Legal Fault Lines Divide Workers and Leave Them Without Protection* (New York City, NY, NYU Press, 2012).

In Deborah Cohen's book, *Bracero: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*<sup>7</sup>, she analyzes the program in many different aspects, including economics, race relations, immigration, politics, identity, and discrimination. Cohen argues the braceros were actors on a greater stage of transnational politics who did have agency and Mexico looked to the braceros as the key of modernization. Cohen focuses on braceros from the Mexican state Durango and where they ended up, mostly California and areas of the American Southwest, with a considerable number of them returning to Mexico. Cohen's book is divided into three parts which can be summed up by at least eight themes. Cohen details the struggles Mexicans faced in joining the program, which started in their community and lead them into the border processing centers which greatly affected their identity in numerous ways. By the end of her book Cohen offers one question on whether the program was about exploitation or opportunity. There was definite exploitation and discrimination within the program but it was also a great opportunity that pushed Mexico forward on the world stage.

“The Long-term Consequences of a Temporary Worker Program: The US Bracero Experience” is an article from *Population Research and Policy Review*.<sup>8</sup> Authors Douglas S. Massey and Zai Liang give many reasons how a temporary worker can affect large scale immigration. Massey and Liang directly correlate the Bracero Program of the ‘40s and ‘50s to increased immigration, both legal and illegal, in the ‘70s and ‘80s. They reveal that the process of cyclical immigration occurs after a behavior pattern is established when guest workers go abroad and come back home and share their experiences with family and friends. In return this experience piques the interest of those in the native land which ultimately inspired them to take

---

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, see footnote 3 for full citation.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Zai Liang, "The Long-term Consequences of a Temporary Worker Program: The US Bracero Experience," *Population Research and Policy Review* 8, no. 3 (1989): 199-226 (Accessed October 20, 2015) <http://0-www.jstor.org.wncln.wncln.org/stable/40229907>.

part in working abroad. Not only is a behavior pattern established but also a perception of upward economic mobility. After long exposures working abroad guest workers' motivations change from gaining financial independence to becoming more inclined towards materialism. Therefore, a cycle is also established to improve one's status as well as being able to purchase more material possessions. Massey and Liang also discuss how the cycle creates a greater tie between the guest worker and the place in which they are working called settler mentality, meaning relationships are built and they become comfortable in the no longer new environment.

Neil Foley is the author of *Mexicans in the Making of America*<sup>9</sup> and within his book he describes the various roles Mexicans played in shaping the United States. Everything from the Mexican-American War to the current immigration situation is covered and he offers a fantastic chapter on Operation Wetback. Foley's chapter "Braceros and the 'Wetback' Invasion" covers the 1950s in which the United States government directed the deportation of over a million undocumented workers under Operation Wetback. Foley argues this government intervention increased discrimination and animosity among white Americans towards braceros and Mexican Americans. Foley focuses on the discrimination issues and the battle braceros fought in order to receive proper wages, housing, and healthcare. Framing the role of discrimination within the Bracero Program and the risks of being an undocumented worker offers insight on the push and pull factors of the program and also brings up questioning on why people continued to return despite facing discrimination.

In a section from Ruben Garcia's *Marginal Workers: How Legal Fault Lines Divide Workers and Leave Them Without Protection*<sup>10</sup> Garcia focuses on the exploitation of those involved in the Bracero Program and suggests them to be victims. In the section "Labor as

---

<sup>9</sup> Neil Foley, "Braceros and the "Wetback" Invasion," *Mexicans in the Making of America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2014): 123-147.

<sup>10</sup> Garcia, see footnote 6 for full citation.

Property: Guestworkers at the Margins of Domestic Legal Systems” Garcia makes the claim that braceros were nothing more than a commodity to the United States and that they could easily be exported and imported. He notes 32 out of the 48 states at the time of the program’s establishment were “importing” braceros. Unlike Cohen, Garcia argues that due to the impoverished status of the workers in their home country they had little bargaining power in determining their conditions.

Don Mitchell’s *They Saved the Crops*<sup>11</sup> gives a negative outlook of the Bracero Program. While Mitchell focuses on the braceros working in California he also addresses the many complaints that occurred, most notably the battle of wages. Mitchell argues that while the program may have helped some individuals, the corporations and governments were the true benefactors. Within the book he expresses that the braceros were short handed, despite their heroic attempts to live the “American Dream.”

In the documentary *Harvest of Loneliness*<sup>12</sup>, the program is shown in its most negative light. Often suggested as to be the “Program of Shame” rather than the Bracero Program, the film displays the program as being completely neglected by the governments of Mexico and the United States. The film suggests the program’s demise was a result of the destruction of the Mexican family and that the Catholic Church and labor unions were the biggest help in speaking out against the program.

Lastly, to tie up the discrimination issues of the program, Jennifer Najera uses the example of a southern Texas town, La Feria, to show how braceros, World War II veterans, and Mexican Americans shaped that region’s Civil Rights Movement. She discusses the issue of

---

<sup>11</sup> Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-era California*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*, Directed by Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price, 2010, Youtube, [Https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc).

Texas businesses denying service to Latinos. In her article, “An Accommodated Form of Segregation”<sup>13</sup> Najera uses La Feria as a case study of how discrimination by businesses in the community affected the general outcry of civil rights among Latinos. She begins her article by citing how braceros were not allowed to work in Texas until 1947 due to Mexico blacklisting Texas for their strict Jim Crow laws. After the ban was lifted braceros worked in Texas and also brought a semi-boom to the local economy in La Feria through purchasing goods in the areas in which they worked. Despite all the positive effects braceros were still refused service at some Texas businesses. Najera ultimately focuses on how discrimination affected not only braceros but the communities in which they worked.

Throughout the sources the narratives differ. Cohen suggests the program was exploitative but the opportunity outweighed the negative experiences and *The Harvest of Loneliness* suggests the program was nothing more than neglect and abuse. This adds to the complexity of the program but it is also important to notice who the secondary sources are interviewing and then who they are neglecting to add to their narratives. Much of Cohen’s interviewees come from the Mexican state of Durango, a large state in northern Mexico, and other sources only briefly mention a mix of Mexican states within their interviewees. The other majority states that ran through the heart of Mexico are seldom mentioned and never fully explored. Many of Cohen’s subjects are those who either migrated to the United States or created businesses in Mexico while *The Harvest of Loneliness* takes accounts of former braceros living in small farming communities in Mexico. Every story remains unique but yet many braceros had things in common with one another. One thing they all tend to have in common is the desire to become financially stable. Depending on who tells the story of the braceros and which bracero interviews the author might use reflects the successes or failures of the program. Cohen uses

---

<sup>13</sup> Najera, see footnote 4 for full citation.

Durango but often neglects other big sender states. In order to construct a better understanding of the bracero experience it is best to include other big sender states.

Because the Bracero Program was a bilateral agreement Mexico and the United States many negotiations took place to assure its success. Since the program was an outlet provided mainly in part by the United States as a way for Mexico to help with the Allied war effort it was important for the United States to get what they asked for. For Mexico the program was an answered prayer. Mexico was thrilled to partner with the United States and be seen as a country of heroes and also hoped to receive an economic boom, but they still had reservations. President Avila Camacho wanted to help the most devastated communities so he agreed to the program under certain conditions.

That Mexican workers were to be paid fairly, provided appropriate housing, and should not face any discrimination were just a few of the requests. The United States, whose labor force was either in the Pacific or Europe fighting the war, agreed to their conditions and the first workers began coming in the summer of 1942.<sup>14</sup> While the program was viewed with positivity, the purpose was entirely necessary. Most of the braceros who lived in the poorest communities were the first to sign on. But even though the program was meant to be short term for World War II and end in 1947, it would last for 22 years and officially end in 1964.

