

ROOTS AND FLOWS OF THE TEJANO DIASPORA  
IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

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I examine in this dissertation the historical significance of Texas Mexican agricultural labor and the formation of Latino communities across the southern United States in the latter twentieth century. Their primary destinations chosen for work, as well as their experiences in those locations, established patterns of migration and settlement followed and faced by subsequent flows of Latino workers. The lives of Texas Mexicans are, thus, critical to understanding the process of Latino migration and settlement in the region.

I utilize the term *Tejano* Diaspora to help understand the northward movement and eventual settlement of agricultural workers from their home communities in South Texas. This framework also situates *Tejano* labor migration as a consequence of forced displacement and reflective of a larger systemic phenomenon between the United States and Mexico. In turn, this dissertation expands and complicates most extant writings on Latinos in the New South that remain limited to the contemporary period and neglect the historical presence of Texas Mexicans as part of the literature.



In this examination, I focus on four distinct localities that serve as individual chapters in this dissertation: South Texas, the Mississippi Delta states of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee, then South Florida, and, finally, North Carolina. These geographies represent the primary destinations chosen by *Tejano* workers in chronological order, and were also principal centers for agricultural production. To undertake this task, I conducted extensive archival research at various local, state, and federal repositories across the country, and I utilized the interlibrary loan system to review related newspaper articles from the region. In addition, I conducted seventeen select oral history interviews.

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I dedicate this work to the lives and presence of  
*Papo y Mamo* and *Nena* and *Pops*,  
Catarino Grimaldo Vásquez and María Ynés Castillo Vásquez,  
Petra Barrera Lara and Mateo Muñoz Lara.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not exist without the presence and sacrifices of others in my life—both known and unknown, in the generations of the past as well as the present.

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In my immediate circumstance, this work belongs to my family. I am grateful to Patsy and Baby Andrew for the fishing

at Pecan Valley. I am also grateful to Bobby for hosting one of the best barbeques in the state of Texas and knowing exactly what it means to fall in the snow. The love and prayers of my parents, Antonio C. and Gloria L. Vásquez, have sustained me throughout, as well as Norma, Angie, and Daniel. This, of course, also includes *mi'jo y mi'ja*, Devin and Samantha Amparo, both of whom I love as big as the sky.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"The first thing I do is  
bless my hands with the  
love of the Lord. And then...  
you have to make sure  
you have the right ingredients."*

--Gloria L. Vásquez<sup>1</sup>

Unlike past historical periods of large-scale Mexican labor migration that were peripheral to what was considered legitimate intellectual inquiry in both Mexico and the United States, the contemporary phenomenon has benefitted from a long following of scholars across various academic disciplines and research interests. The 2001 anthology *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* ushered in a new era of scholarship focused solely on the southern United States. This new literature has continued in the tradition of past regional scholarship by examining the contours of "southern distinctiveness," yet has

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<sup>1</sup> My Mother, Gloria L. Vásquez, is recognized as our homegrown oral historian, theologian, philosopher, diplomat, accountant, chef, political scientist, and organic intellectual in my immediate and extended family. In the above quote, I asked my Mother her secret in making *menudo*, a tripe soup. She first paused, and then spoke these words.

centered on the impact of recent Latino migration and settlement.<sup>2</sup>

As Owen J. Furuseth and Heather A. Smith have pointed out, "In a region that continues to grapple with long held traditions of privilege, belonging, and 'race,' the growing presence of Latinos complicates the traditional mythology of southernness and gives rise to yet another iteration of the so called 'New South.'" The primary stimulus in the scholarly production has, thus, been the unprecedented numerical increase of Latino populations, particularly the 1990s. During this decade, six states in the South—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—were identified among the highest growth rates for Latinos in the country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez, "Introduction: Histories and Historiographies of Greater Mexico," in *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, ed. Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxii; Arthur D. Murphy, Colleen Blanchard, and Jennifer A. Hill, eds., *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press), 2001; Mary E. Odem and Elaine Lacey, "Introduction," in *Latino Immigrants and the Transformations of the U.S. South*, eds. Mary E. Odem and Elaine Lacey (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), x.

<sup>3</sup> Owen J. Furuseth, and Heather A. Smith, "From Winn-Dixie to Tiendas: The Remaking of the New South," in *Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place*, eds. Heather A. Smith and Owen J. Furuseth (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 2; Rakesh Rochar, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya, "New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population

This dissertation responds to this growing literature, what has also been called a variation of the New South or *Nuevo South*, by reframing the study of recent migration and settlement within a larger historical narrative and counter-narratives of Latino incorporation struggles in the southern United States. "Reframing," according to Native scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "is about taking much greater control over the ways in which indigenous issues and social problems are discussed and handled." To also use the words of family historian and organic intellectual, Gloria L. Vásquez (my Mother), as shown in the opening epigraph: "you have to make sure you have the right ingredients." Most writings on the *Nuevo South* have played an important role in describing varied experiences in the contemporary period, yet have also neglected prior periods of Latino migration and settlement in the twentieth century. At the very least, this examination is necessary to discern experiences of convergence and divergence between the past and present, and to contribute toward a more comprehensive understanding of larger structural processes that have informed Latino labor migration and settlement in the region. Moreover, most academic writings in the *Nuevo South* continue to position

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Growth," Pew Hispanic Center, July 26, 2005, available at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/50.pdf>.

Latinos within a "new immigrant" narrative that is compared solely to earlier experiences of European immigration.<sup>4</sup>

One critical ingredient that I examine in this dissertation, which stands in contrast to extant *Nuevo South* literature, is the historical presence of *Tejano* workers in the southern United States. As I demonstrate, the experiences of *Tejano* agricultural workers, referring to male and female persons of Mexican ancestry who were born or established permanent homes in Texas, is absolutely critical to understanding how Latino communities have formed across the region in the latter twentieth century. Their primary destinations chosen for work, as well as their experiences in those locations, established patterns of migration and settlement followed and faced by subsequent flows of Latino workers.

To undertake this task, I focus on four distinct localities that serve as individual chapters in this dissertation: South Texas, the Mississippi Delta states of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee, then South Florida, and, finally, North Carolina. These geographies were not chosen randomly. While I examine the experiences of *Tejano* workers, this study also represents one

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1995), 153-154; d to the a, to the t, to the m.

history of agriculture in the region. The process of mechanized farming and commercial agriculture gave rise to employer demands and recruitment efforts for short-term itinerant farm labor. I examine how this process involved the lives of Texas Mexicans in the principal locations across the region in the twentieth century. By following the crops on paper through extensive archival research across the country as well as select oral history interviews, I strive to make connections between and across these seemingly disparate experiences, time periods, and geographies in the South.

### **Long Line of Immigrants**

Since the publication in 2001, the new literature on Latinos in the *Nuevo South* has grown rapidly in volume, reflected in various publication formats that include mostly scholarly anthologies, several full-length books, and well over twenty-five dissertations and theses. Drawing from primarily anthropology, geography, political science, and sociology, some works have highlighted how Latinos have enriched these varied social landscapes, such as through cultural festivals, music and foods. Others have described challenges to successful integration, such as language barriers, or racial attitudes. Secondly, some works have also sought to describe why and how Latinos have migrated to new destinations in the region in the

contemporary period, which have enriched the new literature beyond regional perspectives.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing these important strides that remain necessary, there are still challenges that confront the new scholarship. This is clear when contextualizing its formation within the contemporary politics of immigration enforcement in the United States. Immigration enforcement practices had been steadily growing from earlier decades, notably since the employer sanction provision in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. The events surrounding September 11, 2001, justified the

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<sup>5</sup> For anthologies, see, for example, Murphy, Blanchard, and Hill, *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South*; Odem and Lacy, *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*; Cameron D. Lippard, and Charles A. Gallagher, eds., *Being Brown in Dixie: Race, Ethnicity, and Latino Immigration in the New South* (Boulder and London: First Forum Press, 2011); Smith and Furuseth, *Latinos in the New South: Transformation of Place*; Stanton Wortham, Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., and Edmund T. Hamann, *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Ablex Publishing, 2002). For full-length books, see, for example, Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Hannah Gill, *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina: New Roots in the Old North State* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); José María Mantero, *Latinos and the U.S. South* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2008); Helen B. Marrow, *New Destination Dreaming: Immigration, Race, and Legal Status in the Rural American South* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Gregory B. Weeks and John R. Weeks, *Irresistible Forces: Latin American Migration to the United States and Its Effects on the South* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).



expansion of actions at all levels of government nationwide in the name of counter-terrorism and homeland security.

The most visible expression of worksite enforcement in the first decade of the new millennium was the escalation of nationally coordinated and highly publicized immigration raids. According to the Department of Homeland Security, the number of worksite arrests increased from approximately 510 in 2002, to 6,287 in 2008, marking an increase of roughly 1,133 percent within a six-year period. In addition to immigration raids, other strategies included increased fines and penalties against employers, the use of undercover agents at various worksites, and the implementation of an employment verification (e-verify) system, all trying to implement "a culture of compliance and enforcement."<sup>6</sup>

Immigration enforcement measures were also pursued through state and local government collaboration, especially in the South. "Instead of acting to prohibit and eliminate systematic exploitation and discrimination against Latinos," according to a

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<sup>6</sup> "ICE Worksite Enforcement Overview," U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, April 30, 2009; available at <http://www.ice.gov/pi/news/factsheets/worksite.html>; Laurie M. Dawn, Mahsa Aliaskari, and Joe Whitley, "2008: The Year of Increased Worksite Enforcement," in *Homeland Security: Legal and Policy Issues*, eds. Joe D. Whitley and Lynne K. Zusman (Chicago, Illinois: American Bar Association Publishing, 2009), 123-139.

study by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2009, "state and local governments in much of the South have exacerbated the situation." The two most notable examples were the unprecedented growth of the 287(g) Program and, subsequently, the Secure Communities Program.<sup>7</sup>

Through 287(g), selected state and local officers—such as highway patrol, city police, or county sheriff officials—receive training administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and thereafter become certified as agents for immigration enforcement in their local municipalities. Each 287(g) Program is approved through individual memoranda of understanding agreements (MOAs) between ICE and the participating state and local agencies. Although existent since 1996, operation became a tool for immigration enforcement in the twenty-first century. In 2002, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement was the only agency with an existing agreement. From 2005 to 2009, over 70 agreements were signed between state and local municipalities and ICE, with the majority located in communities across the U.S. South. While still active, the Secure Communities Program has since replaced the 287(g) Program in the enforcement agenda. Established in 2008, the Program

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<sup>7</sup> *Under Siege: Life for Low-Income Latinos in the South*, A Report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (Montgomery, Alabama: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009), 4.

authorizes local law enforcement officers to fingerprint persons transported to participating jails. The fingerprints are then compared to federal databases available through the Program, which determines their immigration status.<sup>8</sup>

The rise of immigration enforcement and detention in the first decade, what historian Rachel Ida Buff has rightfully called the "deportation terror," also worked in tandem with anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiment. One prominent example from the region was the metropolitan city of Charlotte, North Carolina. Following a fatal accident that led to the death of a local school teacher in September 2005, U.S. House of Representative Myrick (R-NC) introduced the "Scott Gardner Act" that called for the deportation of undocumented persons charged with drinking while driving. At the same time, she introduced the "10K Run For the Border Act."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In December 2009, there were sixty-six mutually signed agreements and five active agreements "pending good faith," according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The top four states with the largest number of 287(g) agreements were, in numerical order, Arizona, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. In November 2013, there are thirty-six active agreements shown. "Fact Sheet: Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act," U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, accessed November 15, 2013; available at <http://www.ice.gov/news/library/factsheets/287g.htm#signed-moa>.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Ida Buff, "The Deportation Terror," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 523-551.

When the "Scott Gardner Act" was proposed, Representative Myrick stated the following: "No more excuses. You're drunk. You're driving. You're illegal. You're deported. Period." In December 2005, in response to another drinking and driving incident, Representative Myrick stated, "I'm going to offer an amendment on the floor that says, 'I don't think that we need to give them two more times to kill somebody.'" Although the "10K Run for the Border Act" sought to increase the fines for employers who hire undocumented workers, the imagery of the border targeted specifically local undocumented residents from Mexico, with the underlying message again that they did not belong. By intentionally linking the issue of immigration with drinking and driving at the same time, the representative further neglected the varied social and economic contributions made daily by the targeted local resident population. In addition, the narrative conveyed a message that Mexican lives are not as worthy, contributing to the perception of them as "illegals," that is, as criminals and a problem to society.<sup>10</sup>

Mexican lives in Charlotte were also positioned as threats to national security. Former Mecklenburg County Sheriff and current Commissioner Jim Pendergraph expressed this sentiment in

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<sup>10</sup> "Myrick Seeks Immigration Crackdown," *Charlotte Observer*, August 16, 2005; "Bill Puts N.C. in Borders Debate: House Representatives From State Push to Toughen Legislation," *Charlotte Observer*, December 9, 2005.

promotion of the local 287(g) Program, one of the more successful operations in the South and nationwide. In August 2006, then-Sheriff Pendergraph testified before a congressional hearing on the importance of this collaborative program:

Even though I have great concern for the flood of illegals coming across our southern border looking for a better way of life, my bigger concern is for those crossing our porous border looking to cause harm and commit acts of terrorism against the United States. This is a serious Homeland Security issue.

Appeals to national security resonated in another statement by the sheriff in December 2006. "He can be carrying a dirty bomb in a suitcase," he reported in a *Charlotte Observer* article, "or there can be two or three of them separately carrying parts to a bomb." Similarly, Representative Myrick highlighted this link on her campaign website to affirm her opposition to the issuance of driver's licenses. "If we don't secure our borders, illegals will continue to come into our country. It is a national security issue when we do not know who is in our country," she stated. Myrick continued in reference to the drivers' license issue: "I don't support illegals getting any form of government ID. It allows them to drive on our roads, open bank accounts, or even get on planes, like we saw on 9-11." This particular language has since been changed, though does not discard how local political leadership pursued an immigration enforcement

agenda by linking the presence of local undocumented residents with blatant acts of violence, including September 11, 2001.

This, of course, points to a glaring contradiction. Select local political leadership like Representative Myrick called for greater immigration enforcement measures, which included opposition to driver's licenses and other forms of government identification. Yet, one method to confirm who is living within the geo-political boundaries of the United States and including Charlotte, based on the framework of national security, would be to issue some form of identification to all local residents. Denying this resource means having persons who live in the community but are outside the scope of the U.S. government, making communities "less safe" in this regard. Focusing briefly on Charlotte, North Carolina, provides insight here into the impact of the immigrant enforcement agenda across the southern United States—especially at the state level in Georgia and Alabama in the same period—as well as the fervor of anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiment that accompanied these actions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jim Pendergraph, "Written Testimony for 'Empowering Local Law Enforcement to Combat Illegal Immigration,' August 25, 2006, *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources of the Committee on Government Reform, United States House of Representatives, One Hundred Ninth Congress, Second Session*; "His Mission, Fame: He Sends Illegal Immigrants Home-Mecklenburg Sheriff Embraces Visible

Few works from the New South literature sought to directly challenge the expansion immigration enforcement in the first decade. One noteworthy effort included a small collective of scholars in North Carolina who studied and documented the varied human costs of the then-controversial 287(g) Program for Latino and non-Latino communities alike. Most importantly, they were intentional in sharing their insights through various public community forums held in the state to impact a larger audience beyond those in academia. These actions, though critical, were marginal to the New South project, in word and deed.<sup>12</sup>

Pertinent to this dissertation, few studies from the New South literature have given significant attention to the history of Latinos in the region. Two notable exceptions include the

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Role in U.S. Program," *Charlotte Observer*, December 10, 2006; "Illegal Immigration," Sue Myrick Profile Website, available at <http://www.suemyrick.com/site/PageServer?pagename=Immigration>. The particular language currently reads: "It allows them to drive on our roads, open bank accounts, and get on planes while unlawfully present in the country. We saw this happen on 9-11, and it is an issue of national security."

<sup>12</sup> Mai Thi Nguyen, "Immigration Ordinances in North Carolina;" Hannah Gill, Mai Thi Nguyen, Katherine Lewis Parker, and Deborah Weissman, "Legal and Social Perspectives on Local Enforcement of Immigration Under the 287(g) Program," *Popular Government* 74, no.3 (Spring/Summer 2009): 2-21; Mai Thi Nguyen and Hannah Gill, *The 287(g) Program: The Costs and Consequences of Local Immigration Enforcement in North Carolina Communities* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The Latino Migration Project, The Institute for the Study of the Americas and The Center for Global Initiatives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), Gill, *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina*.

works of Wayne J. Pitts and Julie M. Weise. In 2003, Pitts provided a brief overview on the history of Mexican immigration to the United States to contextualize his study on community formation processes in Western North Carolina. In 2009, Weise integrated writings from Mexican American history to help inform her interpretation on the significance of Mexican "place-making" in the South. Both works, however, neglected the historical significance of Texas and Latino migration in the region, which is the focus of this dissertation.<sup>13</sup>

The pioneering anthology published in 2009, *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*, stands out for its influence on current and future directions of the New South scholarship. In contrast to the first publication in 2001, the more recent work represents perhaps the most accomplished to-date because of the breadth of issues addressed within and beyond regional perspectives. Editors of the

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<sup>13</sup> Although not addressing the contemporary period but should be part of the new literature, Sarah E. Cornell's work in 2008 drew from historiography on Mexican Americans and African Americans to illuminate and deconstruct contradictions in the resilient binary racial ideologies in the nineteenth century. Wayne J. Pitts, "Recent Mexican Immigration to the Rural South: A Case Study in Western North Carolina" (Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2003); Julie Meira Weise, "Fighting For Their Place: Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South, 1910-2008" (Dissertation, Yale University, 2009); Sarah E. Cornell, "Americans in the U.S. South and Mexico: A Transnational History of Race, Slavery, and Freedom, 1810-1910 (Dissertation: New York University, 2008).



anthology were also intentional to exclude Texas as well as Florida from the literature, another important distinction from the work in 2001.