In the early years of the Bracero Program only ten percent of the United States labor force was listed as Mexican under the program, this included both the railroad and agricultural workers. In the beginning there were 6,000 spots open with over 10,000 waiting in line to apply.<sup>15</sup> For those seeking to work in the United States one had to be 18 years old, meet physical

---

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, 21-28.

standards, and pass medical exams.<sup>16</sup> This road was a complicated journey for the men involved because the process would always start at home where they would collect letters of recommendation from former employers, local officials, and church leaders to prove their work ethic (Appendix 2).<sup>17</sup> This process was not easy and was often the beginning of the exploitation of braceros. Some men had to pay a steep price for a letter of recommendation because they were in such high demand. Most men, such as Pedro Carmona Vera had to use what little savings they had to pay these ‘bribes’ in order to receive their letters of recommendation.<sup>18</sup>

After local leaders created a list of approved men they would travel to a processing center where they would have to pass a series of tests. Since there were limited spots the process became rigorous, men would have to go through several medical exams before they could even sign a contract. And before they could even have their medical exams braceros would sometimes wait in line for weeks waiting for their names to be called. During those weeks they had no income and some faced starvation. Jose Avecedo reported the horrors he saw by explaining out of desperation some men ate watermelon and banana peels.<sup>19</sup> Exams in Mexico were easy to pass; it was the ones at the border processing centers that men often worried about. After one would pass the exams in Mexico they were sent to another processing center at the border. The method of transporting the large groups of men was by cattle cars on trains. Jesus Rivera Lopez remembers the grueling 12 hour ride to the border and how he stood the whole time.<sup>20</sup> Once they arrived at the border processing centers they would be checked for calluses on their hands in

---

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, 21-28.

<sup>17</sup> “Certificado De Buena Conducta,” J Guadalupe Nava López to Timoteo Flores Soto, July 24, 1957, Tapalpa, Jalisco, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/621> (accessed December 10, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Pedro Carmona Vera, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, May 20, 2006, Item #344, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/344> (accessed October 15, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Jose Ezequiel Avecedo, Interview and translation done by Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Jesus Rivera Lopez, Interview done by Perla Guerrero Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, May 13, 2006, Item #274, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/274> (accessed November 5, 2015).

order to prove their work ethic (Appendix 3).<sup>21</sup> Then the applicants would be passed around by doctors to check for diseases such as tuberculosis and be given various x-rays (Appendix 4).<sup>22</sup> Finally the applicants would be given vaccinations as a preventive measure. Most importantly the braceros were required to be sprayed with DDT on their naked bodies as an acting insecticide and to protect the workers from malaria which completed the medical process (Appendix 5).<sup>23</sup> This process had to be done to every bracero each time they came to work in the United States despite if they had worked there before.

Alberto Gonzalez revealed being treated like an animal and “being floured like bread.”<sup>24</sup> And for Isidoro Ramirez the process was completely humiliating and more embarrassing than anything he had ever faced in Mexico.<sup>25</sup> Some men often thought about turning back to go home but realized the controlled environment they were in gave them no place to go. “They sprayed us like rats, like insects. We left covered in powder,”<sup>26</sup> said Isaias Sanchez. It was only after the DDT was sprayed on the braceros that they could finally sign a worker contract with an employer.

Both small and corporate farms were present at the processing centers and contracts were required to be drawn up in both English and Spanish (Appendix 6).<sup>27</sup> The contract would lay out

---

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Nadel, "An official examines a bracero's hands for calluses during processing at the Monterrey Processing Center, Mexico," Bracero History Archive, Item #1592, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1592> (accessed October 22, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Leonard Nadel, "A bracero receives a chest X-ray during a physical examination at the Hidalgo Processing Center, Texas," Bracero History Archive, Item #1305, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1305> (accessed October 15, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Leonard Nadel, "Braceros were fumigated with DDT while others stand in line at the Hidalgo Processing Center, Texas," Bracero History Archive, Item #3000, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3000> (accessed October 12, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Alberto Montes Gonzalez, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, July 27, 2005, Item #136, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/136> (accessed October 15, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Isidoro Ramirez, Interview done by Steve Velásquez, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, July 13, 2005, Item #142, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/142> (accessed October 8, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Isaias Sanchez, Interview done by Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price, *Harvest of Loneliness*, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> "Contract with Pay Wages Described per Task," Worker Contract to Rodolfo Cruz Figueroa, September 1957, Bracero History Archive, Item #838, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/838> (accessed October 17, 2015).

the guidelines of work and the pay that was to be given. “One stood by the wall and [in] came contractors like going to buy cattle,”<sup>28</sup> remembers Ramirez. Rafael Cortez recalls his experience, “[In] came ranchers, contractors, formed us in a line and choose us like animals.”<sup>29</sup> Both eerily similar quotes provide the demeaning feeling braceros had in the processing centers and yet they continued to come.

Those who were not able to receive letters of recommendation through bribery or pass the medical exams often sought to come to the United States as undocumented labor. These individuals, while not formally recognized by the Bracero Program, were still working alongside braceros on farms. Those undocumented had the same motivations as the legitimate braceros but were often more likely to face discrimination and receive low wages. They could not debate their exploitation because they had no legal standing. Juan de Dios Estrada Lopez comments, “They got fewer wages and often were people not recognized by their government back home.”<sup>30</sup>

The idea of push and pull factors in migration affects the proposed question on why anyone would continue to come work in a place where they felt exploited. For many the biggest was the economic factor, or to put it simply, money. Braceros were searching for financial security through the program and this caused them not to come only once, but multiple times. Despite the program being designed for the unemployed and those most in need, nearly forty-five percent of the first applicants already held jobs in Mexico.<sup>31</sup> The demand became so high that severe restrictions were eventually placed in the 1950s which caused undocumented labor to grow. While braceros left behind poor economic conditions in Mexico, they also left behind

---

<sup>28</sup> Ramirez, Interview.

<sup>29</sup> Rafael Cortez, Interview done by Araceli Esparza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, May 13, 2006, Item #261, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/261> (accessed January 10, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Juan de Dios Estrada Lopez, Interview done by Myrna Parra-Mantilla, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, Item #20, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/20>.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, 22.

families. Jose Orozco, the son of a bracero, remembers the majority of the men in his community leaving, at least seventy percent.<sup>32</sup> Orozco also notes what it felt like to be alone with other children and their mothers but says his father did it out of necessity. “My mother often cried,” Orozco says.<sup>33</sup> Jesus Lopez remembers his father leaving and in return that put him in charge of family affairs. When his father returned Jesus told him that he also wanted to become a bracero, which his father objected to.<sup>34</sup> Alberto Gonzalez recalls how his family often suffered too, it would put a strain on them he recalls. Gonzalez says that was not his only concern though, he often faced discrimination and felt cramped in his living quarters, saying sometimes 300 and up to 1,000 men worked on the farm with him but despite this he continued to return to work in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Gonzalez even admits to coming as a “wet.”<sup>36</sup> The term “wet” or “wetback” referred to illegal crossing of the border and Operation Wetback which occurred in the 1950s where over a million people were deported working on farms.<sup>37</sup>

Out of the 4.6 million contracts issued only 1.4 million Mexicans took part in the program, and this only identifies the documented labor.<sup>38</sup> It means out of the 1.4 million Mexicans who participated in the Bracero Program’s 22 years of existence many of these men and women were making continuous trips into the United States and sometimes bypassing the processing centers and coming undocumented. The risk of coming into the United States as an undocumented laborer was worth it to those bypassing the processing centers. Many also did not feel the need to waste their money on more bribed recommendation letters in order to enlist.

---

<sup>32</sup> Jose L. Orozco, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, May 28, 2005, Item #158, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/158> (accessed January 10, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Orozco, Interview.

<sup>34</sup> Rivera Lopez, Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Gonzalez, Interview.

<sup>36</sup> Gonzalez, Interview.

<sup>37</sup> Foley, 123-147.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, 21.

The risk of coming undocumented during the 1950s was even greater than it was previously because of the nature of Operation Wetback at that time. Operation Wetback was instituted by the United States government in order to preserve the so called status quo. Through the strain of returning soldiers in World War II entering the job market again they would sometimes argue their jobs were unavailable due in part to braceros. The response from the United States government was not to end the program, although the amount of bracero contracts were restricted, but to find the undocumented workers and deport them. Operation Wetback would quickly become infamous and a new threat for braceros. During the period of Operation Wetback roughly a million workers were deported.

Most of these men were undocumented workers but there were some cases of documented braceros who were also deported. In the case of Mary Vargas' father, he was deported, despite being a signed bracero contract, because he was approached by a federal agent and did not have his paperwork on his person.<sup>39</sup> By the end of the program in 1964 the documented immigration was at 1.4 million while the undocumented immigration was at 1.5 million.<sup>40</sup> This pattern was set up by the desperation of those who could not join the Bracero Program legally and also those returning home and spreading positive reviews of the program when it came to its benefits.

Despite the numerous dangers of continuously coming back, whether it be documented or undocumented, the goals outweighed the risk. Braceros began to see the United States as an opportunity provider despite the exploitation that many did face. Many braceros argue there was definite discrimination against them but yet they continued to return home after their contracts and tell their family and friends about their experiences, which tended to be more positive than

---

<sup>39</sup> Mary Vargas, "Un Simple Bracero," Bracero History Archive, Item #3239, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3239> (accessed December 1, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Foley, 123-147.

the actual reality. "When I'm big I'm going to America,"<sup>41</sup> recalls Rafael Cortez from a young age after hearing other braceros returning home to encourage him. Sometimes the braceros did not have to speak at all about their experiences. One could simply look at their neighbors returning home wearing new clothes or teaching a new skill set to realize where they had gained it. Some braceros could return home and show their success by becoming a prominent member in the community and others created businesses. In the case of Leonardo Chavira Carrillo who discusses how he was able to purchase his first car from the money he earned working as a bracero. Among other things he mentions sending his children to private school and buying them extra clothes.<sup>42</sup> It did not take long for whole families to begin applying for not only jobs but legal residence in the United States. According to observations by Massey and Liang just a few return visits to the United States could already establish a behavior pattern of wanting to settle there.<sup>43</sup>

Early on in the history of the Bracero Program the Mexican government wanted to determine the motivations for these men. In research conducted in the late 1940s Luis Fernández del Campo, the director of the Ministry of Labor in Mexico asked 303,054 braceros their reasoning for joining the program. What the Mexican government wanted to hear was an overwhelming desire to modernize the country, what they got was different. Del Campo discovered that 72% joined for better salaries, 14% for personal reasons, 12% for adventure, and 2% to gain new knowledge (Appendix 7).<sup>44</sup> Interestingly other braceros were asked a similar question to which 85% said it was for purely economic reasons.<sup>45</sup> The role of the economy was

---

<sup>41</sup> Cortez, Interview.

<sup>42</sup> Leonardo Chavira Carrillo, Interview done by Veronica Cortez, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, May 20, 2006, Item #350, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/350> (accessed January 20, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Massey and Liang, 99-205.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen, 24.

at the forefront of thought for the Mexican people wanting to join the Bracero Program. For them it was not necessarily about improving Mexico's industry by learning a new skill set or modernizing the country after the devastation of war and economic depression, it was about being able to provide for their families through the American economy, these other things were only perks. Through the oral histories available on the "Bracero History Archive" it is revealed that many braceros eventually settled in the United States. And within Cohen's book it is mentioned that several braceros who decided to remain in their home country became prominent business owners or officials in their towns. And she also suggests the Bracero Program brought modernity and improved everything down to infrastructure to literacy rates, making it a win win for Mexico.<sup>46</sup>

Many braceros, such as Pedro Carmona Vera, coming from the Mexican state of Jalisco noted the change they saw throughout their involvement in the program. He, like many others, had heard about the program from those who had already participated. Vera also admitted to paying the bribes to get his letters of recommendation in order to sign up for the program but one thing he noted different from others was the accidents that claimed the lives of braceros.<sup>47</sup> A fellow bracero died while he was picking dates, another died in an attack from a hate group, but yet Vera continued to come back to the United States to work. He comments that ability to provide for his family, return home, and then sign a new contract a few months later kept him coming back.<sup>48</sup>

"While your muscles beg for mercy, bracero..."<sup>49</sup> sings Phil Ochs and through his lyrics one can imagine the harshness of the labor involved. As the song continues from its original

---

<sup>46</sup> Cohen, 21-28.

<sup>47</sup> Vera, Interview.

<sup>48</sup> Vera, Interview.

<sup>49</sup> Ochs, *Bracero*, song.

paradise type feel the listener can quickly gather that the farm labor was not as easy as it was suggested. In video footage from the *Harvest of Loneliness* the short handled hoe and shovels were shown as being difficult to operate (Appendix 8).<sup>50</sup><sup>51</sup> Many men stooped over for up to 12 hours in the hot blistering sun picking vegetables with these tools (Appendix 9).<sup>52</sup> Leonard Nadel, a photojournalist documenting the Bracero Program shares many images of the daily lives of braceros which offers insight into the type of farm work being done. Nadel not only photographed the work but the housing of the work camps. Many work camps did not provide adequate housing, which was a barrack style that cramped hundreds of men in one area, and many did not provide bathrooms or kitchens, forcing braceros to bathe in ditches and cook over open fires (Appendix 10).<sup>53</sup><sup>54</sup>

Even for Isidoro Ramirez who was asked about his memories being a bracero and if they were positive or negative responded, “Negative, it is to be a slave.”<sup>55</sup> But yet Ramirez continued to come back several times even though in his eyes the program was a system of abuse. He ends his interview with, “It was a system of bribery. One had to pay to get paid. It was never simple to be a bracero.”<sup>56</sup> Early on the fight for fair wages was in the mind of the bracero. The farmers were not allowed to deduct from the pay of the braceros for simple things such as blankets, but they did, and many braceros fought back.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*.

<sup>51</sup> Leonard Nadel, “A bracero stands in a Californian field,” Bracero History Archive, Item #2383, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2383> (accessed October 22, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Leonard Nadel, “A bracero stoops down to do field work in a field in California,” in Bracero History Archive, Item #2257, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2257> (accessed January 20, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Leonard Nadel, “Braceros lie in bed and have a rest in a living quarter of a Californian camp,” Bracero History Archive, Item #2913, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2913> (accessed January 20, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*.

<sup>55</sup> Ramirez, Interview.

<sup>56</sup> Ramirez, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*.

Deductions reduced the amount of money a bracero could send to their family back home. Sending money back was of great importance to braceros. Sara Arrieta, whose father was a bracero early on in the program, recalls not being able to eat at times until her father sent home money.<sup>58</sup> In the beginning of the program sending money back home helped the desperate family members to eat. Faustina Flores says her husband was able to send back several money orders ranging from \$20 to \$30 dollars, but it was a letter he wrote to her in September of 1963 in which he sent home \$200 that truly benefited her.<sup>59</sup> Money orders became very important to the flow of income with \$20 or \$25 dollars being sent home on nearly a monthly basis (Appendix 11).<sup>60</sup> Rafael Cortez says he was able to send \$40-\$60 monthly to his family.<sup>61</sup> Men working in the United States were able to send a portion of their income back to their families and in 1963 Mexico's 3rd ranking source of income was from the braceros sending money back.<sup>62</sup> But it was not only about sending money back home it was increasingly becoming about purchasing power.

Primitivo Bustamante recalls reading letters from his father to his illiterate mother. In those letters Bustamante's father would also send money which his mother used to buy furniture. Bustamante's father would also return with clothes he had bought for the children. "He always came back home happy and with presents,"<sup>63</sup> recalls Bustamante. Providing gifts for one's family upon arrival back home was always a big deal. Faustina Flores remembers her husband Timoteo bringing home a radio as a gift, but ultimately found himself impressed when he seen a

---

<sup>58</sup> Sara Arrieta, Interview done by Alejandra Valles, Translated by Hugo Tomas, Bracero History Archive, January 12, 2008. Item #665, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/665> (accessed December 1, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Timoteo Flores Soto to Faustina Flores, September 30, 1963, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/625> (Accessed January 12, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> "Money Order Receipts," Sent to Francisca Rodriguez from M. Gonzalez, August 28, 1950 & November 15, 1949, Bracero History Archive, Item #1198, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1198> (accessed December 10, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Cortez, Interview.

<sup>62</sup> *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program.*

<sup>63</sup> Primitivo Bustamante, Interview done by Myrna García, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, September 1, 2005, Item #168, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/168> (accessed January 20, 2016).

phone inside a home in Mexico.<sup>64</sup> Communication by letters was the only way for many braceros to remain connected to their families in Mexico but phones and radios were becoming increasingly seen all over Mexico. Those who had phones in their homes tended to be the ones with the best success in the United States. “When they went back they were so proud because they had something to take back with them,”<sup>65</sup> recalls Minerva Cheatum who worked in the processing center at Rio Vista, Texas.