"For the purposes of this volume," according to the editors in the introduction, "we define the South as those states that share a history of slavery and the legal institution of racial segregation and its undoing by the civil rights movement." They went on to state definitively, "Because of our interest in new immigration states we omit Texas and Florida, for they have a longer and different history of Latin American immigration." This view, however, is problematic. Although located on the geographic periphery, both Texas and Florida were important slave states in the region by the mid-nineteenth century in terms of population. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, both states also served as principal geographic centers and corridors of Latino migration and settlement by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

By establishing permanent homes in South Florida in 1950s, Latinos from the *Tejano* diaspora were able to pursue employment

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<sup>14</sup> Apart from Texas and Florida, states within the designated region of the U.S. South as outlined in the new literature have included Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia; Mary E. Odem, and Elaine Lacy, "Introduction," in *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the U.S. South*, eds. Mary E. Odem and Elaine Lacy (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), x.

in other locations in the South. Although designated a "new immigration" state, Latinos were already present and established in North Carolina well before the IRCA legislation in 1986. *Tejano* labor migration represents, thus, one critical missing link in current scholarship on Latinos in the New South. Excluding *Tejano* history fails to consider how Latino communities have formed across the southern United States through the twentieth century and perpetuates the false notion of *Tejanos* as a "people without history," which is not unique to the New South literature.<sup>15</sup>

Due to the sole focus on the contemporary period, the dominant narrative in the *Nuevo South* literature also has accepted and adopted the portrayal of Latinos as "new immigrants" or part of the last wave of immigrants, which too is subject to question as other scholars have noted. Namely, the narrative assumes an inclination to migrate and assimilate based solely on individual free-will, removes from discussion the larger historical-structural forces that have induced migration, and negates the historical presence of Mexican peoples that predates current geo-political boundaries. As historian Emma Pérez observed in a related critique, "Immigrants are expected

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<sup>15</sup> Armando C. Alonzo, *Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 6.

to become part of the dominant culture; they are urged to adopt its habits and forget their own—to erase.” Moreover, the narrative does not consider systemic societal relations that inhibit successful integration across multiple generations. Scholarship on Latinos in the New South has, thus, mostly reinforced a dominant history derived primarily from prior European patterns of immigration.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond just the inclusion of literature, more to the point here is the need to develop differential critical perspectives, or what can also be called expressions of oppositional consciousness, that examine and challenge the hemispheric imprints of European conquests and colonization in the Americas. We are now well into the second decade of this growing body of scholarship on the New South or *Nuevo South*, and the real task before us is not just one of “description” but also “prescription.” This form of intellectual engagement involves,

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<sup>16</sup> Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 78; Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 20-23; Ramón Grosfoguel, “Puerto Rican Labor Migration to the United States: Modes of Incorporation, Coloniality, and Identities,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 22, no. 4 (1999): 503-504.

in turn, a necessary process of rethinking the meaning and purpose of our work.<sup>17</sup>

### **Chicano Studies and Tejano Diaspora**

The official intellectual formation of Chicano Studies in academia—traced to *El Grito: Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought* founded in Berkeley in 1967, and *Aztlán: Chicano Journal of the Social Sciences and the Arts* in Los Angeles established in 1970-1971—influence this dissertation, including my critique of the New South literature. Most early writings were intentional, first and foremost, in countering extant academic scholarship that either completely ignored the presence of Mexican populations in the United States or dehumanized them. As well, noted Teresa Córdova, "Chicana/o Studies was founded upon *ideals of connectedness* between

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<sup>17</sup> These terms "corrective," "description," and "prescription" are drawn here from the work of the late historian Manning Marable, who identified three principles and practices within the African-American intellectual tradition. The "descriptive," presents the "reality of black life and experience from the point of view of black people themselves" (57). The "corrective" reflects "a concerted attempt to challenge and to critique the racism and stereotypes that have been ever present in the main discourse of white academic institution." And the "prescriptive" represents "an intellectual orientation which consistently connected scholarship with collective struggle, social analysis with social transformation" (58); Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Re-imagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 57-58; ode to the p, to g, to d.

university and community, whereby we pledged to apply the products of our education toward addressing the issues and problems facing Chicana/o communities." Early scholarship, in this view, served an important function in directly challenging forms of inequality confronting Chicano communities in the real world, and, in the process, contest the very legitimacy of academic knowledge in traditional disciplines.<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, early writings from the discipline represented a continued intellectual praxis by preceding generations of Chicano intellectuals, within academia and beyond. In describing the significance of *El Grito*, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto asserted that the literature "called for recognition that the Mexican American ferment of the time was not the result of new consciousness, but rather a continuation of a long struggle for human dignity."<sup>19</sup> Emma Pérez also surmised that writings by preceding Chicano intellectuals appeared to be "mainstream," yet were more oppositional and laid an important foundation for subsequent scholarship.

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<sup>18</sup> Teresa Córdova, "Plugging the Brain Drain: Bringing Our Education Back Home," in *Latino Social Policy: A Participatory Research Model*, eds. Juana Mora and David R. Díaz (New York, London, and Oxford: The Haworth Press, 2004), 27; emphasis by Córdova.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Michael Soldatenko, *Chicano Studies: The Genesis of a Discipline* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 6.

"Oppositional history was being articulated by these early scholars, whose work exhibited a significant intervention. Another consciousness was already emerging," Pérez noted. While the formation of Chicano Studies continued in this tradition, some writings turned to the role of the U.S. state and the study of colonialism to understand experiences of inequality for Chicano communities.<sup>20</sup>

The prominent example was the promulgation of the "model of internal colonialism" that was influenced by scholars such as Pablo Gonzalez Casanova and Robert Blauner. Casanova defined internal colonialism as "a structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogeneous distinct groups." Blauner further identified four shared experiences for internal colonies in the United States: an experience of forced or involuntary incorporation; a distortion of indigenous cultural values and ways of life; external administrative dependence; and finally, experiences of

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<sup>20</sup> This, of course, should not diminish related critiques by previous intellectuals, including the important work of Ernesto Galarza. "Thus it becomes of primary importance to determine," noted Galarza in 1949, "whether the economic policy of the United States is fostering or hampering the chances for creating a Mexico able to employ, feed, house, clothe, and educate its workers on a rising standard of living. To ignore its basic premise is to overlook the roots of the problem" (11); cited in Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 11; Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 9-10.

institutional and individual practices of racism. This analytical framework was most insightful in historicizing racial inequalities in the United States as a condition of colonialism, for Chicanos as well as Native Americans and African Americans.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequent scholarship has much noted, however, that most early writings from the discipline did not fully consider internal differences, contradictions, and changes affecting Chicano communities. Most scholars employed the internal colonial model to understand historical processes of racial oppression in the United States, yet they did not fully apply this framework in terms of differences in class, gender, geography, and sexuality. In a recent critique of the early literature, Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez posited that scholars "tended to oversimplify the complex experiences of this neglected group." The oversimplification was extended to the study of Mexican labor migration that was hindered by insular regional and nation-centered articulations, he further noted.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Blauner, "Internal Colonialism and the Ghetto Revolt," *Social Problems* 16 (Spring 1969): 393-408; Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, and London: Harper & Row, 1972); Pablo Gonzalez Casanova "Internal Colonialism and National Development," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 4 (1965): 33; Cardell K. Jacobson, "Internal Colonialism and Native Americans: Indian Labor in the United States from 1871 to World War II," *Social Science Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (March 1984): 158-171; Peter Bohmer, "African-Americans as an Internal Colony: The Theory of Internal Colonialism," December 20, 1998.

Due as well to its historic formation during the militant and culturally nationalist period of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the internal colonial model and the study of colonialism has since been subject to much criticism and, for many, ultimately discarded.<sup>22</sup>

In one respect, the disassociation from the study of colonialism stands with some reason when considering the still recent history of the discipline as a "legitimate" body of knowledge in academia. George Mariscal raised this point in his critical study, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975*. The deployment of the "nationalist" critique without further elaboration, he stated, has been used to discredit many positive contributions during the Chicano Movement, and the visibly activist expressions of contestation that helped establish most Chicano Studies programs and departments in college and university settings. The use of the label has also obscured the multiple nationalist and internationalist intellectual positions, as well as contradictions, that influenced Chicano political thought during

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez, "Introduction: Histories and Historiographies of Greater Mexico," in *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, ed. Mark Overmeyer-Velázquez (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxvi; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6-8; Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 6.



this period, and, in turn, Chicano Studies as a discipline. The disavowal of early scholarship, which is conflated with the historic period, represents one logical response to perhaps solidify the discipline from its still tenuous position into the professional mainstream of academia. This inclination, however, also comes with a cost that is still being written.<sup>23</sup>

In an assessment of the early literature, from 1970 to 1984, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo offered an interpretation that encapsulates the intellectual charge and challenge of the discipline. "Chicano Studies for the most part shares in the broader endeavor," according to Rosaldo, "of combating ideological, political, and economic forms of oppression confronted by their research subjects."<sup>24</sup> At the very least, the business of immigration detention and deportation linked to the growing prison industrial complex, the concomitant anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiment used to justify immigration

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<sup>23</sup> Mariscal was more direct: "I am struck continually by the efforts of many Mexican American professionals to deny any value whatsoever to the [Chicano] Movement period and to cast it in a completely negative light. I began to notice the ways in which at academic conferences and even at the level of everyday community and campus politics something called 'Chicano nationalism' had become the *cucui* or bogeyman against which those professionals who had achieved successful careers (a success inconceivable without the Movement's contributions) constructed their public and professional identities" (11-12); Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 11-12.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun*, 19.

enforcement, deepening economic disparities at local, national, and international levels, and continued threats against ethnic studies programs make clear for the continued need of a Chicano Studies intellectual praxis.

Furthermore, the discipline continues to expand from its initial intellectual formation in the 1960s, including with this dissertation. This relates to the issue of geography. One continued criticism of the literature has been the focus on the southwestern United States as the norm. Although Chicano communities have been present in the Pacific Northwest for over a century, as one glaring example, the number of studies conducted and published on the entire region does not compare to scholarly attention on the city of Los Angeles alone. The restricted geographic focus has been due to a number of factors, including the historic concentration of Mexican peoples in the southwestern United States, the relatively recent history of the discipline, and the still small number of scholars committed to its development. My analysis is informed from a Chicano Studies framework, while I refine its geography to the southern United States and, in turn, contribute to the growth of the literature.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For one example reflecting this critique, see Gilberto García, and Jerry García, eds, *The Illusion of Borders: The National Presence of Mexicanos in the United States* (Dubuque,

This dissertation also enriches discussion on Tejano history and diaspora within Chicano Studies. There are varied elements that can constitute a diasporic experience. These include "dispersal from a homeland, often by violent forces, the making of a memory and a vision of that homeland, marginalization in the new location, a commitment to the maintenance/restoration of the homeland, and desire for return and a continuing relationship and identity with the homeland."<sup>26</sup> Historian Emma Pérez took important steps by exploring the experience of diaspora in her work on the "decolonial imaginary."

This framework, at the very least, offers a much needed counter-narrative to the dominant new immigrant model that renders differences invisible or compared solely to prior patterns of European immigration. Pérez recognized this point in the following:

Diasporic subjectivity would not deny the culture of race, but instead would open a space where people of color—in this case, Chicanas/os—could negotiate a raced culture within many kinds of identities without racial erasure through assimilation, accommodation, adaptation, acculturation, or even resistance—all of which have been

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Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2001); ode to the j, to the g.

<sup>26</sup> Tiffany Ruby Patterson, and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (April 2000): 15.

robbed of their decolonial oppositional subjectivity under the rubric of immigrant.

Along the same lines, diaspora provides a long-term and holistic approach in understanding and resisting the contours of colonial domination. Pérez also applied this lens to describe a history of Texas: "A kind of colonial diaspora emerged, created by populations dispersed through a land named, renamed, bordered, measured, mapped, and fenced to restrict more movement, whether dictated by Spanish colonialists, Mexicans or Euroamericans—all have mapped and demarcated with artificial lines land where travel persists through time." In this respect, the term diaspora provides a critical space that recognizes the different layerings of colonial impositions and contestations taking place over time, from generation to generation.

The lived experiences, representing histories from the "bottom up," become the center of analysis. While diasporic communities are formed through negative experiences, there is also an emphasis on the power of agency among those living in the diaspora. In spite of continued challenges in the "absence of homeland," they still possess the power to reconnect and recreate their own expressions of belonging.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 75-80; see also, Antonia I. Castañeda, "Que Se Pudieran Defender (So you Could Defend Yourselves): Chicanas, Regional History, and National Discourses," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22, no. 3

Marc Simon Rodriguez also applied this framework in his title, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin*. Published in 2011, Rodriguez examined the formation of community activism, what he termed "Mexican Americanism," in Texas and Wisconsin, from the post-World War Two period of the 1950s into the Chicano Movement era of the 1960s and 1970s. Social networks within the agricultural migrant stream enriched community activism between South Texas and Wisconsin, including the formation of *La Raza Unida* Party in the former and the labor union *Obreros Unidos* in the latter. For Rodriguez, the *Tejano* diaspora emerged in response to the need of labor markets in the United States. "The migrant stream that comprised the Tejano diaspora emerged in the early twentieth century as a labor network established by interstate agricultural industries," he noted.<sup>28</sup>

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(2001): 116-142; Karen Mary Davalos, *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 21-31; Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 34-35; Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). At least one work to-date from the Latinos in the New South literature has employed diaspora in the title. See Stanton Wortham, Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., and Edmund T. Hamann, eds., *Education in the New Latino Diaspora* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Ablex Publishing, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora*, 6.

Although not one of his central concerns, historian James N. Gregory similarly gave attention to the *Tejano* agricultural workers as part of a larger process of U.S. southern out-migration from the turn of the twentieth century through the 1970s. "The *Tejano* exodus," Gregory stated, "was easily overlooked by contemporaries who usually failed to distinguish between Chicano migrants and newcomers from Mexico." Gregory applied the term "Southern Diaspora" to represent labor out-migration by southern workers in the United States, a process that peaked in the 1970s and 1980s and declined thereafter.<sup>29</sup>

This study examines experiences of *Tejano* agricultural workers who left their home communities in South Texas during the mid-twentieth century, focusing on localities in the southern United States. Similar to the above articulations, I too apply a "diasporic subjectivity" to emphasize the power of agency in the lives of these workers. In addition, the concept of a *Tejano* diaspora helps to understand the northward movement from South Texas and eventual settlement of agricultural workers as a process of labor migration.

At the same time, viewing the *Tejano* diaspora solely through a lens of labor migration and only within a nation-based

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<sup>29</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 35.

movement neglects the experience of displacement for *Tejano* workers as part of a systemic phenomenon between the United States and Mexico, as I propose in this dissertation. Labor migration among southern workers from the United States declined after the 1970s and 1980s, yet the presence of *Tejano* agricultural workers as part of this movement also signaled the rise of southern workers from Mexico. The varied experiences of Texas Mexicans in the southern United States provide insight then into how Mexican—and, in turn, Latino—communities began to take shape throughout the region. While still very questionable, a diasporic subjectivity helps in this study to situate the presence of Mexican labor in the United States as a consequence of forced displacement, including *Tejanos*, and to cultivate a consciousness of solidarity between and within Mexican diasporas across distinct historical periods and geographic regions.

### **Outline of Chapters**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. I begin in chapter one by providing a historical mapping of Mexican labor migration to and from the United States as reflected in extant scholarship in Chicano Studies. I also include a brief discussion on the first large period of labor migration between

Mexico and Texas in the early twentieth century, which provides a foundation for the remaining chapters.

Chapter two examines the historical significance of the Bracero Program in South Texas and the systemic inducement of a *Tejano* diaspora nationwide. My discussion on the Bracero Program continues in chapter three when I turn attention to the Mississippi Delta states of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi. Similar to South Texas, agricultural workers in the Delta, principally Arkansas where the largest number of *braceros* were contracted, experienced different dimensions of displacement.

I continue in chapter four by tracing the process of *Tejano* labor migration and settlement in South Florida, from the 1950s through the 1970s. I particularly examine the formation of Florida Mexican community activism during this period. In chapter six, I then analyze the rise of inter-state farmworkers and their experiences on farms in North Carolina, primarily from the 1970s to the 1990s. As Mexican American and Mexican farmworkers became more visible during this period, including employer recruitment of H2A guest workers in the 1990s, I demonstrate ways in which they too were grafted into existent colonial configurations already present in the state.



## Terminology

Let me also say a brief word about terminology. I have tried to be as specific as possible to illuminate the geographic region and historic period being discussed. In this introduction, I frequently use the term "Latinos in the New South" or "Latinos in the *Nuevo South*" to correspond with academic literature written about recent Latino labor migration to the South. Unless otherwise specified, the term "Latino" refers to male and female persons living in the United States whose country of origin or ancestry is located in Latin America, including Mexico.

Beginning in chapter one, I use the term "Mexican" to refer to male and female persons who were born in Mexico and migrated to the United States, unless otherwise specified i.e. "Mexicans from colonized territories." I also begin to use the term "Texas Mexican" to refer to male and female persons of Mexican ancestry who were born or established their permanent homes in Texas. The term "*Tejano*" is used interchangeably with "Texas Mexican." Unless specified to individuals, I have decided to use the masculine term "*Tejano*" to designate male and female persons in plural form, i.e. "*Tejano* migrants" or "*Tejano* labor migration." This also maintains consistency with the Latinos in the New South literature, and which I also extend to the discipline of "Chicano Studies."

In chapter two, I use the term "*braceros*" or "*bracero* workers" to designate legalized single male guest workers from Mexico who were contracted for work through the Bracero Program from 1942 to 1964. This term is also used interchangeably with "Mexican National workers." The term "undocumented" is used to refer to male and female persons living in the United States without U.S. legal status. In chapter three, I begin to use the term "Black farmworkers" or "Black migrant farmworkers" to refer to male and female persons born in the southern United States and direct descendants of enslaved Africans in the same region.

In chapter four, I use the term "Florida Mexican" to designate male and female migrants from Texas who established permanent homes in Florida. Sporadically, I also use the term "Mexican American" to refer to male and female U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry, without distinction to geographic location. And in chapter five, I use "H2A workers" to designate legalized single male guest workers from Mexico who were contracted for farm work in the United States through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

### **Disclaimer**

The purpose of this dissertation, I should also note here, is not to provide a comprehensive micro-historical study on Latinos in every location examined. In order to address how and

why Mexican, and in turn Latino, communities have formed across the southern United States in the twentieth century, my main goal is rather to trace the systemic process of labor migration and settlement in the principals destinations, and in chronological order.

In order to understand, for example, how and why Latinos have settled in North Carolina, I had to situate this process as a consequence of labor migration to and from South Florida and the Atlantic Migrant Stream. Similarly, migration and settlement in South Florida took place because of out-migration from the Mississippi Delta and South Texas. Each experience of labor migration, in other words, informed the next.

I also focus my analysis on experiences of agricultural workers to provide cohesiveness throughout all locations examined, and to underscore the influence of commercial agriculture and systemic inducement of labor migration. I envision each chapter to serve as a springboard for future related studies on the southern United States. More work is still needed to further contextualize Latino experiences in urban municipalities, which followed.

I likewise suggest here that future directions in the Latinos in the New South scholarship should necessitate concurrent and differential critical perspectives that consider the geographic expanse of recent Latino migration. The New

South literature, in other words, was formed in response to contemporary Latino migration, primarily from Mexico and Central America and secondarily the Caribbean and South America.<sup>30</sup> More nuanced interpretations on Latinos in the New South or *Nuevo South* have just begun to be explored in this regard, which should also help illuminate distinct configurations of colonial conquests, colonization, and migration. This dissertation project represents, then, only one in a series of much needed counter-narratives still to be constructed in the *Nuevo South* literature.

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<sup>30</sup> As Mary E. Odem and Elaine Lacy documented, for example, Mexico and Central America represented nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  or 74 percent of places of origin for the Hispanic/Latino population in ten southern states, according the U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey; Odem and Lacy, "Introduction," x, xix.

Figure 1. "Truckload of Mexican Migrants Returning from Mississippi Where They Had Been Picking Cotton, Highway near Neches, Texas, Anderson County"<sup>31</sup>



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<sup>31</sup> Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONQUESTS, COLONIAL LABOR, AND DIASPORIC MIGRATION: SITUATING MEXICAN LABOR MIGRATION

*"Certainly our immigration policy and program results in exploitation of the Mexican peasant in that he works for less than our own citizens. The doctrine of manifest destiny is brought down to date with a vengeance. Where, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we only took Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California away from Mexico, we now, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only exploit (even though it be to our long-run disadvantage) Mexico's own citizens. We also discriminate against her on the economic front."*

--U.S. Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, 1948<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

This chapter builds upon extant Chicano Studies scholarship in history to situate Mexican labor migration to the United States. Most writings, first of all, begin with the centrality of the U.S. military invasion and occupation of northern Mexican territories in the mid-nineteenth century. "Since that radical and painful fragmentation and dispersal of Mexicans in 1848," as Karen Mary Davalos has expressed, "women and men have moved and

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<sup>1</sup> "Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, December 31, 1948," Subject File, Papers of David H. Stowe (hereafter PDHS), Box 6, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum (hereafter HSTLM).

have been moved back and forth across the geopolitical border looking for work, joining with family, and forming communities." The Mexican Government lost vast territory, and the U.S. invasion also established international relations of unequal engagement between the two countries.