“We sent money to our families in Mexico so they could eat better, dress better, and live better. While we were in the US,”<sup>66</sup> says Ignacio Gomez. But for some braceros they did not let this make them depressed. Many braceros took part in their own materialism by purchasing items or experiences. Juan Lopez said he made “a pretty penny” which was .55 a hour which amounted to \$5.50 for his ten hour work day.<sup>67</sup> Juan also sent money home but for himself he would often go to the local cinema in the United States to watch Mexican movies in Spanish. “I even went on plane rides for \$2, we would fly over the fields.”<sup>68</sup> Leonardo Carrillo who sent a lot of money back home which eventually paid for a car said in the United States he was able to purchase a radio to listen to while he was in the barracks and it even picked up Spanish channels.<sup>69</sup> Within Najera’s article she comments on how braceros who purchased items in the communities they lived in brought an economic boom by buying clothing items such as jeans and hats to kitchen items for cooking at the barracks.<sup>70</sup> Lorenzo Gonzalez was able to purchase his first car, which

---

<sup>64</sup> Faustina Flores, Interview done by Anais Acosta, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, July 27, 2005, Item #139, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/139> (accessed January 10, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Minerva Christine Anne Cheatum, Interview done by Fernanda Carrillo, Bracero History Archive, April 3, 2003. Item #77, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/77> (accessed January 20, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Ignacio Gomez, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, July 28, 2005. Item #156, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/156> (accessed November 7, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Juan de Dios Estrada Lopez, Interview done by Myrna Parra-Mantilla, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, Item #20, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/20> (accessed November 7, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Lopez, Interview.

<sup>69</sup> Carrillo, Interview.

<sup>70</sup> Najera, 83-106.

he would later use to take braceros to work.<sup>71</sup> Cohen also offers how braceros would help the local economy by going out to the bars which eventually lead braceros to mingle with local women.<sup>72</sup>

Felix Avalos told Cohen the women would flock to braceros because they knew they were hard working and had money.<sup>73</sup> This action would eventually cause some braceros to leave their wives and girlfriends in Mexico for relationships they were building in the United States, some of these braceros would also start families with American women, and some would just simply have an affair and return home to their families in Mexico. This made the animosity between local American men and braceros grow even further. But nonetheless the relationships were already established which lead to a greater intertwining with the United States.

For many braceros they could even climb the ladder of work on the farm. Those who knew English would often be placed as supervisors, such as members of Cayetano Ornelas' family. His brother and two sons worked as braceros and he explains how his son Juan was able to gain a better position because he had learned English.<sup>74</sup> Lorenzo Gonzalez also describes how he gained a better position from being a hard worker and learning English which also lead him to earn more money.<sup>75</sup> Ornelas describes how he was able to witness the change in Mexico because he was not a bracero. He says that braceros helped the hacienda of Manuel Doblado grow physically and turned it into a city with infrastructure and the new technologies that were coming

---

<sup>71</sup> Lorenzo Gonzalez, "Bracero Waving from Car," Bracero History Archive, Item #983, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/983> (accessed January 10, 2016).

<sup>72</sup> Cohen, 132-134.

<sup>73</sup> Cohen, 132-134.

<sup>74</sup> Cayetano Loza Ornelas, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Hugo Tomas, Bracero History Archive, July 30, 2007. Item #684, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/684> (accessed January 10, 2016).

<sup>75</sup> Lorenzo Gonzalez, Interview done by Jackie Martinez, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, May 26, 2006, Item # 379, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/379> (accessed November 15, 2015).

into the country.<sup>76</sup> Ornelas' sons also brought home gifts, with radios being a popular gift among braceros.<sup>77</sup>

Audomaro Zepeda states, "Over here your life changed because you earned more money, you could buy more things that you wanted, buy clothes, eat better."<sup>78</sup> For the braceros the experience was life changing and many wanted it to continue. It was something that had never truly been seen among the poor communities in Mexico, for many it was sent by God. Leonardo Carrillo said being a bracero changed his life for the better and sending his children to school was one of the best things he was able to accomplish.<sup>79</sup> It inspired many braceros and their families to eventually fight for this to continue causing some family members to join organizations in order to protect braceros. Labor union involvement increased and the civil rights movement of the 1960s became more heavily involved in the role of braceros in the United States.

Towards the end of the Bracero Program many labor unions were trying to recruit braceros. Some labor unions also claimed that braceros kept the wages down because they would work for lower pay which in return would keep American men from obtaining farm jobs. The Catholic Church also became involved saying the Mexican family was being destroyed. They claimed the destruction came from the fathers being away for too long and that their primary motivation was no longer about helping the family survive but what the father could buy extra for the family.<sup>80</sup> To an extent this was true, Mexicans were now apart of a large capitalist culture and they had more purchasing power than ever before. Purchasing power could be a good thing,

---

<sup>76</sup> Ornelas, Interview.

<sup>77</sup> Ornelas, Interview.

<sup>78</sup> Audómaro Zepeda, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, July 28, 2005, Item #159, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/159> (accessed January 10, 2016).

<sup>79</sup> Carrillo, Interview.

<sup>80</sup> *Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program.*

but in the grand scheme of things too much could be destructive, the Church argued. It was no longer about providing the necessities of life but being able to purchase the latest and greatest. Even with this prevailing thought the majority of Mexicans still had trouble purchasing the basic necessities.

There were many braceros who spoke out in favor of keeping the program open, even the Mexican government was hesitant to let the program end. The United States argued for the program to end by saying it was a great benefit to both Mexico and the United States during its time and even cited the improvement to the Mexican economy as a way to move on.<sup>81</sup> The Bracero Program officially ended in 1964 but that did not stop the labor. Many workers who had been a part of the program were now coming undocumented and some even petitioned to settle in the United States as permanent residents. Framing the role of the bracero program in current immigration issues is important to understand the motivations for Mexicans.

It can not be denied that the program was full of exploitation and discrimination. “It was a time of suffering. I believe that. I don’t wish it on anyone. That’s as much as I can tell you,”<sup>82</sup> says Jose Ezequiel Avecedo. Despite how harsh the program was and seemed to many, it arguably helped Mexico. Mitchell argues that the only true benefactors were the governments of Mexico and the United States but Cohen argues the people also benefitted. Even in a United States document from 1963 they reveal that Mexico had received “spectacular economic growth over the last two decades.”<sup>83</sup> That same document goes on to say manufacturing was becoming a major industry but 53% of the population were still invested in agriculture. Therefore there were

---

<sup>81</sup> “The President’s Trip to Mexico,” The National Security Archive, June 29 – July 1, 1962, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB124/doc14.pdf> (accessed November 13, 2015): 3.

<sup>82</sup> Avecedo, Interview.

<sup>83</sup> “The President’s Trip to Mexico,” NSA Document, 3.

definite positives with Mexico's economy on a gradual rise and literacy rates also improving that Mexico did consider the Bracero Program as their key to modernity.<sup>84</sup>

While there were many push and pull factors for braceros in the program the positives appeared to outweigh the negatives. Social, political, and economic issues all influenced braceros but it was the economic aspect that was the deciding factor in joining. The ability to earn money, send money home to family, and still have some left over was enticing. The goal outweighed any discrimination and hardships one might face and braceros continued to work in the United States, many of them coming multiple times. The ability to purchase goods in the United States and show them off in Mexico allowed many to look at their neighbors and consider joining the program, or even taking the risk to come undocumented. The braceros not only showed off their goods and the money they had earned they shared their experiences which tended to focus on the positives rather than the negatives. There was a community of braceros who returned home and wanted others to succeed so therefore the pull factors were not just in the United States but also in Mexico. Pedro del Real Perez comments, "Well on one hand it was beneficial and on the other hand the family suffered as much as you did."<sup>85</sup> Pedro's comments indicate why one might not want to join the program because families left behind suffered from the absence of men, but as he also states it was beneficial to leave in order to support them.

Another important factor outside of success that pulled braceros into the United States were the relationships that were being built. Not only were personal connections made with American women at times and friendships with other men but there were also professional relationships made. Some farmers employed the same men who had worked with them in previous seasons. The families of braceros also began to migrate into the United States for

---

<sup>84</sup> Cohen, 84 - 86.

<sup>85</sup> Pedro del Real Pérez, Interview done by Mireya Loza, Translated by Author, Bracero History Archive, July 28, 2005, Item #152, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/152> (accessed January 20, 2016).

economic reasons. The upward economic mobility pushed them from Mexico and into the United States for settlement. Even when braceros would migrate and settle in the United States they still felt discriminated against. Mary Vargas claims her father often sits and wonders how the country he helped in a time of desperation could continue not to treat Mexican laborers properly.<sup>86</sup>

Large scale immigration from Mexico would steadily increase throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s as a result of economic pressures and perceived upward economic mobility from the Bracero Program.<sup>87</sup> The Bracero Program laid the foundation for people to become connected to the land that they worked on and the communities in which they worked. Those spreading the positivity of the program back home in Mexico also encouraged others to join or to risk coming undocumented. In return this created a cyclical migration process. As the length of time spent in the United States increases the potential to further settle in the United States also increases. Longer exposure to the foreign experience no longer makes one feel like a visitor and in return makes them feel more at home. In the case of braceros after the experience was lengthened in the United States they began to see it more as a land of opportunity and their chance of permanent settlement increased. Leonardo Carrillo who was a bracero from 1950-1960 noticed the change himself, “there was a pattern being put forth.”<sup>88</sup>

One would think that the prospect of money was not enough to go through discrimination, work in poor conditions, and watching some braceros die. But many felt it was a necessity for them to survive in the beginning of the program so they tolerated it. “For me it was a positive experience. Maybe some would say not,”<sup>89</sup> states Audomaro Zepeda. Economic stability was something many Mexicans had not ever seen in their lifetime. What they were used

---

<sup>86</sup> Vargas, Interview.

<sup>87</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Zai Liang, p 99-205.

<sup>88</sup> Carrillo, Interview.

<sup>89</sup> Zepeda, Interview.

to seeing was poverty, starvation, and conflict. When it came to making the decision braceros decided that it was worth it to go through temporary discrimination for having a financial gain they could take back home with them. Every bracero mentioned from the big senders states in Mexico returned multiple times to the United States to earn money. Suffering was guaranteed in many parts of Mexico, and the big sender states in particular, but it was not always so for the United States. As the program grew older and Mexico began to see its own economy grow the motivations for those signing up began to change. There were better salaries offered in the United States and personal and professional relationships were being made so it was no longer about survival but rather a movement towards upward economic mobility. Despite discrimination and hardships the prospect of financial gain kept braceros coming and later their descendants. “I came looking for a way to send them money... I always thought of my mother and my brothers. I never thought about making my life just for me.”<sup>90</sup> - Jesus Martinez.

---

<sup>90</sup> Jesus Martinez, *Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program 1942-1964*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2008.

## Bibliography

### Primary

#### Interviews

Arrieta, Sara. Interview done by Alejandra Valles. Translated by Hugo Tomas. Bracero History Archive, January 12, 2008. Item #665, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/665> (accessed December 1, 2015).

Sara Arrieta's father was bracero from Durango, Mexico who participated in the program in 1942, being one of the first groups of men to join. She describes being in a very large family of 16 children and how her family suffered in the absence of her father. She mentions there were days that they would go without eating until her father was able to send money back home. She also describes the way her father would talk about the United States and how he enjoyed his time there and was fond of the place, but would occasionally mention discrimination he faced. Most importantly Sara speaks of how her father would come back with items they did not have, boxes of clothes, and money.

Avecedo, Juan Ezequiel. Interview and translation done by Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness*. 2010. Youtube.  
[Https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc). Accessed November 15, 2015.

Avecedo shares his experiences of the program and the processing centers in a negative way by detailing what the braceros had to go without.

Bustamante, Primitivo. Interview done by Myrna García. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, September 1, 2005. Item #168, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/168> (accessed January 20, 2016).

Bustamante's father joined the Bracero Program when he was around 5 years old. Bustamante is from Coahuila. He speaks about how his father was able to bring home clothes for him and his siblings as well as gifts. He also says his mother was able to purchase furniture with the money his father would send home.

Carmona Vera, Pedro. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, May 20, 2006. Item #344, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/344> (accessed October 15, 2015).

Pedro Carmona Vera from Jalisco, details how he joined the bracero program at a young age to help provide for his family. Vera mentions he worked on and off from 1948-1960. He goes into great detail about the process of 'bribing' individuals for recommendations and what it meant for those who could not get recommendations. During his time as bracero he explains he seen several accidents and had one friend lose their life due to the farm work.

Chavira Carrillo, Leonardo. Interview done by Veronica Cortez. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, May 20, 2006. Item #350, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/350> (accessed January 20, 2016).

Leonardo Carrillo, from Jalisco, was a bracero for nearly ten years in the later period of the program. He recalls the process to get recommendation papers but also for the undocumented to hire coyotes, people who would smuggle in or forge papers for them. He notes in his interview he could see how a pattern of immigration was beginning to be established and that during Operation Wetback government officials would often go into the farms to check for undocumented. He notes the braceros were always working and only had one day off a week and that holidays were not observed in any way. But he is happy with his time in the program, noting he could pay for his children's school and clothes.

Cheatum, Minerva Christine Anne. Interview done by Fernanda Carrillo. Bracero History Archive, April 3, 2003. Item #77, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/77> (accessed January 20, 2016).

Minerva Cheatum worked in one of the processing centers in Rio Vista, Texas. Cheatum describes what went on at the processing centers and the questions she had to ask braceros. She comments on how proud braceros were when returning home.

Cortez, Rafael. Interview done by Araceli Esparza. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, May 13, 2006. Item #261, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/261> (accessed January 10, 2016).

Rafael Cortez talks about how the braceros were recruited in Jalisco, Mexico. While in the United States he discusses the money braceros earned and how they could sometimes participate in entertainment outside the farm and barracks. Says he wanted to be a bracero very young as soon as he heard the good words said by other braceros about their experiences.

de Dios Estrada Lopez, Juan. Interview done by Myrna Parra-Mantilla. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, March 31, 2003. Item #20, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/20> (accessed April 4, 2016).

Juan was a bracero from Chihuahua, Mexico who discusses how he was to use the money he was earning for recreation while he was in the United States. He also gives insight on the rate he was paid in roughly the mid 50s.

del Real Pérez, Pedro. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, July 28, 2005. Item #152, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/152> (accessed January 20, 2016).

Pérez, from Zacatecas, discusses how the program had difficult times but at the same time it provided opportunity for many men like him. He also provides insight on how not only the braceros would suffer at times but the families they left behind suffered the most.

Flores, Faustina. Interview done by Anais Acosta. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero

History Archive, July 27, 2005. Item #139, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/139> (accessed January 10, 2016).

Faustina Flores' husband was a bracero from Jalisco. She describes how life was while her husband was away and is a voice of the women and children left behind. Flores also goes on to discuss the money her husband made and how he was able to send money orders back home to support her. She also brings up how while her husband was gone technology was expanding and how her husband when he returned was shocked to see a radio at home.

Gomez, Ignacio. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Candice Workman.  
Bracero History Archive, July 28, 2005. Item #156,  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/156> (accessed November 7, 2015).

Ignacio Gomez, a bracero from Michoacán, describes his motivation for joining the Bracero Program which was to provide for his family but he also comments on how he was able to dress better, eat better, and live better.

González, Lorenzo. Interview done by Jackie Martinez. Translated by Candice Workman.  
Bracero History Archive, May 26, 2006. Item # 379,  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/379> (accessed November 15, 2015).

Lorenzo González, from Jalisco, provides an example of how many braceros returned back home successful. As a bracero Lorenzo was able to climb the ladder on the farms he worked and earned extra money. But he also recalls how children had to go to work in Mexico because the men were not there to work.

Loza Ornelas, Cayetano. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Hugo Tomas. Bracero History Archive, July 30, 2007. Item #684, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/684> (accessed January 10, 2016).

Cayetano, from Guanajuato, had family members involved in the Bracero Program and offers a voice for those left at home. His brother and his two sons were involved in the program and he discusses how they were able to bring back money and gifts. With money that his sons sent home he was able to purchase more livestock. Most importantly he addresses that he stayed in the same town and watched braceros go back and forth and as they came back home the town also grew into a city with them.

Montes Gonzalez, Alberto. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Candice Workman.  
Bracero History Archive, July 27, 2005. Item #136,  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/136> (accessed October 15, 2015).

Alberto Gonzalez, from Jalisco, discusses the process it took to become a bracero and the medical procedures at the processing centers. He mentions that sometimes treatment of braceros was not well and discrimination was something one had to deal with often. He mentions the strain it put on his family but also said he continued to come back in order to work, sometimes as a 'wet'.

Orozco, Jose L. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, May 28, 2005. Item #158, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/158> (accessed January 10, 2016).

Jose Orozco is the son of a bracero who details the sacrifices the families back home in Jalisco had to make. He describes the village being lonely and that there were only women and children. But he understands his father did it out of necessity for the family and they eventually were able to move to California.

Ramirez, Isidoro. Interview done by Steve Velásquez. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, July 13, 2005. Item #142, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/142> (accessed October 8, 2015).