Another variant points rather to the consequent economic subordination of Mexico that began two decades later in the nineteenth century. "When the integration of a national economy occurred," noted Juan Gómez-Quiñones in reference to Mexico in the late nineteenth century, "control of major productive resources was in the hands of foreign North-American and European capital." Recent work by Gilbert G. González and Raúl A. Fernández has extended this view: "The origins of the Chicano population evolved from economic empire led by corporate capitalist interests with the backing of the U.S. State Department." U.S. economic dominance over the Mexican Republic initiated sustained flows of Mexican labor migration, a process distinct from the violence of military conquest.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Mary Davalos, *Exhibiting Mestizaje: Mexican (American) Museums in the Diaspora* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 21; Juan Gómez-Quiñones, "Mexican Immigration to the United States, 1848-1980: An Overview," in *Chicano Studies: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, eds. Isidro Ortiz, Eugene García, and Francisco Lomelí (New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1984), 58-59; González and Fernández, "Empire and the Origins," 57, 59.

I integrate both perspectives in this chapter to demonstrate how military and economic conquests have been mutually reinforcing, albeit in different ways. First and foremost, the imposition of a geopolitical border through military conquest accentuated fragmentation among Mexican families and peoples. The physical and symbolic separation was strengthened through colonial labor practices developed on conquered lands in the latter nineteenth century, particularly Texas. While the U.S. invasion established terms of unequal engagement, subsequent U.S. capital domination in Mexico further solidified an economic neocolonial relationship between the two countries. Equally important, experiences of displacement resulting from economic conquest have induced sustained migratory flows of Mexican diasporas.

I first examine the significance of military conquest and the imposition of the geopolitical boundary, focusing on South Texas. While the formal rights of U.S. citizenship were extended to Mexican subjects in colonized territories, I demonstrate ways in which this concession was limited in the face of real and symbolic forms of violence and dispossession that emanated from military conquest. Secondly, I examine the relation between U.S. economic conquest and Mexican labor migration. And lastly, I begin to briefly analyze these processes in the first large-scale period of Mexican labor



migration in early twentieth century, when large numbers of workers and families from Mexico added to existent Texas Mexican communities by establishing permanent homes in South Texas.

### **Military Conquest and Colonial Labor**

"Though God might be guiding the Americans to the conquest of Mexico," noted Reginald Horsman in his highly referenced study, "he had not provided a detailed plan for American rule over the Mexican people."<sup>3</sup> With its official end in 1848, the estimated 75,000 to 100,000 Mexicans who remained in colonized territories were accorded "all the rights of citizens of the United States" under Article IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. At the same time, racialized and gendered renderings of anti-Mexican hostility that justified the U.S. military invasion, and the preceding Texas Republic movement in Texas, continued to manifest in the latter nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 13; Antonia I. Castañeda, "The Political Economy of Nineteenth Century Stereotypes of Californianas," in *Between the Conquests: Readings in Early Chicano History*, ed. Michael R. Ornelas (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991): 87-105; Arnoldo De León, "Initial Contacts: Redeeming Texas from Mexicans, 1821-1836," in *Between the Conquests: Readings in Early Chicano History*, ed. Michael R. Ornelas (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991): 59-71; Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*

These real and symbolic forms of violence hindered the full incorporation of Mexican Americans. Namely, Mexican Americans became "foreigners in their native land" in spite of U.S. citizenship. Pertinent to this discussion, elements of a "colonial labor system" also emerged in the wake of military conquest. A "colonial labor system exists," proposed Mario Barrera, "where the labor force is segmented along ethnic and/or racial lines, and one or more of the segments is systematically maintained in a subordinate position." The region of South Texas—located south of San Antonio, north of the Rio Grande River, and west of the Gulf of Mexico according to Cynthia E. Orozco—proved to be an important geography where colonial labor practices developed. These included experiences of labor repression, a dual wage system, occupational stratification, a reserve labor force, and disposability.<sup>5</sup>

Three principal factors facilitated this development in South Texas. First and foremost, the military invasion imposed a contested geopolitical political boundary that became the United States-Mexico border. Whereas Mexico held that the

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(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 14-20.

<sup>5</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 39-40; Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 18-19.

boundary was located farther north along the Nueces River, U.S. Congress enforced the Rio Grande as the dividing line. In the immediate sense, the forced separation of South Texas from Mexico fragmented Mexican families and peoples living in the area. Américo Paredes astutely surmised the impact of war:

It was the Treaty of Guadalupe that added the final element to Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point, became a dividing line. Men were expected to consider their relatives and closet neighbors the people just across the river, as foreigners in a foreign land. A restless and acquisitive people, exercising the rights of conquest, disturbed the old ways.

Through U.S. military conquest, South Texas became a Mexican internal colony in the United States. While Mexican labor migration to South Texas remained fluid throughout the nineteenth century, the invasion initiated a new era of formalized divisions among Mexican families and peoples, based on distinct categories of citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

The formation of the United States-Mexico border also assumed greater importance in terms of its geographic expanse. That is, with the "Gadsden Purchase" in 1853, the U.S. territorial conquest created an expansive geographic proximity to Mexico that allowed, in turn, a continuity of Mexican migration, including permanent, temporary, or intermittent. The

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<sup>6</sup> Martha Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants: A Texas History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 16-17; Américo Paredes, *'With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958), 15.

actual Texas-Mexico border made up more than half of the geopolitical boundary, which most importantly ensured the propinquity of a large international reserve labor pool.<sup>7</sup>

The reserve labor could be used in various ways. In periods of high demand, workers from northern Mexico could easily be recruited to increase production. In times of economic crisis, workers could serve as a scapegoat for public discontent. The reserve labor force could also contribute to a dual-wage system as a means of decreasing wages and countering actions of organized labor. Texas remained the primary receiving state for Mexican labor through the mid-twentieth century, and these practices continued to grow in importance.<sup>8</sup>

A second factor was a settler culture of anti-Mexican violence that emanated from military conquest, which, in turn, expanded forms of labor repression. Texas Mexican communities were subjected to large-scale acts of violence and dispossession

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<sup>7</sup> Christine M. Sierra, "Chicano Political Development: Historical Considerations," in *Chicano Studies: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, eds. Isidro Ortíz, Eugene García, and Francisco Lomelí (New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1984), 82-84; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 47-48. According to *The Texas Tribune*, the Texas-Mexico border represents approximately 1,254 miles, or 66 percent, of the 1,900 mile border. "Tribpedia: Texas-Mexico Border," *The Texas Tribune*, available at <http://www.texastribune.org/tribpedia/texas-mexico-border/>.

<sup>8</sup> Gómez-Quíñones, "Mexican Immigration to the United States," 58; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 41-43.

amid the Texas Republic movement in the mid-1830s, particularly in towns above the Nueces River and in closer proximity to settler colonies like Austin. The U.S. military conquest ten years later reinforced these practices.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1850s, Texas Mexican families were expelled in communities above the Nueces River for suspicion of disloyalty and aiding enslaved peoples to escape to Mexico and toward freedom. According to David Montejano, the Texas-Mexico border "was the boundary sought by both escaping Mexican *peones* and black slaves," during the 15-year period from the military invasion and U.S. Civil War. "The boundary was also the working zone for slave and *peón* 'catchers,'" he continued. Entire Texas Mexican communities in cities and counties were completely uprooted through the 1850s, including in Austin in 1853 and 1855, and Seguin in 1854. Texas Mexicans were displaced in Matagorda and Colorado counties in 1856 and in Uvalde in 1857.<sup>10</sup>

Following the Civil War in the 1860s and 1870s, South Texas too became a "powderkeg of violence," most notably in the form of lynchings. Perhaps the most notorious acts of violence toward

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<sup>9</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 26-30, 77; Arnoldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A Brief History, Second Edition* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1999), 38; De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 52-53.

Texas Mexicans involved the Texas Rangers. Initially formed in the 1820s as a small body of volunteers charged with scouting "Indians," the frontier battalion became a military unit during the U.S. military conquest of Mexico. And upon military conquest, they served various roles in the displacement of Texas Mexicans. During the 1870s and 1880s, according to Arnolfo De León, the rangers conducted extensive terror campaigns in the Rio Grande Valley by inciting fear in the lives of Texas Mexican residents "at every opportunity." While "rinche" referred to official Texas Rangers, the word was also extended to "any other Americans armed and mounted and looking for Mexicans to kill," according to Paredes. Former rangers also worked as foremen for landowner Richard King and other cattle barons in South Texas.<sup>11</sup>

From this culture of violence resulting from military conquest, the economic mobility of most Texas Mexican labor became limited. In his study, David Gutiérrez noted that work for Texas Mexicans was fairly evenly distributed in 1850, which included independent ranch-farm owner-operators, skilled workers, and semiskilled and unskilled laborers. By the 1870s, a disproportionate number were relegated to "unspecialized

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<sup>11</sup> De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 40; De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 75-76, 80-81, 88; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 33-34, 52, 83; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 26; Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, 24.

labor." In 1900, "Mexicans in Texas made up part of a regional economy characterized by a clear ethnic division of labor in which they were trapped in the least-skilled and lowest-paid jobs." The process of occupational stratification greatly reduced and limited the types of employment available to Texas Mexican labor in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

A third dynamic present in South Texas was the existence of paternal work relations that facilitated the positioning of Texas Mexican working-class as disposable peoples. Mario Barrera identified this condition as "buffers" in his study on the colonial labor system in the Southwest. In one sense, according to Barrera, "buffers" represent workers who lack social, economic, and political influence, relegated to the least-skilled and lowest-paid jobs. That is, "the advantage to the employer in such a system is that the impact of hard times is concentrated on the workers who are most vulnerable and least able to defend themselves." As easily as they can be recruited, as disposable peoples, they can also be used as "shock-absorbers" in times of high unemployment, which in the end only strengthens the position of employers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 26; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 48.

In the South Texas where Texas Mexicans were numerically dominant, the emergence of another important buffer variant also took shape. "In the case of the Texas-Mexican border region and generally in the annexed Southwest," Montejano pointed out, "the ability to govern in the immediate postwar period was secured through an accommodation between the victorious Anglos and the defeated Mexican elite, with the latter in command of the Mexican communities." In collaboration with landowning elite, the success of settlers was most contingent on adopting existent *patrón/peón* work relations that emphasized loyalty and mutual dependence, and assuming the ways of the former.

Upon military conquest, this maneuvering proved to be critical in the concentration of social, economic, and political control. One glaring example was the electoral process. In localities outside of South Texas, collaboration was less necessary as legislation mostly constrained Texas Mexicans from political participation, including the "White Man's Primaries" that established criteria for voting to only "qualified white" voters, and the implementation of a poll tax. South Texas was distinct in that electoral success necessitated the local involvement of Texas Mexican *patrones*. That is, "Anglo political bosses provided patronage and/or cash payments to these [Mexican American elite] sub-bosses in exchange for the working-class Mexican American vote they delivered." The act of



voting represented, then, an extension of obligation to the *patrón* as opposed to a liberating form of civic engagement.

By using their knowledge and influence to help to maintain order and control, some Texas Mexican landowning families also benefitted from the accommodation arrangement, particularly in the immediate years after the violence of war. Due primarily to their economic status as landowners, elite families were protected in part from virulent forms of anti-Mexican hostility that affected most Texas Mexicans. Male members were also able to maintain a social identity as "good citizens" and exercise some degree of influence over local affairs, a process that can be called selective citizenship. At best, however, their equal participation proved to be only circumstantial. Through the latter nineteenth century, paternal work relations were effectively adopted in settler ranches throughout South Texas, and the economic land base for most Texas Mexican elite families further collapsed. With the loss of land, so did most lose their influence and by 1900, they too were rendered obsolete with the influx of new settlers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 34, 50, 81, 84; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 26-28, 32-33.

## **Economic Conquest and Diaspora**

South Texas became a Mexican internal colony in the United States through military conquest in the mid-nineteenth century. Subsequently, the Mexican Republic became dependent on the United States through a process of economic conquest. While the former established terms of unequal engagement for Mexican labor within the U.S. colonial project, the latter ensured a continuity of labor migration through a condition of economic neocolonialism. "The essence of neo-colonialism," according to the late Kwame Nkrumah, "is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic systems and thus its political policy is directed from outside."<sup>15</sup> In this section, I briefly examine the main tenets of this process in the late nineteenth century, focusing on the relation between U.S. capital investment and the initial displacement and migration of Mexican labor. Building upon the work of Gilbert G. González and Raúl Fernández, this historical analysis demonstrates the importance of Mexican labor dispersal in the

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<sup>15</sup> Cited in Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 191.

United States throughout the twentieth century as a structural response to the economic subordination of Mexico.<sup>16</sup>

Mexican workers in Mexico were first displaced in the wake of U.S. economic conquest in the late nineteenth century, which coincided with perhaps the most concentrated historical period of political centralization and economic development. For the duration of the thirty-five years under Porfirio Díaz regime, from 1876 to 1911, and in collaboration with local Mexican elite, foreign companies came to control all major industries in Mexico. "It was a period," according to one study, "in which foreigners, with U.S. entrepreneurs at the forefront, took over much of the economy." The most critical was the railroad industry. Although a railroad system was already developed from Mexico City to Veracruz, the Mexican Government during the *Porfiriato* opened up government concessions to U.S. railroad companies to expand construction, particularly in the northern states of Sonora, Coahuila, and Chihuahua. Within the first three years, five railroads were constructed using Mexican labor and owned by foreign capital.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Gilbert G. González, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor: Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 194.

<sup>17</sup> James D. Cockcroft, *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State* (New York: Monthly Review Press,

Control of the railroad system enabled regional markets to be connected as well as future investments in other Mexican industries. Links were established between rich mining areas in northern and central Mexico to gulf ports and towns along the Texas border, as well as industrial centers in the United States like Chicago and Pittsburgh. While U.S. companies came to own fully 80 percent of Mexican railroads, more capital investment and eventual control was seized in other industries like mining, cattle farming, and cotton production. In 1884, for example, U.S. mining interests controlled and operated forty mining sites in Mexico. Twenty years later in 1904, U.S. companies controlled just under 13,700 mines, particularly in Chihuahua in northern Mexico. By 1911 and in the midst of the Mexican Revolution, some 90 percent of all investments in mining were owned by foreign interests, with the majority, approximately 80 percent, by U.S. companies.<sup>18</sup>

One immediate and long-term result was the formation an unequal relationship between the Mexican Government and foreign economic interests, principally the United States. By 1910, for

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1983), 86-87; González and Fernández, "Empire and the Origins," 34.

<sup>18</sup> Cockcroft, *Mexico*, 89, 93; González and Fernández, "Empire and the Origins," 21, 34; Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Corridors of Migration: The Odyssey of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007), 40.

example, at least half of Mexico's national wealth was under control of foreign ownership. Based on estimates one year later, U.S. investments alone were greater than Mexican economic elite and twice as much as all other foreign capital in Mexico.<sup>19</sup> The magnitude of this dynamic was also expressed in the following observation:

American interests—the Hearsts, the Guggenheims, United States Steel, the Anaconda Corporation, Standard Oil, McCormick, Doheny—owned three quarters of the mines and more than half of the oil fields; they owned sugar plantations, coffee *fincas*, cotton, rubber, orchilla, and maguey plantations, and—along the American border—enormous cattle ranches. The American investment in Mexico, which by 1910 had grown to more than a billion dollars, exceeded the total capital owned by the Mexicans themselves.<sup>20</sup>

Under then the direction of U.S. economic interests, local Mexican elite served as overseers in the development of Mexican industries and in collaboration with government representatives. Their involvement was critical to the day-to-day management and gave the appearance of an independent republic.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, however, policies related to the growth and direction of these industries, as well as the Mexican political economy, were

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<sup>19</sup> González and Fernández, "Empire and the Origins," 36; Cockcroft, *Mexico*, 93.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> González and Fernández, "Empire and the Origins," 36.

still dictated by economic interests that emanated from the United States.

Another critical outcome was the then-unprecedented large-scale population displacement and internal migration in Mexico, which facilitated the inducement of labor migration to the United States. Internal migration was first realized in two ways, from rural to urban localities, such as to Mexico City, as well as from southern to northern states along the U.S.-Mexico border. In commenting on the growth of Mexico City, for example, historian Michael Johns asserted that "railroads and expanding haciendas threw so many off their lands in the 1880s and 1890s that nearly half of the city's five hundred thousand residents...were peasants." The internal displacement of Mexican peoples from their home communities led to their recruitment as wage laborers in the development of U.S.-owned industries in northern Mexico, particularly railroads and mining. Not surprisingly, then, northern states of Coahuila, Durango, Nuevo León, Chihuahua, and Sonora consistently surpassed others in terms of population growth during the period of the *Porfiriato*. Pertinent to this study, the demographic redistribution toward northern Mexico also solidified the presence of a large

international reserve pool of labor along the United States-Mexico border.<sup>22</sup>

### **Early Twentieth Century Migration**

The displacement of Mexican labor to northern states in Mexico also coincided with the first recognized period of large-scale Mexican labor migration to the United States. Informed scholars estimate one to 1.5 million migrants, or more than 10 percent of Mexico's population, migrated to the United States from the late 1890s through the 1920s. The state of Texas continued to serve as the primary receiving state, and from 1900 to 1930, its Mexican population grew nearly ten-fold. As Carey McWilliams noted, the Mexican population in Texas increased from an estimated 71,062 in 1900 to 683,681 in 1930. By 1930, according to Arnolfo De León, the "Mexico-born population" of Texas Mexicans in the state was estimated to be 266,364.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> González and Fernández, "Empire and the Origins," 36-42; Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 43-44, 47; Michael Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 64; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 69; Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert G. González, "Mexican Labor Migration, 1876-1924," in *Beyond La Frontera*, 30; De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 66, 68; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 40; Lawrence A. Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 38; George O. Coalson, *The Development of the Migratory Farm Labor System in Texas: 1900-*

Workers born in Mexico who migrated and settled in Texas were grafted into existent colonial configurations that were formed in the latter nineteenth century and expanded into the twentieth century. The lucrative business of labor recruitment to meet the desires of commercial agriculture and concomitant rise of anti-Mexican hostility, the focus of this brief analysis, relegated Mexican migrants to low-wage, disposable labor. At the same time, the large numerical presence and eventual settlement of Mexican workers contributed to long-standing Texas Mexican communities.

Extensive recruitment of Mexican labor was critical to the expansion of U.S. railroad, mining, and agriculture industries in the early twentieth century. Similar to northern Mexico, the most important initial development in southwestern United States was construction and maintenance of a railroad system. As early as the 1870s, Mexican labor from the southwest United States and northern Mexico was recruited to clear brush lands for railroad

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1954 (San Francisco, California: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 12; Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 7; Carey McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1942), 247; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 65; "Report to Members of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, from Robert K. Carr, Subject: Civil Rights Problems of Mexican Americans," Records of the President's Commission on Civil Rights (hereafter RPCCR), Record Group (hereafter RG) 220, Box 3, HSTLM.



construction. As a result, local markets became linked across regions and nations, and labor migration was extended into Texas and other regions of the United States. "Railroad employment profoundly affected the movement of Mexican immigrants within the United States," according to Barbara A. Driscoll. "It influenced settlement patterns, especially outside the Southwest, facilitated employment opportunities in other industries, and introduced large visible groups of Mexican workers to a broader cross section of U.S. society," she continued. Equally important, the railroad system facilitated the creation of new markets with the transition of land to large-scale agriculture, and the need for labor.<sup>24</sup>

The completion of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway in 1904 connected the border city of Brownsville and

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<sup>24</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 59-62; De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 52-53; Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 68; Peter N. Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States From Roosevelt to Nixon* (San Francisco, California: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 2; Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin, Texas: The Center for Mexican American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin Press, 1999), 17-18; "Statement of Regional Office Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking for President's Commission on Migratory Labor, July 31-August 1, 1950." U.S. President's Committee on Migratory Labor, 1950-1951 (hereafter USPCML), RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM; Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States" Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of labor Bulletin, No. 78, in *Mexican Labor in the United States*, ed. Carlos E. Cortés (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 469-470.

solidified these changes in South Texas. Soon after, the Rio Grande Valley was transformed from an isolated geographic area to one that attracted a large influx of new settlers, the expansion of land for commercial agricultural production, and recruitment of migrant labor. As one study noted, "With the railroad came farmers, and behind them came land developers, irrigation engineers, and northern produce brokers." One indication of the growth in farming was the total population in South Texas, reported at 79,934 in 1900, and 322,845 by 1930. Most were concentrated in Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Nueces, all farm counties.<sup>25</sup>

The transition to large-scale agriculture was realized primarily through the spread of cotton production, first introduced in 1822 by settler colonies of Austin, and the harvesting of fruits and vegetables in South Texas. In the early twentieth century, the railroad system, increased migration from southern and mid-western United States, and partial mechanization in pre-harvest operations—particularly the introduction of larger machinery such as the tractor—were

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<sup>25</sup> De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas*, 52-53; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 107-108; McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 248; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 107-109.

factors that dramatically expanded production, and Texas became one of the highest producers of cotton in the country.<sup>26</sup>

The railroad system also enabled developers to use land for perishable "truck crops" in South Texas, along with techniques were developed to expand irrigation and preserve perishable goods. Using the railroad system, fresh produce from farming counties in South Texas was quickly transported to northern markets in the United States. Similar transformations also took place in California and Florida, contributing to the year-round availability of fresh fruits and produce in the country.<sup>27</sup>

Growers in South Texas, however, faced the need for short-term farm labor during harvest to maximize potential profits. The presence of the United States-Mexico border, a consequence of military conquest in the nineteenth century, gained greater

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<sup>26</sup> Coalson, *The Development of the Migratory Labor System in Texas*, 1-4; Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, Reprint, 1968), 173-174; José Guillermo Pastrano, "Industrial Agriculture In the Peripheral South: State, Race, and the Politics of Migrant Labor in Texas, 1890-1930" (Dissertation: University of California at Santa Barbara, 2006), 29-30; Sylvia D. Turner, "Thy Kingdom Come: The Intersection of King Cotton and Immigration Policy," (Dissertation: Emory University, 2010), 69.

<sup>27</sup> Coalson, *The Development of the Migratory Labor System in Texas*, 6-7; Pastrano, "Industrial Agriculture," 48; Otey M. Scruggs, *Braceros, "Wetbacks," and the Farm Labor Problem: Mexican Agricultural Labor in the United States, 1942-1954* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 15.

importance. Selden C. Menefree affirmed this view in a study conducted on migratory workers in 1941. "The existence of a reservoir of low-paid Mexican labor just across the border," according to Menefree, "has been from the beginning an important factor in the development of large-scale agriculture in South Texas." In a related assessment, Otey M. Scruggs highlighted this important link in the following:

Across the Texas border there existed what appeared to be an inexhaustible supply of Mexicans. On the East Coast, Negroes only recently emancipated from slavery formed a convenient reservoir of labor. This proximity to large sources of labor has historical significance not only in that it permitted intensive agriculture to expand at a time when American labor was scarce, but also because it came to play an important role in the thinking of the American farmer. He came to regard easy access to reservoirs of labor as a God-given right, any interference with which justified resort to the most illegal measures.

The demographic redistribution to northern Mexico in the latter nineteenth century provided the necessary labor for the development of commercial agriculture in South Texas.<sup>28</sup>

To meet the desires of agriculture and railroad employers, extensive mechanisms of labor recruitment were also established. In Laredo and other border cities, for example, private employment agencies were created with the sole purpose of recruiting and transporting Mexican labor. One common practice

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<sup>28</sup> Selden C. Menefree, *Mexican Migratory Workers of South Texas*. Work Progress Administration (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), x; Scruggs, *Braceros*, "Wetbacks," and *the Farm Labor Problem*, 31.

was to employ private labor contractors in Mexico, who, for a small charge, recruited and assisted Mexican labor to migrate outside of formal immigration channels. Workers were then transported to San Antonio by other labor agents for an additional charge, and eventually to desired destinations. In return, labor agents, who worked in tandem with employment agencies, were paid by growers for each worker delivered to the destination, and often charged for transportation and board.<sup>29</sup>

Given the unregulated or underground nature of the business, employers and recruiters relied upon trickery, debt peonage, social isolation, and forced labor as frequent tactics. Mexican Consul Roberto E. Quíros described the experience for one group of workers who were recruited and transported to Pennsylvania:

Labor agents, whom we call 'enganchadores,' talk to these men at the border—Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California—and even go over into Mexico, telling them tales of easy jobs at big pay, large cities, elegant houses, entertainments and good clothes...The next thing they know they are packed into railway coaches speeding far to the northward. They cannot go back...They soon are aware that they have done an illegal act in entering the country, and they never feel at home here.

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<sup>29</sup> Coalson, *The Development of the Migratory Farm Labor System in Texas*, 16; Pastrano, "Industrial Agriculture," 140; McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 250-251; Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Connecticut, London, England: Greenwood Press, 1976), 9; Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States," 476.

Perhaps the most notorious labor contractors to emerge from this early period were known as "man-snatchers" or "mancatchers."

"Frequently," noted Carey McWilliams, "man-catchers would raid crews imported by labor contractors and shanghai them for employment elsewhere. A common practice was to keep crews locked up in warehouses with armed guards posted at the doors." The business of labor recruitment was a lucrative though competitive enterprise.<sup>30</sup>

According to Emelio Flores who testified before the Commission on Industrial Relations in 1915, it was not uncommon to see as many as one hundred migrants marching through the streets of San Antonio under armed guard. "When put to work at destination or upon their first pay day," he noted, "they are informed [that] so much had been charged to each and every one of them for transportation and employment fees, which said amounts are deducted from their earnings."<sup>31</sup> In Gonzales County, migrants who attempted to break their employment contracts were also chained to posts and guarded by men with shotguns. In some instances, according to Texas economist Max Handman, growers in

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<sup>30</sup> McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 251; Pastrano, "Industrial Agriculture," 138; George T. Edson, "Mexicans in the Pittsburgh, PA, District," Dionicio N. Valdés Papers, Special Collections Division, Michigan State University Libraries, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Coalson, *The Development of the Migratory Farm Labor System in Texas*, 16.

Texas "stood guard with shotguns over their Mexican cotton-pickers to prevent other farmers from luring them away by the promise of better pay."<sup>32</sup> These examples demonstrate both the dramatic transformations in Texas, as well as the intensity of actions taken to lure and control Mexican farm labor.

Federal governmental legislation also favored commercial agriculture, including the leniency of immigration policy. United States Congress enacted Alien Contract Labor Law in 1885, which prohibited foreign contract labor in the United States. From 1885 to 1924, however, the contract law was consistently voided along the Texas-Mexico border for labor recruitment. In the midst of World War I and employer fears of labor shortages, this particular law was also suspended for "private recruitment" efforts on a temporary basis.<sup>33</sup> While the Immigration Act of 1917 further restricted European immigration to the United States and imposed a literacy test and head tax, it excepted Mexican workers. As U.S. Secretary of Labor James L. Davis declared on May 22, 1917, "the United States Secretary of Labor issued an order instructing immigration officials on the Mexican

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<sup>32</sup> Cited in McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 253.

<sup>33</sup> McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 250; "Braceros," Ernesto Galarza Papers (hereafter EGP), Box 26, Folder 9, Green Library Department of Special Collections, Stanford University (hereafter GLDSCSU).

border to disregard the literacy test, the contract-labor section, and the head-tax provision of the immigration law with reference to the coming of Mexican people who were to engage as workmen in agricultural pursuits."<sup>34</sup> Between 1917 and 1921, thousands of Mexican workers, estimated between 72,000 and 80,000, were admitted on a temporary basis in the United States through this exception.<sup>35</sup>

Additional legislation passed in this early period that favored commercial agriculture. One indicated was the Tariff Act of 1897 that taxed foreign sugar imported into the United States, and increased the value and potential profit to be made

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in Louis Bloch, "Facts About Immigration Before and Since the Quota Restriction Laws," Division of Labor Statistics and Law Enforcement, California Department of Industrial Relations, March 1928, Louis Bloch Mimeograph, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace Library and Archives, Stanford University (hereafter HIWRPSU), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Richard H. Hancock, "The Role of the Bracero in the Economic and Cultural Dynamics of Mexico: A Case Study of Chihuahua, 1959," Paul Schuster Taylor Papers (hereafter PSTP), Box 38, Folder 20, Bancroft Library Special Collections, University of California at Berkeley (hereafter BLSCUCB); "Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: The Report of The President's Commission on Migratory Labor, March 1, 1951," USPCML, RG 220, Box 10, HSTLM, III-1; "Plan For a Commission to Survey and Recommend Control Measures for the Illegal Immigration from Mexico, 1949," Records of Assistant Secretary Robert T. Creasey, 1949-1952 (hereafter RASRTC), General Records of the Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary (hereafter GRDL), RG 174, Box 1, National Archives at College Park (hereafter NACP), Maryland; Scruggs, *Braceros, "Wetbacks," and the Farm Labor Program*, 78; Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 27; Turner, "Thy Kingdom Come," 70.



from the domestic cultivation of sugar beets. This was followed by the passing of the Reclamation Act of 1902, which provided funding for the clearing of arid lands to be used for large-scale irrigation projects in the Southwest. In addition, the Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, and 1924, along with the preceding Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the 1907-8 Gentlemen's Agreements with Japan, were all critical in limiting immigration from other countries. In turn, these legislative acts gave greater impetus for growers and employers in the United States to pursue Mexican labor.<sup>36</sup>

Extensive labor recruitment was critical to the expansion of large-scale agriculture and other industries, and, yet, the more visible Mexican presence also reignited widespread anti-Mexican hostility. "Large planters welcome the Mexican immigrant," lamented then U.S. Representative James L. Slayden from San Antonio, "as they would welcome fresh arrivals from the Congo, without a thought of the social and political embarrassment to their country."<sup>37</sup> Part of the justification for their recruitment was their perceived temporality as

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<sup>36</sup> Barton Clark, "Mexican Migration to the United States," in *Mexican Migration*, eds. Thomas Weaver and Theodore E. Downing (Tucson, Arizona: Bureau of Ethnic Research, The University of Arizona, 1976), 53; Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico*, 175; Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land*, 251.

"foreigners," which corresponded with the seasonal needs of large-scale agriculture. Anti-Mexican hostility increased as family units increasingly replaced single male migrants, particularly in the cotton industry, and as labor migration in the 1920s reached record levels.

Concerns about the "assimilability and Americanizability" of the Mexican presence, according to Louis Bloch, spread to consume national political discourse. One defining moment in the midst of the "Mexican Problem" was the creation of the "illegal alien" phenomenon. Mae N. Ngai traces this term to the passing of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924. According to Ngai, the immigration law "created a new class of persons within the national body—illegal aliens—whose inclusion in the nation was at once a social reality and a legal impossibility."

Undocumented Mexican workers emerged to become the "prototypical illegal alien." The historical construction of "illegal alien" is useful here, as it demonstrates how the term, from its inception, was conflated to being Mexican, irrespective of citizenship. Within this framework, then, to be Mexican meant not to be "American" in the U.S. public imagination. "Mexican Americans and immigrants alike," according to Ngai, "reaped the consequences of racialized foreignness that had been constructed

throughout the 1920s."<sup>38</sup> In the previous decades, as already highlighted, Texas Mexicans after military conquest were rendered "foreigners in their native land." In the 1920s, the dominant narrative continued when long-standing and newly established Texas Mexicans were reconfigured as "aliens."<sup>39</sup>

The formation of the United States Border Patrol added another element of anti-Mexican hostility. Initially established in 1924 within the Department of Labor, Kelly Lytle Hernández argued that the border patrol built upon prior institutionalized forms of settler violence used against Mexican peoples in the wake of military conquest. The most noticeable example from this lineage was again the infamous terror campaigns waged by the Texas Rangers. In the more historical immediate context, the official entry of a border patrol

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<sup>38</sup> Bloch, "Facts About Immigration," HIWRPSU, 6; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 57, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Mae Ngai specifically identifies this experience of alien citizenship to Asian Americans and Mexican Americans. Accordingly, "alien citizen" refers to "persons who are American citizens by virtue of their birth in the United States but who are presumed to be foreign by the mainstream of American culture and, at times, by the state" (2). Ngai also attributes the origins of alien citizenship directly to "the histories of conquest, colonialism, and semicolonialism that constituted the United States' relations with Mexico and in Asia" (8); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2, 7-8.

presence also coincided with a resurgence of Ku Klux Klan activity in the United States. In El Paso in West Texas, some of the early immigration officers at the Texas-Mexico border were also local Klan members. Ku Klux Klan chapters were established throughout South Texas, including Brownsville, Harlingen, Mercedes, Edinburg, McAllen, and Laredo.<sup>40</sup>

What was once just a dividing line, the border patrol reinforced formalized divisions among Mexican peoples based on citizenship, and the geopolitical boundary that separated the United States and Mexico. This official governmental agency reaffirmed the racial and cultural boundary that created "illegal immigration" to be the United States-Mexico border, making, in turn, Mexican peoples their primary target. On the eve of the Great Depression, the large-scale removal of Mexican American and Mexican population took place in the United States through voluntary and involuntary movements, with the latter first beginning in the lower Rio Grande Valley in 1928. South

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<sup>40</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2010), 19-21, 48; Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 59; Charles C. Alexander, *Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 24.

Texas became an important training ground in the development of border patrol enforcement practices.<sup>41</sup>

These imposed conditions, however, did not mean that workers simply acquiesced. One method, which occurred frequently, was to simply walk away from pre-arranged work contracts with employers. Workers who were employed with railroads often left to pursue agricultural work, and vice versa. Some used the transportation provided by labor agents to arrive at specific destinations, and then unexpectedly left to seek better wages elsewhere. Other workers simply refused to work for specific growers. Work slowdowns, sabotage, contract violations, and spontaneous walkouts were all strategies used by farm workers. And still, employment elsewhere in Texas, such as Lubbock, and in other states provided workers another means of countering the treatment they experienced in South Texas.<sup>42</sup>

In response to increased border enforcement and more stringent immigration laws, Mexican workers and their families also established permanent homes in South Texas, and settled in

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<sup>41</sup> Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 166-169; Dionicio Valdés, "South from the United States: Mexican Migration During the Great Depression and the Unfolding of a Neocolonial Relationship," Unpublished Paper, 2012, 14; Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 209-226; Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal*.

<sup>42</sup> Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 36-38.

cities. Similar to other larger cities across the Southwest, San Antonio attracted a significant number of Mexican workers and their families, in spite of continued experiences of occupational discrimination and dual-wages that limited their economic mobility. Still, the geographic segregation of existent Texas Mexican communities provided a form of self-protection and communal belonging from most virulent forms of anti-Mexican hostility. New and established Texas Mexican families in San Antonio represented the largest Mexican population in the country through the 1930s.

In his recent study on the *Tejano* diaspora in the mid-twentieth century, Marc Simon Rodriguez asserted that a process of *Tejano*-ization took place by Mexican migrants adopting regional Texas Mexican identities. Migration and settlement in Texas alone did not make workers from Mexico become *Tejanos*. "In a more expansive use of the term," he argued, "migrants increasingly became '*Tejano*' as a result of expansion of these labor networks, which thrust Texas-based workers into the North American migrant labor market." Rodriguez continued: "In an unstable world, migrant workers made these places in South Texas home and remade themselves as *Tejanos*, even if their families had left Mexico in the decades after the revolution." The first three decades of the twentieth century is critically important in this regard, as *Tejano* identities emerged for the first time

from a confluence of a Mexican diaspora displaced by U.S. economic conquest in Mexico, and a Texas Mexican diaspora severed by U.S. military conquest in South Texas.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

Building upon extant scholarship, this chapter examined root causes and the first large-scale period of Mexican labor migration to the United States in the early twentieth century. This first period provides insight into larger historical processes of contested relations between the two countries, which emanated from U.S. military and economic pursuits in the nineteenth century. The various methods used by employers to recruit labor from Mexico demonstrate the expanding influence of U.S. industries, particularly commercial agriculture, and the development of labor control practices used against Mexican labor in the first three decades.

South Texas represented the most densely populated region for Mexican peoples in the United States, and, hence, served as an important center where these employer practices began to take

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<sup>43</sup> Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4-6; Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 59; Richard Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican-American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 33, 43-45; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 22-24, 40.

shape. At the same time, workers and families from Mexico also reinforced the notion of a *Tejano* homeland by establishing permanent homes and becoming Texas Mexicans.



## CHAPTER TWO

### DEEP IN THE HEART: *BRACEROS* Y *TEJANOS* IN THE COLONIAL IMAGINARY OF SOUTH TEXAS, 1940s-1960s<sup>1</sup>

*"The crux of the migratory problem  
lies in the Rio Grande Valley."*

--Héctor P. García, 1950<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction

*Tejano* communities in South Texas transformed once again amid the expansion of an official guest worker agreement between the United States and Mexico in the mid-twentieth century. Most writings on the Bracero Program widely accept experiences of division and resentment between U.S. citizen and non-citizen agricultural labor to be the norm, which has also been extended to relations between Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers, particularly in California. Matt García, in his exemplary study on citrus workers in greater Los Angeles, applied this same

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this section is partly adapted from Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*.

<sup>2</sup> "Statement Health and Welfare Conditions Among the Underprivileged Migrant Workers of Texas, by Dr. Héctor P. García, M.D. for President's Commission on Migratory Labor, July 31 and August 1, 1950, Brownsville, Texas," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

framework when describing repeated episodes of what he termed as intra-ethnic conflict. "Wage differentials and unequal competition for jobs resulted in strong feelings of resentment toward *braceros* among Mexican American men," he noted.<sup>3</sup> This chapter, as well as the next that focuses on the Mississippi Delta, offer a similar and, yet, divergent critique to reframe this continued discussion within a larger historical context of unequal international relations.

In South Texas, the proximity of the imposed geopolitical boundary separating the two countries, a consequence of U.S. military conquest, was critical to shaping experiences of labor repression for *Tejano* and Mexican National workers during the Bracero Program, and which also favored commercial agriculture. The nearby presence of reserve farm labor from Mexico enabled growers to circumvent participation in the program, and violate contract-related protections when *bracero* workers were finally employed. Texas Mexican workers also faced employer rejection due to their citizenship status in lieu of *bracero* and undocumented labor, and consequently pursued employment in other agricultural sectors in Texas and beyond. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the emergence of a nationwide *Tejano* presence from

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<sup>3</sup> Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 174-188.