Isidoro Ramirez, a bracero from Jalisco, is one account of the horrible abuse braceros would face. He says discrimination was frequent and the farm handlers could be evil people. For him the bracero was a negative experience that began at the processing centers which he details as places of horror. He said they were treated like cattle for the farm handlers to come pick at.

Rivera Lopez, Jesus. Interview done by Perla Guerrero. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, May 13, 2006. Item #274, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/274> (accessed November 5, 2015).

Jesus Lopez was the son of a bracero before he became a bracero against his father's wishes. He was left to care for his family while his father was away. He describes the grueling 12 hour ride to a processing center in a cattle car on the railroad. He details the work and living conditions as well as what the work did to his body. Despite the troubles he faced he was able to save money to help his family.

Sanchez, Isaias. Interview done by Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price. *Harvest of Loneliness*, 2010. Youtube. [Https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc). Accessed November 15, 2015.

Isaias Sanchez discusses the horrors of the program in the documentary and offers insight of the processing centers.

Vargas, Mary. "Un Simple Bracero," Bracero History Archive, Item #3239, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3239> (accessed December 1, 2015).

In Mary Vargas' testimony she details the struggle her father who was from Michoacán, went through as a bracero and what risks were involved. She mentions the system of 'bribery' that many other braceros had to play by and that he was also caught without his papers and deported once. When he got the money to pay for his bribe again to be a bracero he was robbed in an alley. By the end of the testimony Vargas says her father wonders how the country that so desperately needed him still mistreats Mexicans laborers today.

Zepeda, Audómaro. Interview done by Mireya Loza. Translated by Candice Workman. Bracero History Archive, July 28, 2005. Item #159, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/159>

(accessed January 10, 2016).

Zepeda, from Jalisco, offers information on what it was like to have purchasing power as a bracero. He comments on how he was able to buy clothes he could not have before hand and he also says he was able to eat better.

### **Images**

Gonzalez, Lorenzo, "Bracero Waving from Car." Bracero History Archive, Item #983.  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/983> (accessed January 10, 2016).

Image of Lorenzo Gonzalez driving the car he bought from the money he earned as a bracero.

Nadel, Leonard, "A bracero receives a chest X-ray during a physical examination at the Hidalgo Processing Center, Texas." Bracero History Archive, Item #1305.  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1305> (accessed October 15, 2015).

An image depicting in order to pass inspection workers had to be given an x-ray exam as part of the process.

-----, "Braceros were fumigated with DDT while others stand in line at the Hidalgo Processing Center, Texas." Bracero History Archive, Item #3000.  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3000> (accessed October 12, 2015).

An image of Braceros leaving the shed in which they were fumigated in.

-----, "An official examines a bracero's hands for calluses during processing at the Monterrey Processing Center, Mexico." Bracero History Archive, Item #1592.  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1592> (accessed October 22, 2015).

An image depicting the importance for a worker to have a farming background and therefore the officials would check their hands for callouses as proof of their experience.

-----, "A bracero stands in a Californian field." Bracero History Archive, Item #2383.  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2383> (accessed October 22, 2015).

An image of a bracero holding the short handled hoe which was not encouraged to use and sometimes considered illegal.

-----, "A bracero stoops down to do field work in a field in California." Bracero History Archive, Item #2257. <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2257> (accessed January 20, 2016).

An image of a bracero doing stoop labor, which many described from the oral histories as being very difficult and wearing them down.

-----, "Braceros lie in bed and have a rest in a living quarter of a Californian camp." Bracero History Archive, Item #2913. <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2913> (accessed January 20, 2016).

An image showing how the work camp living quarters would have been.

### **Exhibit Brochure**

Martinez, Jesus. *Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program 1942-1964*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2008. Accessed November 15, 2015.

A brochure from the Bittersweet Harvest Exhibit that within collaboration between their museums and the Bracero History Archive provides general information on the program as well as using Nadel images shows the Bracero Program in a historic view. Quote from Jesus Martinez.

### **Song**

Phil Ochs. *Bracero*. Elektra Records, 1966. Accessed January 5, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrmNDZNmxIk&list=RDNrNrmNDZNmxIk>  
[http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/Phil\\_Ochs:Bracero](http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/Phil_Ochs:Bracero)

In the song Phil Ochs embraces the life of a bracero by describing the motivations for joining the program as well as what life was like working. It also provides commentary on the identity of the program.

### **Film**

*Harvest of Loneliness: The Bracero Program*. Directed by Gilbert Gonzalez and Vivian Price.

2010. Youtube. <Https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcV2EOo-Xdc>. Accessed November 15, 2015.

Harvest of Loneliness details the discrimination as well as the exploitation of braceros from the moment they entered the processing centers to the end of their contracts. It shows the program in its most negative light and is full of direct images of the braceros and interviews of them.

### **Documents**

“Certificado De Buena Conducta.” J Guadalupe Nava Lopez to Timoteo Flores Soto. July 24, 1957. Tapalpa, Jalisco. <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/621> (accessed December 10, 2015).

Donated to the Bracero History Archive by Timoteo Flores Soto’s wife, Faustina. It is an example of a recommendation letter that would have written in order to defend a man’s workmanship. Most braceros sought after recommendation letters written by prominent men in the community. In the case of Flores it was the president of the municipality.

“Contract with Pay Wages Described per Task.” Worker Contract to Rodolfo Cruz Figueroa. September 1957, Bracero History Archive, Item #838, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/838> (accessed October 17, 2015).

An example of wages and the differences for picking certain items. Written in both English and Spanish.

“Money Order Receipts.” Sent to Francisca Rodriguez from M. Gonzalez. August 28, 1950 & November 15, 1949. Bracero History Archive, Item #1198,  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1198> (accessed December 10, 2015).

An example of the money orders that would have been sent back home to Mexico. Both examples are for a money order of \$25 which would have been a decent amount to send.

Timoteo Flores Soto to Faustina Flores. September 30, 1963. Accessed January 12, 2016.  
<http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/625>.

A letter written to Faustina Flores from her husband, Timoteo in which he sending 200 dollars.

“The President’s Trip to Mexico.” The National Security Archive. June 29 – July 1, 1962.  
<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB124/doc14.pdf> (accessed November 13, 2015).

NSA Archival document from 1962 on Mexican and American relations. It mostly deals with the influence of communism in Mexico but also goes into the improved state of the Mexican economy, found on page 3.

## Secondary Sources

Cohen, Deborah. *Bracero: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Cohen offers many different aspects of the Bracero Program and those who participated. She takes many of her sources from oral accounts of the Braceros but also examines documents in relation to ways the Braceros were discriminated against. Cohen’s main focus is the discrimination that Mexicans workers faced as well as the relation between citizen and country. There are arguments relating to how the Bracero Program ultimately affected further immigration both legal and illegal and how it persisted racism and discrimination against Mexicans in the United States.

Foley, Neil. "Braceros and the ‘Wetback’ Invasion." *Mexicans in the Making of America*, 123-147. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Foley describes Operation Wetback which was a movement to deport illegals working in the United States from Mexico. Most of these deported were illegals who did not make it into the Bracero Program. This operation also led to widespread discrimination and led to the popularity of the racial slur, ‘wetback’. The chapter I am reading is a part of a larger narrative of Mexicans in the building of America as it is known today.

Garcia, Ruben J. "Labor as Property: Guestworkers at the Margins of Domestic Legal Systems." *In Marginal Workers: How Legal Fault Lines Divide Workers and Leave Them Without*

*Protection*. New York City, NY: NYU Press, 2012.

Garcia examines the political and economic consequences of guest workers in domestic economies. He also explains how this type of system could lead to discrimination and a labor force being seen as property. I am using this chapter to examine how this system compares to the Bracero Program and similar outcomes that could happen.

Massey, Douglas S., and Zai Liang. "The Long-term Consequences of a Temporary Worker Program: The US Bracero Experience." *Population Research and Policy Review* 8, no. 3 (1989): 199-226. Accessed October 20, 2015.  
<http://0-www.jstor.org.wncln.wncln.org/stable/40229907>.

In this article the two authors examine how the Bracero Program affected the long term relationship between Mexican Immigrants and the United States. In the article assumptions can be made as to how the program promoted immigration, both legal and illegal, due to the experiences workers had while being in the Program. The argument the authors make is that the experiences, despite some bad, ultimately encouraged immigration in order to make money and gave them a sense of upward mobility. But they also believe the program pushed back real upward mobility and had a negative effect on Mexicans in general.