South Texas was intimately connected to the expansion of the Bracero Program. In this way, as Dr. Héctor P. García astutely observed in the above epigraph in 1950, the crux of the "migratory problem" became the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas.

### **Go Work or Go Home**

The international agreement that formalized the importation of Mexican labor into the United States, known as the Bracero Program, was established in 1942 and continued in various phases through 1964. During its 22-year official existence, some 4.6 million workers from Mexico were officially brought into the country on temporary work visas.<sup>4</sup> Growers sought *braceros* partly out of a fear of a shortage of workers needed to harvest agricultural crops in the midst of the Second World War and beyond.<sup>5</sup> Grower Austin Anson from the Texas Citrus and Vegetable Growers and Shippers in Harlingen, Texas, affirmed this view.

"We cannot produce our share of the volume of perishable agriculture required for our nation either in peace or under

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas 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): 203; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 138; regarding the utilization of Mexican labor on railroads as part of the Program, see again Driscoll, *The Tracks North*.

<sup>5</sup> Otey M. Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947," *Pacific Historical Review* 32, no. 3 (August 1963): 251.

wartime conditions without this Mexican labor," he argued. Representing the Pride O'Texas Citrus Association of Mission, Texas, M.W. Held also stated, "Because of the shortage of local labor we are absolutely dependent upon Mexican labor to do the necessary grove work, likewise we are dependent upon Mexican labor for the harvesting of the fruit." Braceros represented, for some growers, to be the "greatest contribution" made by Mexican Republic.<sup>6</sup>

While certainly true, there was still more to this picture in South Texas. Aware of the entrenched anti-Mexican hostility and the still recent deportation campaigns that began in South Texas, the Mexican Government initially and officially prohibited growers in the state from accessing *bracero* labor from 1942 to 1947. While growers were prevented from using *braceros*, they circumvented the ban in South Texas because of the geographic proximity of Mexico. In this way, they still employed Mexican National labor as undocumented workers. "As early as 1943," noted Otey M. Scruggs, "the availability of illegal entrants had made it unnecessary for the farmers of southern Texas to worry unduly about the ban on braceros." One

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<sup>6</sup> "Statement of Austin E. Anson, Texas Citrus and Vegetable Growers and Shippers, Harlingen, Texas," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM; "Statement of M.W. Held, Co-Partner of the Pride O'Texas Citrus Association of Mission, Texas," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

official report from the U.S. Department of Justice offered a more direct appraisal of the situation: "The majority of growers in border states, notably Texas and New Mexico, make no secret of their intention to use 'wetbacks' if they can get away with it."<sup>7</sup> The decision by Mexican Government to exclude Texas growers indeed demonstrated political leverage. The abundant of reserve labor from Mexico, however, made the symbolic gesture more inept and intensified the entrenchment of unequal relations between the two countries.

With the inception of the Bracero Program, the intentional recruitment of undocumented workers from Mexico became widespread in South Texas, which reinforced various forms of exploitation and displacement affecting all workers on both sides of the border. Large-scale growers relied on undocumented labor to have their crops picked early and quickly, which, in the end, benefitted large-scale agribusiness and to the detriment of small-scale farmers.<sup>8</sup> Even after being admitted into the Bracero Program in 1947, Texas growers took "no steps

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<sup>7</sup> Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program," 251, 263; Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs*, 88; "Mexican Immigration," undated, United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, USPCML, RG 220, Box 1, HSTLM; Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, Third Edition* (New York: Harpers Collins Publishers, 1988), 261-263.

<sup>8</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 135.

either in looking to the legal recruitment of Mexican laborers under the International Agreement or to hold domestic farm laborers who are said to be leaving the area in large numbers in search of employment elsewhere." Rather than bother with contractual obligations, such as providing for transportation, health and accident insurance, and legal paperwork, most growers instead recruited and employed undocumented workers.<sup>9</sup>

Still, requests for *braceros* provided several advantages for Texas growers after the state was admitted into the program. In some instances, growers made requests to saturate the labor market and accelerate the harvest, which, in turn, generated more revenue. While employer participation in the program assured the necessary labor for the season, the available surplus of workers from Mexico also enabled growers to violate contract-related provisions.

In 1951, growers from Laredo requested additional Mexican National workers through the Bracero Program. After an investigation, the U.S. Department of Labor determined otherwise: "Farmers stated that they would like to get more workers but believed they could get a crop out with those who were available. Additional workers, however, would enable them

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<sup>9</sup> "Mexican Immigration," USPCML, RG 220, Box 1, HSTLM; "Statement of Regional Office Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

to harvest the onion crop earlier than usual." The letter went on to state, "apparently, earlier reports on the urgent need for additional workers were exaggerated." In another instance, the U.S. Department of Labor investigated a *bracero* contract issued to one grower from Texas, who was also a county judge. The contract was reportedly revoked because of the blatant ill-treatment toward legally-contracted *braceros*, which included feeding them canned meat that was "dog food" in lieu of human food. Though government authorities terminated this one contract, these decisions were rare. Most employers caught with contract violations only faced warnings, without real repercussions.<sup>10</sup>

The Mexican Government also objected to the treatment of Mexican National labor, and secondarily Texas Mexican workers, by responding through political discourse and international diplomacy. In 1947, the Government of Mexico accused Texas growers of "fomenting illegal immigration...in the hope of obtaining cheap hand labor, pay minimum wages, and force Mexican workers who live permanently in Texas to migrate north." A year

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<sup>10</sup> Letter to Honorable Lloyd Benson, Jr., House of Representatives, from Robert T. Creasey, Assistant Secretary of Labor, May 14, 1951, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 74, Box 2, NACP; "CIO Aids Farm Labor, Pamphlet No. 205, Reprinted from April 1952, Economic Outlook," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 3, NACP; "Texas Judge Feeds Men Dog Food," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 8, 1951, EGP, Box 25, Folder 5, GLSCDSU; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 144.

later in 1948, an interior ministry spokesman for Mexico warned, "We've said before, and I'll say it again, no braceros will be sent to states known for their racial discrimination." He continued, "In both Texas and Arkansas the braceros are exploited, being paid salaries inferior to other farm laborers." According to the Department of Labor in 1951, the Mexican Government also "complained very bitterly to representatives of our Government that American employers had come into Mexico and distributed leaflets inviting Mexicans to enter the United States illegally and accept work on American farms."<sup>11</sup> These instances, however, did not stop the deliberate recruitment and exploitation of undocumented workers and *braceros* by employers in South Texas.

Steps taken to recruit Mexican National workers were also complemented by actions and inactions of U.S. government agencies. One critical government action certified undocumented workers already present in the United States to be registered as *braceros*. Using the same rationale that created the Bracero Program, Cleon O. Swayzee from the U.S. Department of Labor

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<sup>11</sup> "Braceros in Texas," *La Prensa*, October 25, 1947, EGP, Box 4, Folder 2, GLSCDSU; "Texas Still on Mexican Farm Worker Blacklist," May 6, 1948, EGP, Box 25, Folder 2, GLSCDSU; "Department of Justice INS Monthly Review, Volume 7, No. 9, March 1950," National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor Collections, 1937-1967 (hereafter NCALLC), Box 14, Folder 19, BLSCUCB; "Wetbacks Endanger Health and Security, June 4, 1951," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 2, NACP.



justified this decision as a way to prevent further undocumented migration from Mexico. "Illegal workers already in the United States," he declared, "may be employed under the same type of contract approved pursuant to the agreement for workers to be brought in legally from Mexico and that their immigration status will be adjusted accordingly." This policy, he argued, represented "the most effective means of preventing further entry of wetbacks." Some 80,000 undocumented workers were granted *bracero* legal status in Texas in 1949. By 1950, more undocumented workers in Texas were granted *bracero* status by a ratio of five to one than those recruited from Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

The preventive measure soon prompted the opposite effect, and undocumented labor migration from Mexico to Texas intensified. "There have always been wetbacks in Texas," noted one Texas official, "but they didn't become a national and international problem until the spring of 1947."<sup>13</sup> By 1951, another report from U.S. Department of Labor noted what was obvious in border communities: "When it became known in Mexico

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<sup>12</sup> Cleon O. Swayzee, "Regarding Plan for Commission to Survey and Recommend Control Measures for Illegal Immigration from Mexico, June 9, 1949," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACP; Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 111-112; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 153.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 148.

that wetbacks were being given legal status and steady employment by American farmers, this country was flooded with wetbacks." These official observations indicated the rise of labor migration by the 1950, as well as the widespread pejorative "wetback" term that critics associated with "misery, disease, crime, and many other evils."<sup>14</sup>

The government decision to grant *bracero* status to undocumented workers, which stimulated labor migration, also increased the number of violent deaths along the border in South Texas. Preceding similar dire consequences from increased border militarization since the 1990s, one local resident from Harlingen, Texas, described the multiple deaths that took place in the mid-twentieth century as the "bracero killings." In a hearing for the U.S. President's Committee on Migratory Labor in 1950, the resident warned of the severity of the situation in South Texas:

It has been estimated that 1,000 lives are lost annually along the lower 100 miles of the Rio Grande, owing to the reported operations of organized gangs of 'river bandits' who kill and robe the returning filed workers for their small savings. In the dark night crossing, far from any help at lonely places along the river, boatmen take these workers for a fee and often while making change, the savings are displayed and the boatman and his aids attack the worker and throw the body into the river to float out into the Gulf, but many bodies are recovered, sometimes

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<sup>14</sup> "Wetbacks Endanger Health and Security, June 4, 1951," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 2, NACP; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 148-149; Acuña, *Occupied America*, 264.

seven or eight in a day. It is common talk that whole families have been lost in the Rio.

One common method was to hold down the bodies underwater and drown them. Once dead, single male and female persons as individuals or entire families would then be robbed, sometimes stripped naked, and sent down the river. In one instance, over 60 human bodies were recovered within a 24-hour period. Since there were no markings of physical abuse on the bodies, the deaths were declared "accidental drowning" by authorities. "These dangers are all produced by the fact," according to the local Harlingen resident, "that the worker comes here illegally in search of employment and cannot use the international bridges by which he would not be allowed to enter this country without proper credentials." In addition to murder, deaths took place because of strong currents and mere exhaustion. The sole possessions tied on the backs of migrants were too burdensome in the water.<sup>15</sup>

The work of the border patrol represented a more direct example of government action that favored employers in South Texas. The importance of this government agency transformed during the Bracero Program, according to Kelly Hernández, "from

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<sup>15</sup> "Statement of Mr. F. Ferree, Harlingen, Texas," August 1, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; "Statement of José Cantú, Spanish Language Commentator of Radio Station KZOR," August 1, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM.

a series of small and locally oriented outposts into a national police force with the resources to pursue immigration control on a much large scale." Border patrol apprehensions indeed increased with the rise of labor migration from Mexico. In 1950, monthly apprehensions increased by 30 percent in Texas. In 1951, one government reported noted that the total number of apprehensions jumped nearly two-fold, from more than 300,000 in 1949, to 600,000 in 1950. Official statistics indicate that apprehensions increased considerably through the early 1950s, peaking to over one million in 1954.<sup>16</sup>

In response to increased enforcement, Texas growers responded by labeling the border patrol a "Gestapo outfit" that threatened their economic livelihoods. Congressional Representative Lloyd Bentsen from Texas, speaking on behalf of large-scale growers in the Rio Grande Valley, even called for a full-fledged investigation. These instances, however, neglected the long established relations of collaboration between growers and the agency, and the importance of South Texas as a training

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<sup>16</sup> "Wetbacks Endanger Health and Security, June 4, 1951," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 2, NACP; Hernández, *Migra*, 105; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 153, 157.

ground where border control practices were perfected. This included the art of selective enforcement.<sup>17</sup>

One report by the U.S. Department of Justice noted that apprehensions and deportations of undocumented labor in Texas consistently coincided with the harvest season. During World War Two, explained Chief of Border Patrol Willard Kelly, "the Service officers were instructed to defer to apprehension of Mexicans employed on Texas farms where to remove them would likely result in loss of the crops." Even in the years after the war, this practiced continued, with the number of apprehensions and deportations increasing at the end of harvest season. In 1948, from May through July, the number of persons subjected to deportation in South Texas was 11,000, 9,000, and 7,000, respectively. By the end of August of the same year, when the cotton picking was complete, "the immigration authorities seemed to have discovered some 34,000 of them hiding around here somewhere," according to noted Texas Mexican attorney, Gus García, in his remarks before the same presidential committee on migratory labor.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New Orleans, Louisiana: Quid Pro Books, 1992, 2010), 34-37; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 153.

<sup>18</sup> "Mexican Immigration," USPCML, RG 220, Box 1, HSTLM; "Statement of Gus García, San Antonio, Texas," President's Commission on Migratory Labor Stenographic Report of Proceedings

García continued, "There has been little or no attempt to disguise the fact that because of pressure from above, the immigration authorities, certainly for a long, long time, made no effort other than a token effort to deport these people." The San Antonio District Enforcement Officer for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, John Holland, also testified before the committee. In response to García, Holland confirmed that the month of August was always a busy month for the border patrol in his jurisdiction, along with September and January. This was due to the actions taken by the agency as well as by workers themselves, who sometimes surrendered on their own accord upon completion of their work.

Regardless, as Holland imagined, the apprehensions and deportations were deemed necessary "because of this invasion—which is nothing but an invasion, nothing else in the world, a human invasion of the country, not an armed invasion, but it is an invasion, and I don't know of any other way to describe it." Through actions of growers and support of the U.S. state via *la*

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Held at Brownsville, Texas, August 1, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTML. Gus García was part of the core Texas Mexican leadership to emerge from San Antonio during this period. In *Hernandez v. Texas* in 1954, he and Carlos C. Cadena successfully challenged jury discrimination before the United States Supreme Court. For the *Hernandez v. Texas* case, see *A Class Apart: A Mexican American Civil Rights Story* (New York: PBS Home Video, 2009); Michael Olivas, ed. *"Colored Men" and "Hombres Aquí:" Hernandez v. Texas and the Emergence of Mexican American Lawyering* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2006).

*migra*, the message toward undocumented workers in South Texas during this period was then clear: work or go home. Their options were limited.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Statement of Gus García," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTML; "Statement of John Holland, District Enforcement Officer of the Immigration and Naturalization Service," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; the term "*la migra*" here means U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

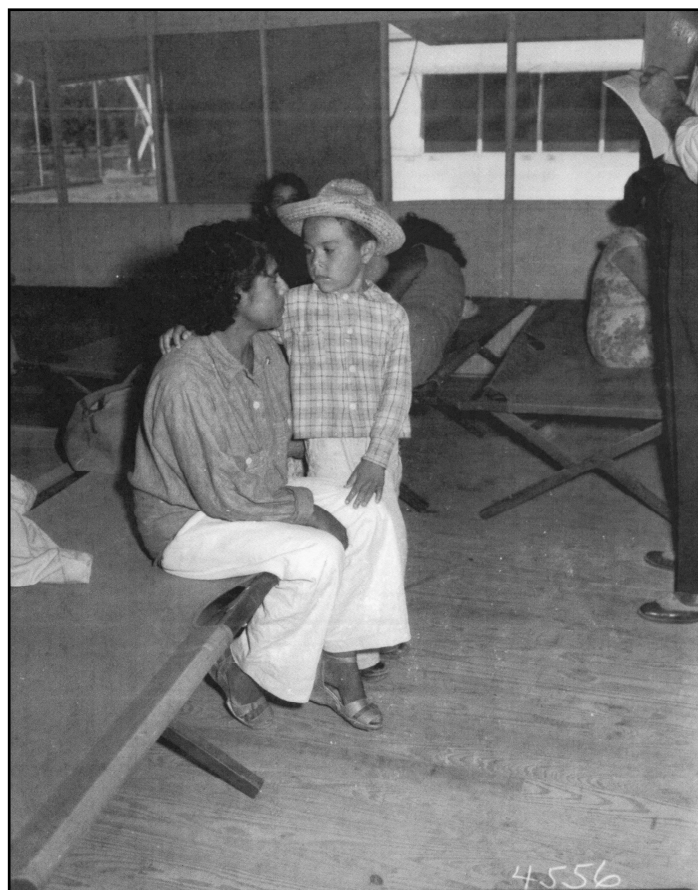
Figure 2. "Workers Arrive at Alien Detention Camp at McAllen, Texas, ca. 1953"<sup>20</sup>



<sup>20</sup> Source: SALPC, ITCUTSA.



Figure 3. "Alien Detention Camp at McAllen, Texas, ca. 1953"<sup>21</sup>



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<sup>21</sup> Source: SALPC, ITCUTSA.

## **Tejano Migration by Dispossession**

For thousands of Texas Mexican workers, South Texas was an already established "Tejano homeland," their center of the universe. But many were decentered as a result of the Bracero Program. With employer recruitment of undocumented labor, Texas Mexicans emerged to become the largest group of U.S. migrant labor in the country.<sup>1</sup> "South Texas with its large Spanish-American and Mexican American population has long been a home base or winter quarters for migratory agricultural workers," observed agricultural economist Paul S. Taylor. "Parallel with the increase in the wetback traffic, the number of Texas Mexican residents entering the migratory labor stream has greatly increased," he continued. In South Texas, where the Texas Mexican population was "'pushed around,' 'jim crowed,' and otherwise discriminated against in every conceivable way ever since the U.S. annexed or occupied the Southwest," the experiences of displacement during the Bracero Program added another important layering in the long history of violence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Texas Harvester Migrant Ministry," Texas Council of Churches, United Church Women of Texas, April 1959, North Carolina Council of Churches, 2001-0100 (hereafter NCCC), Box 56, Duke University David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter DMRRBML); "Report Summary to the President of his Commission n Migratory Labor, April 7, 1951," USPCML, RG 220, Box 1, HSTLM.

<sup>2</sup> "Consequences of the Wetback Traffic: Labor Competition and Displacement," PSTP, Box 28, Folder 12, BLSCUCB; letter to John

According to U.S. government reports in 1948 and 1949, "There is no shortage of citizen-labor in Texas."<sup>3</sup> Texas Mexican agricultural workers confronted, however, a lower "prevailing wage" determined by local growers and companies in the area. In this process, employers' desire for undocumented workers at lower pay undermined the economic and social livelihoods of local Texas Mexican residents. These experiences then stimulated processes of intra-state and inter-state labor migration.<sup>4</sup>

This was the case for Tereza L. Rubio from Donna, Texas. In a handwritten letter to President Harry S. Truman in 1951, Rubio protested the Bracero Program for stimulating undocumented migration and preventing her and her family to work in South

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R. Steelman, Executive Offices of the President, from George I. Sánchez, January 23, 1949, Subject File, PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM.

<sup>3</sup> Brief to The Director, from J. Otis Garber, regarding Illegal Immigration from Mexico, January 13, 1949 Subject File, PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM; "Illegal Immigration from Mexico: Brief on Byron Mitchell's Report, February 15, 1949," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACP; "Statement of Hector P. García," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos E. Castañeda, "Statement on Discrimination Against Mexican-Americans in Employment, May 9, 1947," RPCCR, RG 220, Box 3, HSTLM; memorandum to John W. Gibson, from Robert C. Goodwin, October 19, 1949, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACP; "The Wetback Invasion: Illegal Alien Labor in American Agriculture," President's Commission on Migratory Labor, in *Mexican Workers in the United States: Historical and Political Perspectives*, eds. George C. Kiser and Martha Woody Kiser (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 143-147.

Texas. "We have not been able to work for years," she wrote. "They work for \$2.00 a day from 6:00 in the morning to the evening and others only get paid \$1.50 for the whole day. We cannot work at that wage." Similarly, Catarino Montes was born in 1916 in Driscoll, Texas and lived for the most part in Weslaco of the Rio Grande Valley. In the following passage, Montes described his own experiences:

The farmers pay what they feel like. Now they are paying \$1.00 and \$1.25 for 100 pounds of cotton. I cannot buy food for my family for this wage. In some places there are 800 acres of cotton. There are so many wetbacks they finish the cotton in two or three days. In one week there was only enough work for me to pick 300 pounds. In that week I earned only \$3.75. If the farmers in the Valley would give us the work for a decent wage, we would stay there and get the work done for them. We have to move to other states, sometimes to Michigan, to work because the farmers will not pay us.<sup>5</sup>

Grower employment of Mexican National workers saturated labor markets, lowered wages, and displaced local labor like Catarino Montes, Tereza L. Rubio, and their respective families.

In 1950, farm crew leader Pablo Reyna also testified about the lack of employment in South Texas. "I was born in Mercedes in 1909 and have been there all my life as an American citizen," he stated. "I have been in the harvesting business all along

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to President Harry Truman, from Tereza L. Rubio, Donna, Texas, June 13, 1951, Official File, Papers of Harry S. Truman (hereafter PHST), Box 1234, HSTLM, translation by the author; "Statement of Catarino Montes, Weslaco, Texas, July 27, 1950," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

and we always have been able to take care of the farmers and harvest their crops and bring them to the sheds," he continued. With the employment of undocumented labor from Mexico, citizenship was not enough. "To survive," Reyna stated, "I had to put a mortgage on my truck to carry on and now my only hopes are to work here in Corpus Christi, or in East Texas, or Arkansas or Mississippi to pay my debts." According to Reyna, this condition was prevalent for *Tejano* families throughout South Texas.<sup>6</sup>

Increased use of the cotton-picking machine further stripped economic stability for *Tejano* agricultural workers who relied upon the cotton industry for their livelihoods. This was the case for the maternal family of Rolando Contreras. After they lost employment picking cotton in South Texas, they too turned to the migrant stream, traveling and working in Arkansas and Missouri. Cotton harvest mechanization accelerated in South Texas in the 1940s, and coincided with the expansion of the Bracero Program in the post-World War Two period.<sup>7</sup>

While wages were commonly insufficient to sustain Texas Mexican families, South Texas growers still refused to employ

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<sup>6</sup> "Statement of Pablo Reyna, Trucker and Crew Leaders for Farm Laborers, Mercedes, Texas," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

<sup>7</sup> Oral history interview with Rolando Contreras, April 30, 2013, interview with author.

them in most cases. Union organizer D.C. De Baca of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) expressed this grave concern from his experiences working with citrus workers in the lower Rio Grande Valley. "Farmers and employers of this Valley," he stated, "are banded together in a conspiracy to discourage local citizen labor in order that they may obtain cheap labor from across the border." He continued, "they know that regardless of anything they are always able to obtain labor from across the border at very substandard wages." For De Baca, the imposed geopolitical boundary and available surplus of labor from Mexico favored employers and undermined the livelihood of local citizen labor.<sup>8</sup>

Frequently, he observed, Texas Mexican workers were even rejected work due to their citizenship status. That is, they "have been refused employment merely because they are citizens of the United States." Secretary of the Cannery Workers in Weslaco, Texas, Chester Turner, also offered a similar critique. "There are a lot of the canning plants and packing sheds that will not hire American citizens," he declared. As a result,

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<sup>8</sup> Letter to H.L. Mitchell, from De Baca, Raymondville, Texas, April 26, 1951, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 2, NACP.

Texas Mexican workers were forced to travel elsewhere in attempt to make a living.<sup>9</sup>

The only way to continue to stay home and work, in some instances, was for local Texas Mexican residents to seek to prove their non-citizenship to employers, and, in turn, accept lower wages assigned to undocumented labor. Doing so, however, did not guarantee their economic survival. Harry Koger raised this critical point while speaking on behalf of the Committee to Aid Migrant Workers from San Antonio, Texas, in 1950. "Not only are the resident workers of the Rio Grande Valley unable to compete with the wages paid to their neighbors from across the river," stated Koger, "they are unable to even find jobs." "They report," he continued, "that it has often been a lot easier to land a job if they can prove non-citizenship." According to Pauline Kibbe Povall from the Good Neighbor Commission in Texas, even veteran soldiers who participated in the violence of war found no work when they returned home in South Texas, unless they accepted the lower wage rate of \$0.25 an hour. This, of course, adds more complexity to the post-

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<sup>9</sup> "Statement of D.C. De Baca, A.F. of L., Raymondville, Texas," July 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; "Statement of Mr. Chester Turner, Secretary of the Cannery Workers, Weslaco, Texas," July 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM.

World War Two era considered to be a watershed historical period for Latinos in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Employer threats of retaliation provided effective means of maintaining control and sowing seeds of division among the working population. For undocumented workers, the clear threat was to call upon the services of immigration authorities to take them away. They, consequently, faced a multitude of abuses, from wage theft to physical coercion, and waged fewer complaints. "Many work for a few cents an hour," according to one report, "or even just for food and a place to spread their blankets. If they object to bad conditions, they can be sent back to Mexico." The recruitment of undocumented workers also stymied contract protections afforded to legally-contracted *braceros*. Even if symbolic, these "protections" provided enough incentive for employers to participate in the guest worker program and further fragment relations among all workers,

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<sup>10</sup> "Statement of Harry Koger, Representing Committee to Aid Migrant Workers, San Antonio, Texas," July 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; letter to Maurice Tobin, from Texas State Federation of Labor Executive Secretary, February 21, 1949, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACP; "Comments of Pauline Kibbe Povall, former Secretary of the Good Neighbor Commission in Texas, on the Illegal Entry of Mexican Migratory Workers into the United States, September 14, 1949," USPCML, RG 220, Box 94, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum (hereafter DDEPLM), 1.



especially with *Tejanos* who had no guarantees in spite of their citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Rendered to conditions of disposability, *Tejano* agricultural workers were forced them to accept lower pay and severe working conditions, or leave. "I am advised that the common practice," according to the Executive Secretary for the Texas State Federation of Labor, "is to threaten native labor of Mexican ancestry that if they are not completely submissive, if they attempt to join a union, or if they object in any way to existing conditions, the job will be manned with alien labor." These threats hindered any serious efforts to organize workers through labor unions and challenge the systemic conditions of inequality. As one government reported noted in 1948, the surplus of labor provided a "big enough stick to stop most collective bargaining in its track and to hold down wages."<sup>12</sup>

Union organizer A.F. Cárdenas also highlighted the frustration that organized labor encountered in South Texas

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<sup>11</sup> "CIO Aids Farm Labor, Pamphlet No. 205, Reprinted from April 1952, Economic Outlook," RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 3, NACP; "Meeting of the Texas Council on Migrant Labor, October 28, 1957," USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, DDEPLM; "Statement of Regional Office Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Maurice Tobin, from Texas State Federation of Labor Executive Secretary, February 21, 1949, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACP; "Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, December 31, 1948," PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM.

during the Bracero Program. Employed by the AFL, Cárdenas first began work in South Texas in 1935. "We had the packing plants all organized and we had very, very good conditions. Since that time it seems like the American packer has been displaced," he noted. Increased labor migration from Mexico in concert with the Bracero Program limited the ability to organize workers. This was the case on agricultural farms as well as related industries like packing sheds and canning outfits. As Cárdenas made clear:

We have repeatedly tried to organize these plants and the reason we haven't been able to organize them is due to the fact that they give preference to the illegal alien Mexican. When we go to organize a plant, why naturally, the illegal alien working in the plant, they go to him and they say, 'Well, if you organize, we'll get the immigration officers here to send you over,' so naturally, that leaves us without an organization because they are the majority.

For thousands of Texas Mexicans throughout South Texas, they were simply denied employment. The one notable exception was the Del Monte Canning Company spinach plant based in Crystal City, Texas, that employed some 700 workers and included local citizens. Still, according to Cárdenas, the wages were poor, estimated at \$0.50 an hour. "They will tell our citizens here, 'You will either come to work for this amount of money, or we'll get aliens to take your places.'" Once work was complete at this one spinach plant, the local workers too were forced to leave. "You could go there right at this present time and you

will find some six or seven hundred little homes, fellows who own their little homes, all boarded up," he indicated.<sup>13</sup>

Experiences of displacement from employment or lower paid work prompted Texas Mexicans from South Texas to move northward. As the largest city in South Texas, San Antonio was once again a primary destination and was affected in several ways.

Reflective of entrenched anti-Mexican hostility by the city political leadership, all class segments of the Texas Mexican community were confined primarily to the West Side of San Antonio.<sup>14</sup> South Texas workers too relocated to the same section of the city, which contributed to various concerns related to overpopulation and institutional neglect by the city political representatives.

George I. Sánchez observed effects of labor migration from South Texas to San Antonio in 1950. "The slum conditions in San Antonio are, in considerable part, a direct expression of this economic situation in the Valley," he noted. A city health official concluded that the local Texas Mexican population was "the hardest hit by tuberculosis, because so many of them are

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<sup>13</sup> "Statement of A.F. Cardenas, International Representative, A.F. of L., San Antonio," July 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican-American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929-1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 118, 205.

subjected to poor housing, cheap labor and chronic poverty." San Antonio had one the highest tuberculosis death rates in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

*Tejanos* who left their homes in South Texas for economic survival still could not escape the varied forms of discrimination in spite of their citizenship, such as in employment and education. As summed up in one report by the U.S. President's Commission on Civil Rights, "despite the important role the Mexican Americans have played and probably will continue to play in this country, they have been relegated to a position in which they are without most of the rights which Anglo Americans have come to take for granted." Whether in San Antonio or lower Rio Grande Valley, manifestations of "Jim Crowism" continued to reign supreme.<sup>16</sup>

San Antonio, in turn, became "one of the South's greatest mobilization centers for migratory workers" that involved local

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<sup>15</sup> "Statement of Dr. George I. Sánchez, Survey of Spanish-Speaking People, University of Texas," August 1, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; cited in "Statement of Harry Koger," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM.

<sup>16</sup> "Report to Members of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, from Robert K. Karr, Subject: Civil Rights Problems of Mexican Americans, Prepared by Milton D. Steward and Herbert Kaufman, undated," RPCCR, RG 220, Box 3, HSTLM; Letter to Robert K. Carr, Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, from George I. Sánchez, May 6, 1947, RPCCR, RG 220, Box 3, HSTLM.

residents of San Antonio, Texas Mexicans from South Texas, and *braceros* and undocumented workers from Mexico. As local residents were returning from the north, according to one observer, there was "always a steady stream of Rio Grande Valley workers pouring into San Antonio from the South, because they cannot compete with their fellow workers from across the Mexican border." Consequently, the greater Mexican population in the city and surrounding towns varied year by year, dependent on employment elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

For growers who turned to undocumented labor in South Texas, they portrayed out-migration of local citizen labor differently. "It is not because they have to leave here," according to Roy Ruff, from Brownsville, Texas. "You couldn't prevail upon them to stay. They just will not stay. They move right on...If we had to depend on those people, we would never get our cotton picked, and the alien is our only course." Growers also justified the exclusion of Texas Mexican workers by describing them as "unreliable," "unwilling to work," and "no good." Their recruitment of undocumented labor thus created a

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<sup>17</sup> "Statement of Harry Koger," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; "Statement: Regional Office, Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking Per Theodore J. Radtke, Executive Secretary, July 1950, Re: Migratory Labor," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

"domino effect" that further stimulated labor migratory flows from South Texas to San Antonio, and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

Still, the Bracero Program affected Texas Mexican communities in San Antonio and surrounding towns in other ways pertinent to this discussion. Like El Paso, Laredo, and Los Angeles, San Antonio already had a "Mexican quarter with a distinct awareness of itself as a community with a Mexican consciousness." While thriving, concerns and ideas expressed by its residents—as articulated through the newspaper *La Prensa* by Alicia E. and Ignacio Lozano—were long ignored by the local power structure in the city throughout the early twentieth century. A small Mexican middle class had been present in San Antonio for decades, including families exiled from the Mexican Revolution. They too were excluded from established political institutions in the city.<sup>19</sup> Increased labor migration from South

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<sup>18</sup> "Statement of Roy Ruff, Brownsville, Texas," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM; "Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: The Report of The President's Commission on Migratory Labor, March 1, 1951," USPCML, RG 220, Box 10, HSTLM; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 273.

<sup>19</sup> According to Richard Garcia, Ignacio and Alicia E. Lozano were part of a Mexican *comprador* class exiled in San Antonio. Although the work of the *comprador* class remained centered on politics and interests in Mexico, they still advocated for improvements in the lives of Mexican population in the United States, whether working-class or middle-class. This included improvements "in the Mexican West Side of San Antonio—swimming pools, parks, recreation areas, clinics" (223); Garcia, *The Rise*

Texas during the Bracero Program added a more visible Mexican presence in the city, a factor that the city political establishment could no longer ignore. By the 1940s, according to Richard Garcia, the city political elite began to evaluate and establish guidelines "to handle the development of the Mexicans' metropolitan and political integration." Demands by local Texas Mexican residents for greater political representation were finally heard in San Antonio during the Bracero Program, which coincided with increased urbanization of the Mexican population in cities across the state.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, national attention on migratory labor provided a public platform for local Texas Mexican leadership to voice their concerns.<sup>21</sup> Two particular organizations took a public

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*of the Mexican-American Middle Class*, 28, 223; Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> García, *The Rise of the Mexican-American Middle Class*, 215. While Texas Mexican political representation was indeed realized in the latter half of the twentieth century that began in San Antonio during the period of the Bracero Program, one argument made by Rodolfo Rosales was that their "inclusion" in the political process can really be best described as a "illusion;" that is, in many ways, their inclusion has only provided a form of legitimacy to the continued state of local domination, particularly by the business sector that shapes the agenda for city development (189); Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion*, 189.

<sup>21</sup> Underscoring the national importance of migratory labor in Texas was the appointment of priest Robert E. Lucey to the U.S. President's Committee on Migratory Labor in 1950. Father Lucey was serving as Archbishop of San Antonio.

pro-active stance in denouncing the program, the League of United Latin American Citizens, or LULAC, and the American G.I. Forum. According to Cynthia Orozco, the former represented a culmination of civil rights activism through the 1920s, and was officially established in 1929. LULAC was the first permanent and viable Mexican American organization to challenge racial inequalities in Texas. The American G.I. Forum was formed by Mexican American veteran soldiers in 1948, and became an important civil rights organization in the post-World War Two period. Both organizations remain active into the present.<sup>22</sup>

As one example, LULAC San Antonio chapter sent a telegram to political representatives in Washington D.C. in 1947. In the telegram, San Antonio President, R.J. Peña, protested the recruitment of Mexican Nationals by employers in Texas because they competed with Texas Mexican laborers. Similarly, LULAC National President, R.A. Cortez submitted a letter on behalf of the organization in 1948. As he stated,

I want to make it perfectly clear that, as American citizens, what we are primarily concerned with is the disastrous effect that the use of this limitless reservoir of cheap labor—workers without rights or standing and without the protection of either the Mexican or United States Governments, and bordering on conditions of peonage—

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<sup>22</sup> Orozco, *No Dogs, Women, or Mexicans Allowed*, 180; Cynthia Orozco, "Brief History of LULAC in Austin," *La Voz de Austin*, August - September 2010; Patrick J. Carroll, *Felix Longoria's Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).



has on the nearly two-and-one-half million American citizens of Mexican and other Latin-American extractions who are permanent residents of the Southwestern part of the United States, many of whom are forced to migrate as displaced persons because of their inability to compete...<sup>23</sup>

The American G.I. Forum had a similar position. In 1954, Executive Secretary D. Idar sent a letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower that called for an end to labor recruitment across the border. According to Idar, this practice represented "an incredible sell-out and callous indifference to the needs of three million Spanish-speaking citizens of the Southwest." Earlier in 1950, founder Dr. Héctor P. García criticized national political leadership for neglecting the rights of local citizen workers in Texas. "No organization can compete with the paid full-time workers, lobbyists, etc. which the Valley Citrus and Growers Association and Farm Bureau have had for many years," he declared.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Mexican Worker Imported Protested, 1947," EGP, Box 24, Folder 13, GLSCDSU; letter to Honorable Tom C. Clark, from R.A. Cortez, National President, November 4, 1948, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACP.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram to the President, from D. Idar, Executive Secretary, American GI Forum, Austin, Texas, January 18, 1954, Dwight D. Eisenhower Records as President, White House Central Files (hereafter DDERPWHCF), Box 968, DDEPLM; "Protest, American G.I. Forum, September 28, 1953," Subject Files of Secretary James P. Mitchell, 1953-1960 (SFSJPM), GRDL, RG 174, Box 6, NACP; "Statement of Hector P. García," USPCML, RG 220, Box 7, HSTLM.

The views expressed by these two organizations were complemented by related work from other individuals, including Carlos E. Castañeda and George I. Sánchez. The former criticized the ill-treatment toward the "Latin American citizen" within a longer history of discrimination. As he stated to the U.S. President's Committee on Civil Rights in 1947:

Refusal to give the Latin American citizen equal opportunities for employment and advancement, and the denial of the same wage for the same type of work to members of this group have condemned this segment of our population to a substandard level of living that forms the basis for all other forms of discrimination by which the economic exploitation is justified.

Sánchez was more direct in his critique. "The fruit growers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas have declared recently that the prevailing wage in the industry is 25 cents an hour," he noted as well in 1947. Doing so, however, forced "Mexican American citizens, who pay taxes and are citizens of this country, to lower their standard of living and work for 25 cents an hour, or remain unemployed." By 1963, Henry B. González from San Antonio, the first Mexican American in Texas to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, also added his voice. The longtime congressman began his official political career as an elected city councilman in 1953, during the period of the Bracero Program. "I cannot understand," he stated, "why these men are unsuitable for work in Texas but are suitable for work as far north as Wisconsin." Whereas growers turned to

undocumented farm labor, according to González, they repeatedly turned away local citizen labor for employment.<sup>25</sup> In spite of these and other declarations on behalf of displaced *Tejano* workers, they still could not counter the strong economic hold that employers had in Washington, D.C. through lobbyists and growers associations.

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<sup>25</sup> Letter to Robert K. Carr, President's Committee on Civil Rights, from Carlos E. Castañeda, Professor of History, May 9, 1947, RPCCR, RG 220, Box 3, HSTLM; letter to Robert K. Carr, Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, from George I. Sánchez, May 6, 1947, RPCCR, RG 220, Box 3, HSTLM; "Statement of Hon. Henry B. Gonzalez, A Representative in Congress from the State of Texas," *Hearings before Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies, and Manpower* of the Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, Eighty-Eighth Congress, First Session on H.R. 1836 and H.R. 2009, March 27-29, 1963.

Figure 4. "Travel Patterns of Seasonal Migratory Agricultural Workers"<sup>26</sup>



<sup>26</sup> Small text along East Coast reads: "From Puerto Rico."  
Source: "Domestic Agricultural Migrants in the United States,"  
Public Health Service Publication No. 540, Commissioner's  
Office: Migrant Labor File, 1940-1965 (hereafter COML), Box  
266, State Archives of North Carolina (hereafter SANC).