McCaa, Robert. "Missing Millions: The Demographic Costs of the Mexican Revolution." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 367-400. Accessed January 12, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/msem.2003.19.2.367>.

Information on the possible death toll in the Mexican Revolution.

Don Mitchell. *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.  
<https://0-muse.jhu.edu.wncln.wncln.org/>.

Mitchell gives good background and issues involving the economics and government policies regarding the Bracero Program. He also relays the complexity of the program and how it was not everyone's ticket to prosperity. Mitchell does focus more on the role of unions and policy more than the other sources do and also gives into the debate of if this was not just a scheme to receive cheap labor.

Najera, Jennifer R. "An Accommodated Form of Segregation." *In The Borderlands of Race: Mexican Segregation in a South Texas Town*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2015.

Najera offers a view of racism that isn't fully explored to the extent we see other groups face in discrimination. In the book Najera does a case study of a town in South Texas and examines how racism affected Mexicans living in the town during the turn of the century. She takes oral histories as well as other useful documents to show how Mexicans were segregated in the town. For my research I will take Chapter 4 which she examines the Bracero Program and refers to it as an accommodated form of segregation.

## Appendix 1

Map of the Mexican States, made by Author.



- |                        |                                      |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Aguascalientes      | 17. Nayarit                          |
| 2. Baja California     | 18. Nuevo León                       |
| 3. Baja California Sur | 19. Oaxaca                           |
| 4. Campeche            | 20. Puebla                           |
| 5. Chiapas             | 21. Querétaro                        |
| 6. Chihuahua           | 22. Quintana Roo                     |
| 7. Coahuila            | 23. San Luis Potosí                  |
| 8. Colima              | 24. Sinaloa                          |
| 9. Durango             | 25. Sonora                           |
| 10. Guanajuato         | 26. Tabasco                          |
| 11. Guerrero           | 27. Tamaulipas                       |
| 12. Hidalgo            | 28. Tlaxcala                         |
| 13. Jalisco            | 29. Veracruz                         |
| 14. México             | 30. Yucatán                          |
| 15. Michoacán          | 31. Zacatecas                        |
| 16. Morelos            | Unmarked spot - City of Mexico, D.F. |

## Appendix 2

Example of a recommendation letter in which the mayor is essentially writing a letter in defense of Timoteo's work ethic.

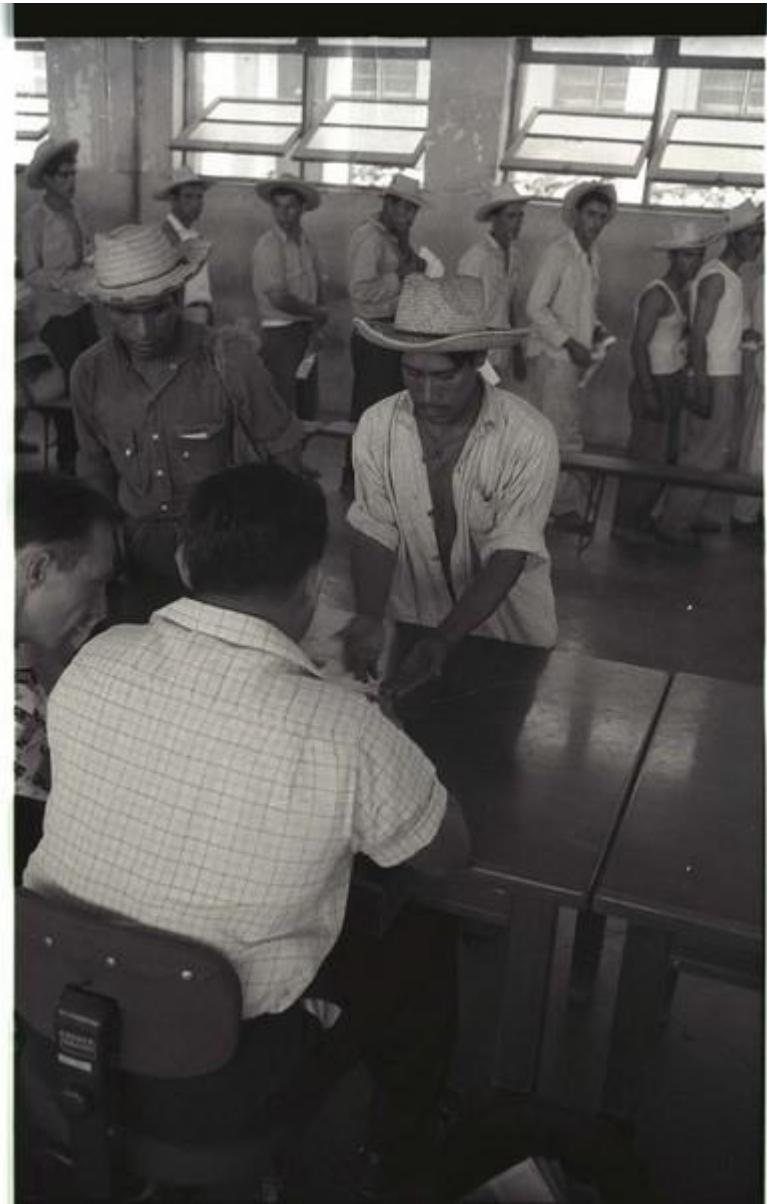
Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/621>



### Appendix 3

Nadel photo of a bracero showing the calluses on his hands to prove his work ethic.

Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1592>



## Appendix 4

Nadel photo of showing X-ray being done on a bracero to check for tuberculous.

Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1305>



## Appendix 5

Nadel photo of the shower of DDT that would be sprayed on braceros before they could sign a contract.

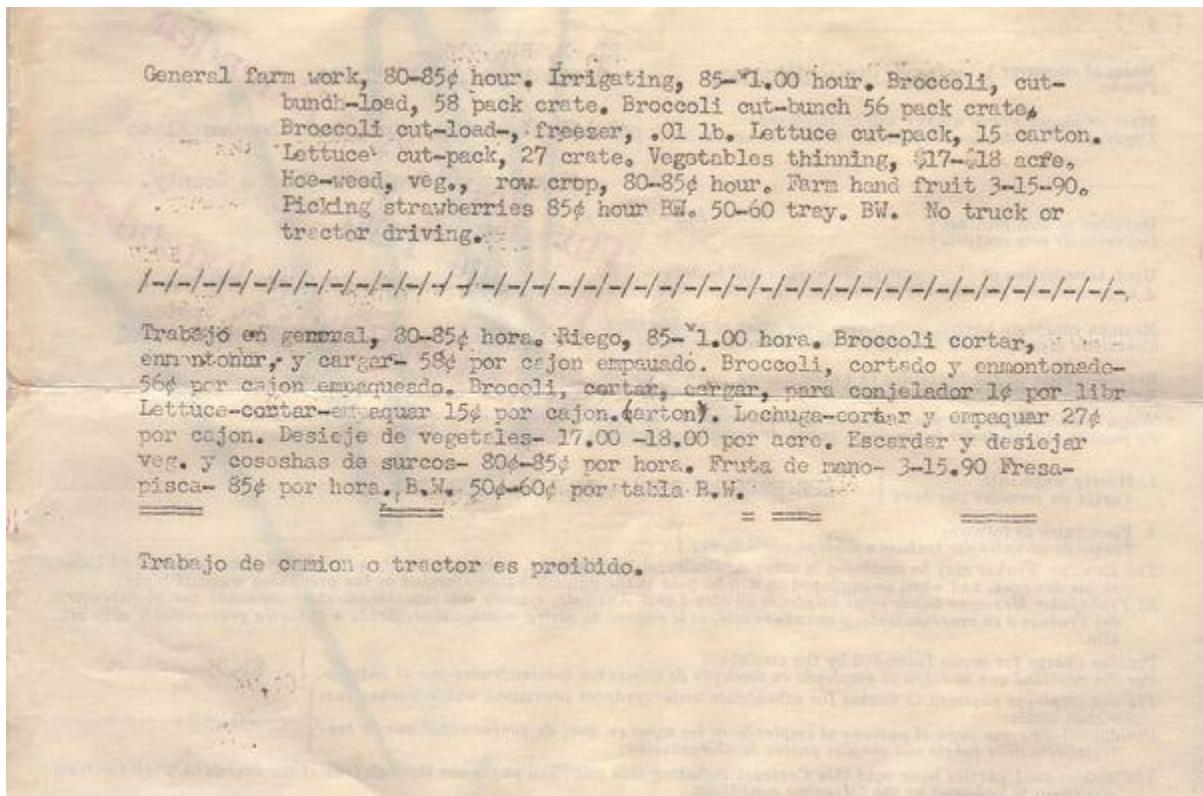
Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3000>



## Appendix 6

Example of work and what pay would be received.