Figure 5. "Interviewing People for Migratory Farm Work, San Antonio, Texas, May 7, 1946"<sup>27</sup>



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<sup>27</sup> Full caption reads: "Opportunities for accumulating a good seasonal bank roll are the principal inducements for the thousands of Texas farm laborers who migrate to the Northern beet fields every year. Employment of the migratory workers is concentrated in San Antonio through the Consolidated Employment Agency, 822 Buena Vista Street, composed of representatives of nine companies...The various agencies send contact men into South Texas to interview prospective families for employment." Source: San Antonio Light Photograph Collection, 1924-1993 (hereafter SALPC), Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas at San Antonio (hereafter ITCUTSA).

## Conclusion

This chapter underscores the historical impact of the Bracero Program in South Texas and the systemic inducement of a *Tejano* diaspora. A surplus of agricultural labor through the expansion of the Bracero Program enabled growers to foment divisions among Texas Mexicans and workers from Mexico, and, in the process, pursue more capital within the international political economy. Formalized divisions based on citizenship, a marker of military conquest, served as an important strategy used by employers for this purpose. While wage differentials and unequal competition for jobs were the norm, these conditions were reflective of the expansion of commercial agricultural as opposed to a natural phenomenon.

*Tejanos*, *braceros*, and undocumented workers all experienced dimensions of disposability, subjected to the needs, wants, and desires of commercial agriculture. Through threats of deportation by employers and in collaboration with the U.S. Border Patrol, *braceros* and undocumented workers encountered blatant forms of labor repression, which also thwarted attempts at labor organizing. In spite of U.S. citizenship, employers refused to employ available *Tejano* farmworkers because of the propinquity of the United States-Mexico border. Notions of citizenship and social equality proved to be circumstantial at best, and at worse, simply did not apply.

One important destination outside of Texas for *Tejano* farmworkers was the Mississippi Delta. As we shall see in the next chapter, experiences of displacement present in South Texas already set the trend for what was to come.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**"ONLY AMERICANS:" THE BRACERO PROGRAM**  
**AND DIFFERENTIAL DISPLACEMENT IN THE**  
**MISSISSIPPI DELTA, 1940s-1960s**

*"Yet many growers still insist there is a need for Mexican Nationals to pick cotton. This action is taken only to terrorize the American workers with a great surplus of labor, and force them to work for less than a living wage."*

--George Stith, Vice-President  
of the National Farm Labor Union, 1950<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

This chapter turns our discussion to farm worker experiences in the Mississippi Delta states of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi in the late 1940s. Due to its geographic location near Texas, the Delta region, principally Arkansas, served as an important destination for the *Tejanos*. Its close proximity enabled families to work during the harvest and subsequently return to Texas, or pursue work opportunities elsewhere. Delta growers also began to request large numbers of Mexican National workers to work alongside *Tejano* labor. At the same time, employer recruitment of Texas Mexican and Mexican National workers added to an already large surplus of local

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<sup>1</sup> "Statement of George Stith, Vice-President of the National Farm Labor Union," President's Commission on Migratory Labor, Stenographic Report of Proceedings Held at Memphis, Tennessee, August 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 155.



resident farm labor. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the expansion of the Bracero Program into the Delta region during the post-World War Two period further complexified experiences of displacement affecting all agricultural laborers, albeit in different ways.

I address three themes in this chapter. First, I examine the experiences of *braceros* contracted for work in the Delta. I then turn to the experiences of Texas Mexican migrants. Finally, I look at employer recruitment of inter-state migrant labor, including *Tejanos* and *braceros*, in relation to local resident farmworkers in the region.

### **In The Steps**

During the Second World War, Mexican *braceros* were contracted for agricultural labor mainly in California, the Pacific Northwest, and parts of the Midwest. While the number of *braceros* during this period never peaked above 88,000, grower participation in the program expanded in the post-World War Two period, including into the Mississippi Delta. By the end of the 1940s, more Mexican National workers were being sent to Arkansas than any other state in the South outside of Texas. In 1949,

*braceros* contracted in Arkansas accounted for 16 percent nationwide, which ranked third behind Texas and New Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

In this section, I examine the significance of Bracero Program in the Mississippi Delta through the experiences of the workers. While *braceros* were contracted for work through the international agreement, they had no mechanism to enforce contract-related conditions on their accord. The workers, thus, relied heavily on Mexican government representatives to act on their behalf. This condition of dependence came to reflect a critical systemic problem within the Bracero Program.

*Bracero* workers contracted on farms in the Mississippi Delta had institutional support through the Mexican Consulate based in Memphis, Tennessee. Serving as an intermediary between *braceros* and growers, the designated Mexican Consul Angel Cano del Castillo played an central role in the region. This included investigating formal complaints issued by workers, responding to complaints by growers, speaking with political representatives and governmental agencies. As Mexican National workers arrived in large numbers by the end of the 1940s, formal complaints were also registered. In 1949, the United States

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<sup>2</sup> "PCML Report," PSTP, Box 28, Folder 12, BLSCUCB. Regarding the Bracero Program in Pacific Northwest during the Second World War, see, Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

Employment Service office in Dallas, Texas, reported at least 175 received complaints by *bracero* workers. Approximately 50 of these came directly from workers in Arkansas.<sup>3</sup>

Given their critical role on behalf of *braceros*, contested interactions between the Mexican Consul and local large-scale growers were frequent. In a 1952 incident, growers representing the Crittenden County Farm Association submitted a formal protest to their Arkansas political representatives, claiming that they were receiving "unfair treatment." They were upset that the Mexican Consul was investigating complaints by *braceros*. The growers also published their remarks in the local newspaper. The Consul, in turn, demanded an apology from the association. Although the result was unclear, this conflict represented an example of the contested interactions between the Mexican Government and large-scale growers.<sup>4</sup>

In another incident 1957, Cano del Castillo learned that *braceros* were being charged extra charges for off-the-job life insurance coverage. The Consul advised growers from three

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<sup>3</sup> "Asks Apology from Arkansas Group," *The Press-Scimitar*, April 30, 1952, EGP, Box 25, Folder 7, GLSCDSU; "Statement of Judge A.W. Oliver of Proctor, Arkansas," August 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 60; telegram from USES, Department of Labor, November 30, 1949, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 1, NACPM.

<sup>4</sup> "Asks Apology from Arkansas Group," EGP, Box 25, Folder 7, GLSCDSU.

growers associations to fully reimburse each worker for the unnecessary charges, which were processed through the First Pyramid Life Insurance Company of America in Arkansas. Until this was done, the Mexican Consul stopped business with the designated insurance company in Arkansas insurance coverage for *braceros*. Furthermore, Cano del Castillo threatened to stop the importation of workers. This included approximately 300 Mexican National workers who were contracted for work in Phillips County in eastern Arkansas. They were waiting at the labor processing center in Hidalgo, Texas.<sup>5</sup>

Growers turned once again to their political representatives and governmental agencies. Representing the Phillips County Arkansas Farmers Association, President J.J. White submitted a formal protest to U.S. Senator John McClellan of Arkansas. "We have a problem in reference to the contracting of Mexican National Agricultural Workers," stated White. "This is a very vital matter to us," he continued, "and if we do not prevail it will result in an additional burden on the farmers of Arkansas in the future." Writing on behalf of the First Pyramid

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to Honorable James Paul Mitchell, Secretary of Labor, from J.W. Fulbright, May 27, 1958, SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 235, NACPM; telegram to Honorable James Paul Mitchell, from Herbert L. Thomas, President, First Pyramid Life Insurance Company of America, May 29, 1958, SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 235, NACPM; "Present Status of Deduction of Off-the-Job Insurance, Mexican Workers, Fall of 1957, Phillips County Arkansas Farmers Association," SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 235, NACPM.

Life Insurance Company of America, President Herbert L. Thomas also contacted Secretary James Paul Mitchell from the U.S. Department of Labor. As Thomas stated, "we have no responsibility in the overcharge they [the Mexican Consul] claim was made by three [growers] associations in eastern Arkansas to Mexican laborers." Rather, he expressed that the insurance company wanted to be released from the "blacklist" issued by Mexican Consul. In turn, the company could then provide insurance coverage to the 300 bracero workers waiting in Texas. Eventually, the Mexican Consul relented and growers in eastern Arkansas secured the labor they requested. At the very least, however, this example demonstrates the degree of contested interactions between the two distinct factions.<sup>6</sup>

Though the Mexican Consul intervened in this one incident, there were too many complaints waged by *braceros* for staff to respond adequately. This demonstrates a critical systemic flaw within the Bracero Program that provided certain work-related protections on paper, but not consistently in practice. At the same time, the lack of accountability provided incentives for

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Honorable John McClellan, United States Senate, from J.J. White, President, Phillips County Arkansas Farmers Association, May 24, 1958, SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 235, NACPM; letter to Honorable James Paul Mitchell, from Herbert L. Thomas, President, First Pyramid Life Insurance Company of America, May 29, 1958, SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 235, NACPM.

growers in the Delta to neglect contract provisions protecting workers, which intensified incidences of abuse.

Completely dependent on others to enforce contract-related provisions, Mexican National workers still responded to the conditions they confronted. One highly publicized incident took place in western Tennessee in 1951. Upon arriving on an 800-acre plantation in Tiptonville, Tennessee, from Eagle Pass, Texas, the *braceros* made several complaints that included lack of adequate housing, lack of meals, low pay, and surplus of farm labor. The following note partly summarized their experiences:

Mexican cotton pickers charged tonight that Mr. Jamison [the grower] had housed them in six cold, crowded army barracks on a windswept lakeshore and had given them only one stove per building for cooking and heating...They also charged they had been brought 1,100 miles from Eagle Pass, Texas to Tiptonville in open trailer trucks, one of which had no water, and had only three 5-minute rest stops on the way. They also said that only one water faucet for cooking, drinking, and bathing purposes had been provided for the entire camp, that too many pickers had been hired for the plantation and they had been unable to make enough money, and that two laborers had been arrested and charged with theft when they had threatened to report on conditions to [Mexican Consul] Mr. Cano.

The incident gained national attention when more than 100 workers arrived at the Mexican Consulate office in Memphis to make their complaints known in-person. They arrived by foot. Initially, 49 Mexican Nationals left their place of employment when their contracts were not being met by the grower. They walked more than 100 miles from the plantation in Tiptonville to

the Mexican Consulate office in Memphis. An additional 50 workers followed, and 12 more also traveled 60 miles from the same plantation near Keiser, Arkansas.<sup>7</sup>

The Tiptonville grower, Terry Jamison, admitted no wrongdoing although he tried to prevent more workers from leaving. When more than 15 *braceros* tried to subsequently follow suit, they were quickly arrested and placed in the local county jail. Justifying these actions, the local sheriff stated that "Terry Jamison [the grower] is a personal friend of mine. I hate to see him lose all that money by the Mexicans running away." He continued by stating, "When a man [Terry Jamison] goes to heavy expense to bring workers here, pays them well and fulfills his part of the contract in every respect only to have other parties to the contract walk off at will, then there is something wrong with the contract." Attention, however, was already focused on this one incident by the media and governmental representatives. By choosing to stop working and walk directly to the Mexican Consulate, the *braceros* exerted

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<sup>7</sup> "Laborers List Complaints," News-clipping, EGP, Box 22, Folder 6, GLDSCSU; "Mexican Exodus Spurs U.S. Inquiry," *New York Times*, November 24, 1951, EGP, Box 22, Folder 6, GLDSCSU; "Second Hearing Ordered in Mexican Worker Treatment," EGP, Box 25, Folder 5, GLDSCSU; memorandum to Phillip M. Kaiser, Assistant Secretary, from A.W. Motley, Assistant Director, Bureau of Employment Security, Subject: Agenda for Conference in Mexico City on Agricultural Labor, January 18, 1951, RASRTC, GRDL, RG 174, Box 3, NACPM.

their influence and Cano del Castillo intervened once again. Along with the U.S. Department of Labor, a joint United States-Mexican investigation was conducted, but nothing more. Eventually, some of the workers took a bus ride back to Mexico, as they "laughed and chatted amiably" along the way according to one article.<sup>8</sup>

As evident in the above example, workers frequently responded when growers violated contract terms. A representative from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, J.F. Delaney, provided a glimpse into the extent of this practice in the Mississippi Delta. According to Delaney, an estimated 18,601 Mexican National workers were contracted for work in the Delta in 1948. From this number, approximately 2,910 workers, or 15 percent, left their places of employment upon arrival. In 1949, an estimated 5,277 out of 21,336 *braceros* protested contract violations, which represented nearly 25 percent of the total.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Mexicans Laborers Tell Why They Left Tiptonville Jobs," *The Press-Scimitar*, November 23, 1951, EGP, Box 25, Folder 5, GLDSCSU; "Mexican Laborers Sent Home by U.S.," *New York Times*, November 26, 1951, EGP, Box 25, Folder 6, GLDSCSU.

<sup>9</sup> "Statement of J.F. Delaney, of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, New Orleans, Louisiana," September 1, 1950, UCPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 269-270.



Those who chose to leave their work either returned to Mexico or pursued employment elsewhere. Due to discrimination they encountered such as low pay, ten *braceros* decided to leave a plantation in Mississippi in 1948. Reportedly, the workers preferred instead to return home and dedicate themselves to make a living there. In a 1953 case, Mexican National workers decided to leave their place of employment in Lake County, Tennessee, the site of the infamous Tiptonville incident in 1951. Many ended up migrating to cities in search of employment, including Chicago.<sup>10</sup> And still, some *bracero* workers chose to join with Texas Mexican workers in the migrant stream, as part of the *Tejano* diaspora.

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<sup>10</sup> "Discriminan a los Braceros los Rancheros de Misisipi," *El Mañana*, October 18, 1948, EGP, Box 25, Folder 2, GLDSCSU; "Maltratan a los Braceros en Louisiana," *El Pueblo*, July 17, 1948, EGP, Box 25, Folder 2, GLDSCSU; letter to Honorable Martin P. Durkin, Secretary of Labor, from Estes Kefauver, June 18, 1953, SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 6, NACPM; letter to Honorable Estes Kefauver, United States Senate, from Secretary of Labor, July 7, 1953, SFSJPM, GRDL, RG 174, Box 6, NACPM.

Figure 6. "Mexican Laborers in Tiptonville, Tennessee, November 23, 1951"<sup>11</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> Source: Mississippi Valley Collection, Photographs and Postcards, University of Memphis Special Collections.

## **"Only Americans"**

This section highlights experiences of *Tejano* farmworkers in the Delta region during the Bracero era. Unlike their counterparts from Mexico, Texas Mexicans were not bounded by an international agreement. Their experiences differed because they had no formal recourse to follow and address their complaints. As citizen agricultural workers, they were also without protections from most labor and security laws in the United States. At the same time, Texas Mexicans had options available to them, and demonstrated an understanding of how to defend themselves.

The Mississippi Delta had been an important destination long before the Bracero Program. As early as 1908, Carey McWilliams noted that small numbers of Mexican workers were employed on plantations in the Mississippi Delta. That same year, labor investigator Victor S. Clark reported, "From Texas, Mexicans have been taken east as far as the Mississippi River, and a few gangs of cotton pickers have been tried even in the Yazoo Delta." In 1925, Paul Taylor noted that trainloads of Mexican laborers were directly recruited for cotton picking, and again in 1928 and 1929. Seasonal labor migration became established in the 1930s. In 1937, Taylor observed, "now the use of seasonal labor is appearing as a normal method of operation, essential to mechanized farming." Hundreds of

migrants from the vicinity of Dallas, Texas, traveled to plantations near Glen Allan, Mississippi, in 1936, and again in 1937. With the possibility for work and continued employer recruitment to northern states like Michigan, the Mississippi Delta remained an important destination for the Texas Mexican workers during the Bracero Program.<sup>12</sup>

In this same period, the magnitude of *Tejano* labor migration escalated sharply. According to one report by the U.S. Department of Labor, an estimated 108,000 Texas Mexican workers entered the migrant stream in 1955. From this number, approximately 51,000 workers, or 47 percent, traveled across 31 states. In 1959, another report suggested that more than 100,000 Texas Mexicans were part of the migrant stream, with 75,000 classified as inter-state migrants and around 15,000 making their own arrangements. By 1959, *Tejano* workers had traveled to at least 37 states across the country.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McWilliams, *Ill Fares The Land*, 249; Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States," 485; Paul Taylor, "Mexican Labor in the United States Dimmit County, Winter Garden District, South Texas," in *University of California Publications in Economics*, Volume 6, no. 5 (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1930), 308; "Greenville, Mississippi Notes from JB Wright, July 2, 1936," PSTP, Box 14, Folder 70, BLSCUCB; "Farm Labor in Mississippi and Arkansas Deltas, 1937," PSTP, Box 17, Folder 4, BLSCUCB; Coalson, *The Development of the Migratory Farm Labor System in Texas*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> "Proceedings of Consultation on Migratory Farm Labor, 1957," Bureau of Employment Security, United States Department of

These numbers, of course, do not offer exact approximations. Work was secured through employment service offices as much as through private grower recruitment efforts and individual arrangements made by workers. In addition, statistical reports were not consistent in terms of who counted as "workers," such as adult women, adult men, youth, and children. At the very least, they demonstrate the geographic reach and numerical breadth of migration.

As mostly U.S. citizen agricultural workers, *Tejanos* lacked work-related protections under federal legislation. During the New Deal liberalism of the 1930s, U.S. workers made certain strides to secure their right to work. Most notably, this included that National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1935. Also known as the Wagner Act, the NLRA provided a legal means for workers to participate in unions and collective bargaining to improve their livelihoods. Agricultural workers, however, were exempt from this important legislation. "Farmworkers did not benefit from this period of dramatic transformation of the industrial workplace," noted Greg Schell in his study on farmworker poverty. "Instead," he continued, "as labor laws were passed to improve the conditions for workers, the doctrine

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Labor, COML, Box 1, SANC, 32-33; "Farm Labor Fact Book, 1959," U.S. Department of Labor, NCALLC, Box 14, Folder 2, BLSCUCB, 128.

of 'agricultural exceptionalism' developed." Before 1960, according to Schell, virtually all federal legislation that offered work-related protections in the United States excluded agricultural workers.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, U.S. agricultural workers, including Texas Mexicans, became dependent on the crew leader system for employment. This form of labor contracting enabled growers to obtain the necessary labor during harvest and externalize their responsibilities over the livelihood of the farmworkers to individual crew leaders. These responsibilities included,

supervisory functions on the job, trucking produce to loading platforms or to markets, computing wages for individual workers, maintaining time-sheets and records of performance, paying the workers, providing labor camps and housing, boarding workers, liability for sickness and accidents sustained by workers in employment.