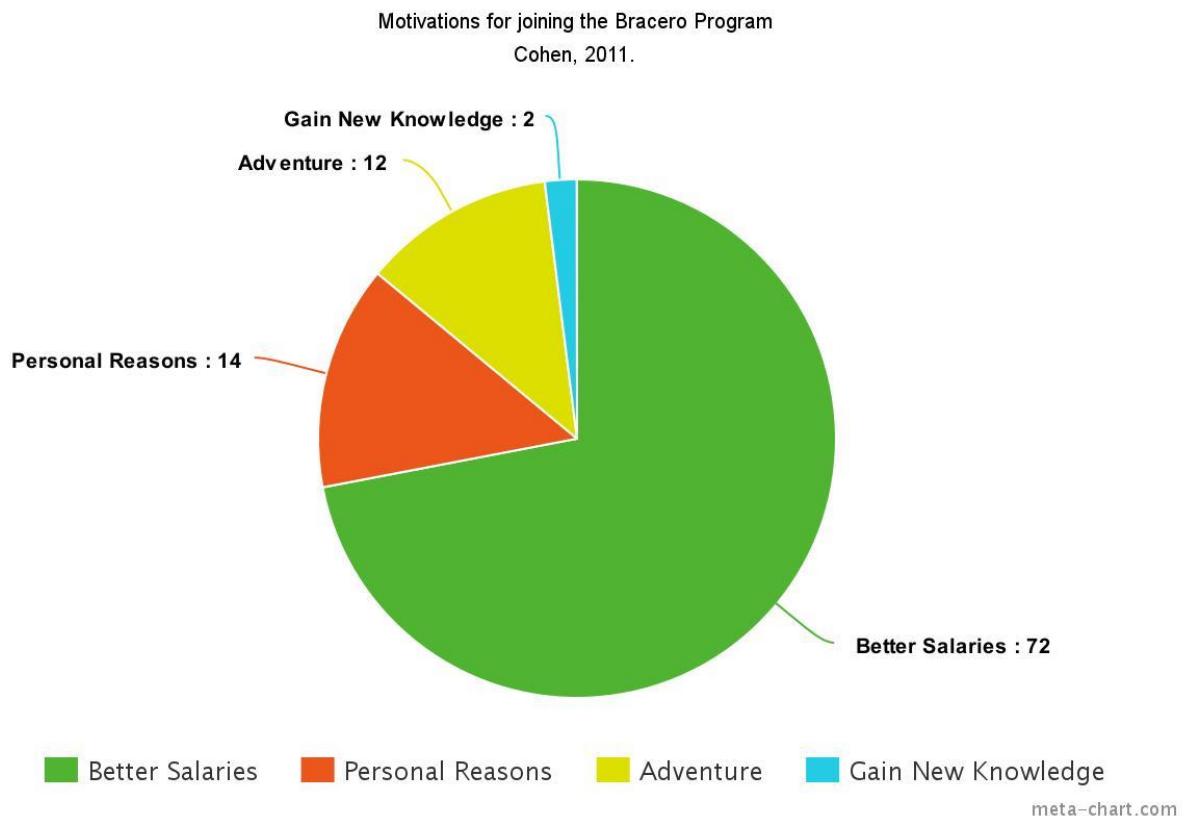
Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/838>



## Appendix 7

Pie chart of the motivations of Braceros taken from information provided in Cohen.

Source: Pie Chart made by Author.



## Appendix 8

Nadel image of a bracero holding the short handled hoe.

Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2383>



## Appendix 9

Nadel image of a bracero performing stoop labor.

Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2257>



## Appendix 10

Nadel image of the work camp housing.

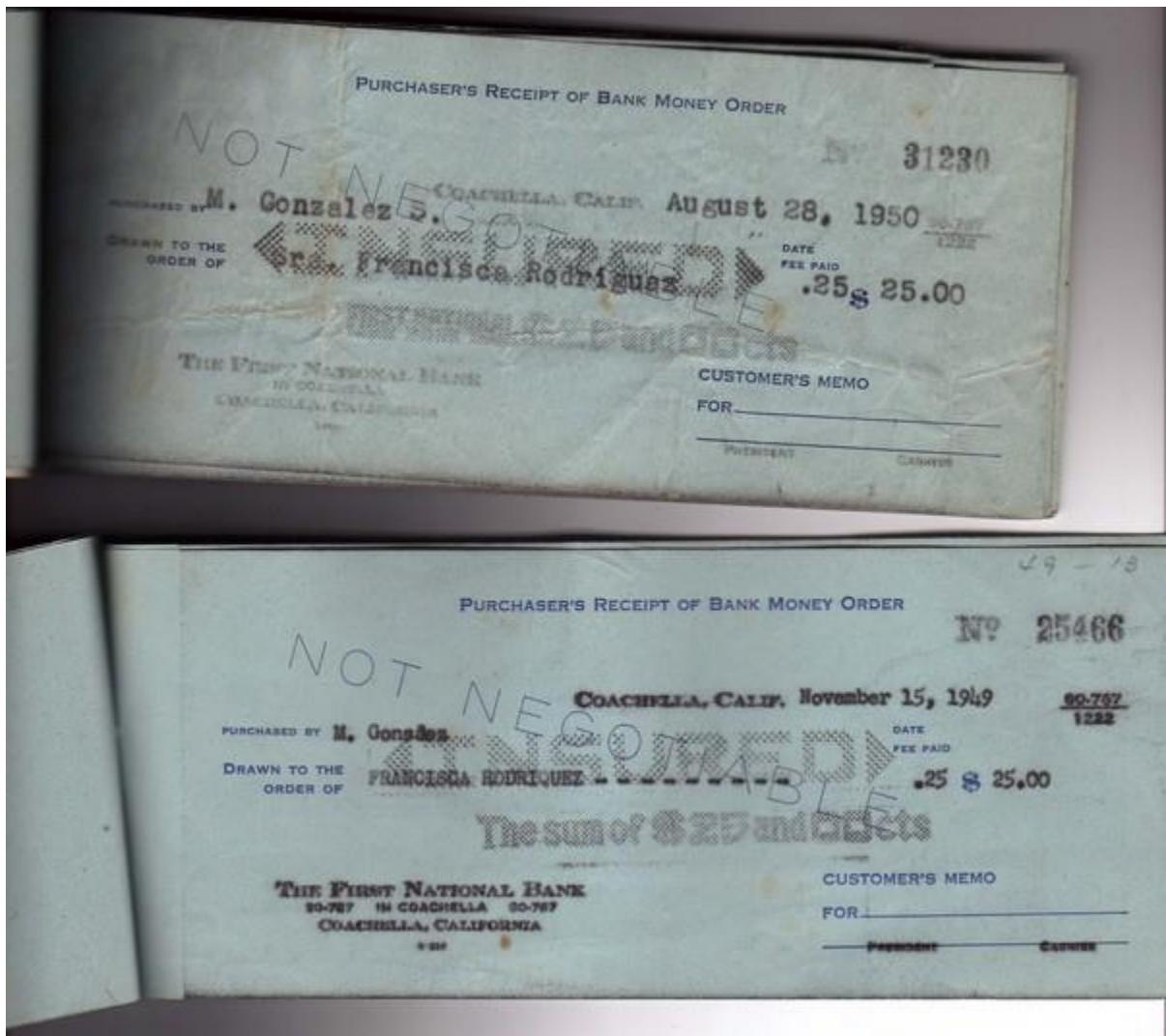
Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/2913>



## Appendix 11

Example of money orders showing \$25 being sent to Mexico.

Source: <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1198>



## Table of Contents

Thesis	1
Annotated Bibliography	26
<i>Primary</i>	26
<i>Secondary</i>	32
Appendix	35
Table of Contents	46
Cover Letter	47

## COVER LETTER

Since the last draft I have changed a lot of content and brought my primary sources up from 48% to 68%. I have added more personal accounts as examples of what braceros would buy in the United States and bring back. And also showed more accounts of braceros who came multiple times.

Added an appendix with pictures, map, and pie chart.

I did not move things around in particular but just added more information and made paragraphs larger, which got rid of the smaller paragraphs I had.

Fixed up my footnotes and bibliography. .

Also corrected my tense usage in the paper and improved the flow.