As L.A. Winokur and Chip Hughes also noted, "growers carefully limit their legal responsibility for the workers in the fields by 'contracting' with these 'independent' crew bosses to deliver a certain level of production at the end of a day or week. How the crew leader gets results is his problem." Whether contracting directly with crew leaders or the state employment

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<sup>14</sup> "Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, December 31, 1948," PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM, 8; Greg Schell, "Farmworker Exceptionalism Under the Law: How the Legal System Contributes to Farmworker Poverty and Powerlessness," in *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers' Lives, Labor, and Advocacy*, eds. Charles D. Thompson, Jr. and Melinda F. Wiggins (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 141.

office, growers relied upon this system. They were able to secure the necessary farm labor and with little accountability.<sup>15</sup> In turn, the crew leaders assumed greater control over farmworkers, with little or no oversight. "The key to the whole migration," noted one statement by the Workers Defense League in 1950, "is the crew leader whose status shifts from recruiter to transporter to contractor as he moves northward." Dependence on the crew leader and with little oversight made workers more susceptible to exploitation and abuse.<sup>16</sup>

Family-based social networks formed the core of Texas Mexican migrant crews, which reduced possibilities for further abuse by crew leaders. At the same time, they still encountered additional liabilities both on the road and at their places of employment. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1950, one clear limitation for U.S. agricultural laborers was the lack of safe transportation. As the report stated, "Frequently they are crowded into unsafe trucks, they

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<sup>15</sup> Liss, "Recruiting of Migrancy Farm Workers," USPCML, RG 220, Box 10, HSTLM, 5; Winokur and Hughes, "Workers at the Harvest," JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 55.

<sup>16</sup> "Summary of Statement by Rowland Watts, National Secretary, Workers Defense League, October 17, 1950," USPCML, RG 220, Box 9, HSTLM, 2; "Explanation of Draft Bill to Provide for the Registration of Crew Leaders in Interstate Agricultural Employment, and for Other Purposes," Papers of the President's Committee on Migratory Labor, Part I: Correspondence with States, 1955-1963, microfilm reel 1.

mostly sit on board or wooden benches or on their personal belongings, or even remain standing for hours at a time." In addition, "they travel many hours without stops, without adequate opportunity to secure food, drinking water, rest and other necessities."<sup>17</sup> One liability that had dangerous consequences was the risk of death on the road.

In 1949, an incident took place when a truck driver was hired by Arkansas growers to transport workers from Texas, and fell asleep at the wheel. "The truck overturned, killing two passengers and injuring seven others. The truck owner carried no insurance and denied any legal responsibility. Some settlement was ultimately made in this case but it could not bring back the dead." In 1954, a cattle truck overturned near Del Rio, Texas, killing seven men. In 1955, six Texas Mexicans were killed and a seventh injured when their truck was struck by a train in east Texas. In 1956, another truck from Weslaco, Texas, overturned on the road in Colorado. One baby was killed and 17 women and men were hospitalized.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Suggested Recommendations of the U.S. Department of Labor to the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, October 1950," USPCML, RG 220, Box 9, HSTLM, 14.

<sup>18</sup> "Suggested Recommendations of the U.S. Department of Labor to the President's Commission on Migratory Labor, October 1950," USPCML, RG 220, Box 9, HSTLM, 14-15; letter to A.W. Worthy, Texas Legislative Council, from Gwen Geach, September 27, 1956, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, DDEPLM.



Such incidences occurred frequently and affected all U.S. migrant agricultural workers. Another horrific traffic accident took place in Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1957, when a flat-bed truck hit a potato-laden tractor trailer. Eighteen Black farmworkers were reportedly killed instantly, including women, men, and a six-month old baby, while 15 more were injured. In 1958, in another North Carolina accident, the truck driver ran into a stop sign and hit another tractor trailer, which left 21 persons dead.<sup>19</sup>

In a 1951 study, Samuel Liss explained that the conditions of the trucks contributed to the frequent accidents. "Not only are many trucks found to be old and dilapidated and generally uncomfortable and unfit for transportation of passengers," according to Liss, "but the conditions of transportation en route do not meet the current requirements for the movement of even cattle." In another study in 1957, Samuel Cox examined migrant-related traffic tragedies, and observed, "each of these accidents was characterized by excessive crowding and improper

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<sup>19</sup> "Report to the President on Domestic Migratory Farm Labor," USPCML, RG 220, Box 48, DDEPLM; "Who is Looking After the Migratory Workers?" *Greensboro Daily*, March 10, 1959, Terry Sanford Papers (hereafter TSP), Box 37, Wilson Library Southern Historical Collection (hereafter WLSHC), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter UNCCH); "Death Rides in North Carolina Highways," *The News and Observer*, July 20, 1958, USPCML, RG 220, Box 6, DDEPLM.

operation of the vehicle transporting the workers." He continued, "Incompetent driving, poorly maintained vehicles, and badly crowded conditions have been elements in many accidents involving the transportation of these workers."<sup>20</sup> For Texas Mexicans, the decision to face these risks in the migrant stream demonstrated the enormity of the "migratory problem" in South Texas as much as their determination to survive economically.

Mexican Consul Angel Cano del Castillo and designated representative Gus García from San Antonio also documented experiences for Texas Mexicans in the Delta. Cano del Castillo noted one instance in 1948, when he was traveling from Dallas, Texas to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Along the highway, he assisted a disabled truck with several migrants, all of whom were "American citizens of Mexican descent." According to the Consul Cano del Castillo, the migrants were already stranded for 36 hours because the truck stopped working and no one else stopped to help them. After learning that they had no food, shelter, or money, Cano del Castillo quickly went to a nearby roadhouse and purchased food for them. In the same trip, he encountered two additional trucks with Texas Mexican workers. He observed that

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Liss, "Recruiting of Migratory Farm Workers by Labor Contractors, Crew Leaders, and Other Private Agencies, January 15, 1951," USPCML, RG 220, Box 10, HSTLM, 31; Ernest G. Cox, "Migrant Worker Transportation Regulations, September 1957," Interstate Commerce Commission, COML, Box 2, SANC.

"the workers were forced to stand up, closely crowded together," according to the reporting article.<sup>21</sup>

Appointed by the Mexican Consulate in San Antonio, Texas, Mexican attorney Gus García traveled to Arkansas to conduct investigations on behalf of *braceros* in 1948. In testimony before the U.S. President's Committee on Migratory Labor, García remarked,

I discovered that while conditions existing among the *braceros* or contract laborers that have come into the United States for seasonal work from Mexico, through the International Agreement—that while their conditions were bad in that, for example, in violation of the agreement, they didn't have any cooking utensils and so on, that while their conditions were bad, they were nothing compared to the conditions that existed among the natives of Mexican descent, among migrant laborers. Thus, at least, Mexican *braceros* had a roof over their heads, while the other people, the people from Texas, the people from other states who were native of our country, were living under trucks and under trees.<sup>22</sup>

As García explained, Texas Mexicans had no formal institutional structures in place to support their rights. He continued, "the Government of Mexico was able to pay an attorney [himself] to represent the interest of its nationals, and properly so. But there was no one at all to speak on behalf of the other people;

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<sup>21</sup> "Braceros Still Abused, Mexican Consul Says," *San Antonio Express News*, October 18, 1948, EGP, Box 25, Folder 2, GLDSCSU.

<sup>22</sup> "Mexico Ask Probe of Arkansas Labor," *San Angelo Standard Times*, October 22, 1948, EGP, Box 25, Folder 2, GLDSCSU; "Statement of Gus Garcia," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM, 215-216.

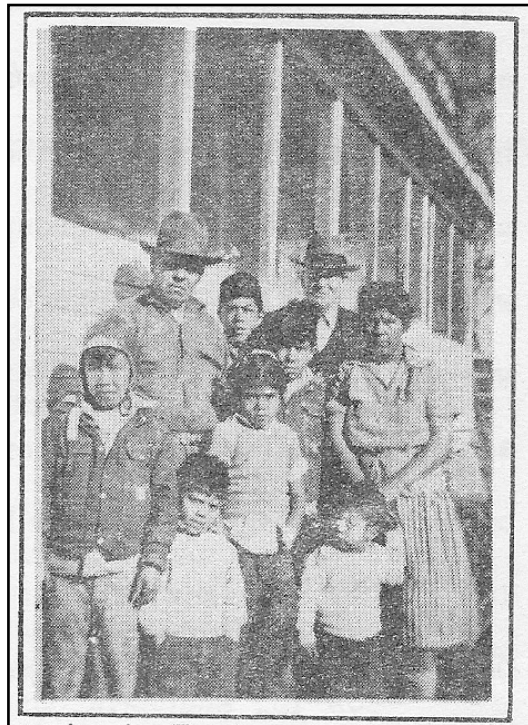
they were only Americans." In this way, they were rendered disposable. As we have learned through the actions of the Mexican Consul, there were instances when the Mexican Government intervened on behalf of "Spanish-speaking Americans."<sup>23</sup> With few resources, however, these instances too were rare.

Lacking institutional support, *Tejanos* turned to themselves for social and emotional sustenance, and self-protection. This dynamic was strengthened through the composition of most *Tejano* migrant crews that relied upon family units and networks, joined by former *braceros*. In addition, Texas Mexicans held U.S. citizenship and were, thus, not relegated to only one employer. In opposition to unfavorable conditions they encountered, they utilized their citizenship by exercising their right to move. The migrant stream served as an important recourse in this regard, even when this option carried certain risks road.

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<sup>23</sup> "Statement of Gus Garcia," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, HSTLM, 216; "Brief to The Director, from J. Otis Garber, re: Illegal Immigration from Mexico, January 13, 1949," PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM, 2.

Figure 7. "Typical Workers from Weslaco, Texas in Poinsett County, Arkansas, 1948"<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>24</sup> Under the caption "Typical Workers," the section reads: "Hipolito Ramírez, Mexican, lives at Weslaco, Texas, with his wife and six children, ranging in age from 18 months to 14 years. Up until four years ago, he and his wife earned their living by day work in the area near their home in such vegetables harvests as tomatoes, onions, and carrots. At that time, he was recruited by Juan Gonzales, crew leader, for employment on a 2,500 acre cotton plantation in Poinsett County in Eastern Arkansas. Each succeeding year he has returned to his employer in this state, traveling with his family in one of the crew leader's trucks." Source: "Arkansas Agricultural Activities Report, 1948," Farm Placement Section, Arkansas State Employment Services, 35.

## Southern Diaspora

The increased presence of Texas Mexican and Mexican National farmworkers after World War Two added to an already large surplus of agricultural labor in the Mississippi Delta. In this section, I examine how employer reliance on outside farm labor, including *Tejanos* and *braceros*, further impacted the lives of local agricultural workers. One result, as we shall see, was a process of out-migration from the Delta into other geographic regions in search of employment.

Among the estimated 78,900 agricultural workers in Arkansas in 1948, according to the Arkansas State Employment Service, nearly 40 percent were either *Tejano* or *bracero*. Approximately 17,500 migrants, or 22 percent, were reportedly listed as Texas Mexican, and 13,000, or 16 percent, were Mexican Nationals. Together, they were part of 35,700 migrant workers, or 45 percent of the total, who traveled to the Delta from outside locations. The remaining outside migrants originated from either non-Delta counties in Arkansas or other states.<sup>25</sup>

In 1954, the United Church Women of Arkansas also provided a picture of farmworkers in the state. According to their survey, there were three primary populations working in Arkansas:

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<sup>25</sup> "Arkansas Agricultural Activities Report, 1948," Farm Placement Section, Arkansas State Employment Service, 19.

First are the English-speaking migrants, both White and Negro, who move through all the states in the East-West and North-South patterns...Second are the Spanish-speaking people from Texas (also Oklahoma and Arizona) who move mostly to the North from Texas and return there sometime during the year. The third group is composed of the Mexican Nationals who are brought into the United States under contract to work for a certain period of time only.

The numerical size and places of employment for *bracero* workers were more certain. "They are the only group," the survey stated, "who may be reasonably sure of work and conditions before they leave their homes." Among the 26,350 international workers who migrated to Arkansas in 1954, approximately 476 were also listed as workers from the British West Indies. The remaining workers were Mexican Nationals, as *braceros*. The majority of all international workers, approximately 21,525, were used for cotton picking.<sup>26</sup>

Employment of non-local farmworkers provided several advantages to growers in the Delta. At the very least, they were not tied to recent collective struggles waged by local workers. Unlike prior labor regimes of farm sharecropping and tenancy, itinerant workers were only present for a short time to complete the tasks at hand, and then left their places of employment, with no further responsibility to the growers.

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<sup>26</sup> "Survey on Migrant Labor in Arkansas," Ministry to Migrants, United Church Women of Arkansas, 1954, USPCML, RG 220, Box 52, DDEPLM; "Arkansas Agricultural Activities Report, 1954," Farm Placement Section, Arkansas State Employment Services, 11.

The surplus of U.S. citizen and non-citizen farm labor offered growers additional leverage over workers. Large-scale growers often went to great lengths to pursue and employ Texas Mexican workers in lieu of local farm workers. A 1948 government report documented how large-scale growers from Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana utilized private recruiting efforts to recruit *Tejanos* and workers from Mexico to meet their needs for short-term labor. Growers from these states "are becoming organized after the fashion of the Arizona cotton growers. They have their recruiting representatives. It is estimated that this year these private recruiters recruited the large part of their migratory labor from Texas and from Mexico." The city of San Antonio again served as one of the important geographic centers for recruitment. "Generally, these San Antonians," according again to the same report, "spend the winter doing odd jobs, mostly in connection with the tourist trade, pecan hulling, and the like. In the spring, they work in agriculture in Texas or Arkansas, then to the beet fields or to cotton picking." Despite the practice of rejecting local citizen workers, Texas employers were still not pleased when Texas Mexican labor was diverted elsewhere, as this diminished



their labor pool. Still, according to one report, the available surplus of labor made Texas ripe for inter-state recruitment.<sup>27</sup>

Employer methods of recruiting Texas Mexican farm labor resulted, in some instances, in direct competition with each other. In 1948, the Texas Employment Service office in San Antonio directed *Tejano* migrant crews to one large-scale grower in Louisiana. Private labor agents employed by cotton growers in Arkansas redirected the migrant crews to their state. "By paying the crew leader a bonus," according to the same government report, "his crews were diverted to Arkansas...These recruiting agents work on the basis of so-much per worker delivered to the site of the work." The farmers furnished living quarters and cooking utensils for the workers.<sup>28</sup>

As *bracero* labor increased in the region, particularly in Arkansas, so too did growers from surrounding states compete with each other about their limited access. "All is still not well in the shipment of labor from Mexico," noted Ed B. Hill of the Mississippi Bolivar County Harvesting Committee in 1948. Hill sent his complaint to the labor processing center in Monterrey, Mexico, where *braceros* were contracted for growers in

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<sup>27</sup> "Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, December 31, 1948," PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM, 6.

<sup>28</sup> "Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, December 31, 1948," PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM, 7.

East Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Georgia. Whereas growers in Arkansas received an abundance of *bracero* labor that same year, according to Hill, the number sent to Bolivar County and neighboring Washington County in Mississippi was minimal, 150 and 200 workers respectively. They desired more.<sup>29</sup>

When growers recruited Texas Mexicans for seasonal labor, they described them as "good and reliable workers" in relation to local farm labor in the Delta. This characterization, of course, contrasted with the predominant view by growers in South Texas, who instead sought Mexican National labor. Yet when growers in the Delta began to employ Mexican National workers in larger numbers in lieu of *Tejanos* and local farm workers, they too used the same justification.

In 1950, John Stephens of the Crittenden County Agricultural Service in Arkansas explained his desire for *braceros*. "My private opinion," according to Stephens, "is that Mexican Nationals offer the greatest possibility to use in this cotton area. We have tried migratory labor from other sections, which has not been satisfactory, as a whole." Similarly, a

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<sup>29</sup> "Cotton Comment," *Common Appeal*, September 28, 1948, EGP, Box 25, Folder 2, GLDSCSU; "Department of Justice INS Monthly Review, Volume 7, No. 9, March 1950, NCALLC, Box 14, Folder 19, BLSCUCB, UCB; letter to William Belton, Department of State, from Robert C. Goodwin, August 19, 1952, PDHS, Box 7, HSTLM.

grower from Mississippi County, Arkansas, Rufus Branch, had for years employed Texas Mexican farmworkers. In 1948, however, he began requesting Mexican National workers through the Bracero Program. "I have one Mexican bringing me around 100 Texas Mexicans a year," explained Branch. "Last year he promised me he would come down and pick cotton until the cane season started, and he didn't show up, and if I hadn't had the Nationals, I would have been in pretty bad shape for cotton pickers."<sup>30</sup> Like growers in South Texas, Branch justified his request for *braceros* by depicting Texas Mexicans as unreliable.

Similar as well to South Texas, the surplus of labor enabled growers to foment divisions and displace local farmworkers. According to George Stith, employer recruitment of *braceros* was used to reject local farm labor. A local farmworker and member of the National Agricultural Workers Union, formerly the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Stith observed, "I was sure that no people would be imported from Mexico to work on farms in Arkansas." There were too many local workers from surrounding towns and cities who could go out to

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<sup>30</sup> "Migratory Labor in American Agriculture: The Report of The President's Commission on Migratory Labor, March 1, 1951," USPCML, RG 220, Box 10, HSTLM, I-3; "Statement of John Stephens, Member of the Crittenden County Agricultural Service, Marion, Arkansas," August 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 88; "Statement of Rufus Branch, Farmer, of Mississippi County, Arkansas," August 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 83.

chop and pick cotton. "If there are some local workers picking cotton on the plantation," he observed, "they are fired so the Mexicans can be employed." Unlike *bracero* workers, the "Arkansas cotton picker" was not guaranteed anything, according to Stith.<sup>31</sup>

In a separate incident, Stith recalled when truckloads of local farmworkers searched for work near Pine Bluff and Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1949. When they approached one grower for farm work, the response was, "Sorry, boys, but I have got these Mexicans, and I have got to take care of them, of course." When work was finally offered to the workers, they, in turn, refused because of the lower pay. "You don't have to take it," claimed the grower. "I can get Mexicans cheaper than that." Employer recruitment of outside farm labor increased revenue for growers and, yet, decreased employment opportunities for local agricultural workers in the Delta.<sup>32</sup>

This criticism of the Bracero Program also corresponded with a related study by William H. Metzler in 1951, which addressed the economic impact of *bracero* recruitment on U.S.

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<sup>31</sup> "Statement of George Stith, Hearings of National Advisory Committee, Washington, D.C., February 5, 1959," EGP, Box 24, Folder 4, GLDSCSU.

<sup>32</sup> "Statement of George Stith, Vice-President of the National Farm Labor Union," August 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 155.

citizen farm labor from the Delta. Metzler documented how wage rates for cotton chopping and picking decreased for U.S. citizen farm labor in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Missouri by 1949, one year after *bracero* labor was first used in the region. In 1948, he noted that U.S. citizen farmworkers from the region were paid between \$3.00 and \$5.00 per hundred pounds of cotton. In 1949, their pay dropped to \$2.50 to \$3.00 per one hundred pounds. Mexican National workers worked in the same location and yet none were paid above \$2.00 per one hundred pounds.<sup>33</sup>

Already displaced by increased mechanized farming in the cotton industry, local farmworkers experienced more unemployment or low paid work when employers turned to non-citizen farm labor. This was the conclusion made by Father J.E. Crosthwait from the U.S. Bishops' Committee for Spanish-Speaking, based in San Antonio. In 1957, he visited 30 states where *braceros* were employed, including Arkansas. He concluded that recruitment of

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<sup>33</sup> William H. Metzler, "Staff Study No. 9: Employment, Wages, and Earnings of Migratory Workers, February 1, 1951," USPCML, RG 220, Box 10, HSTLM, 17-18; see also, "Statement of the Operation and Effects of the International Executive Agreement of 1952 for the Recruitment and Employment of Mexican Nationals in Agriculture in the U.S., Submitted by the National Farm Labor Union, AFL, 1951," NCALLC, Box 20, Folder 16, BLSCUCB; "Statement to The President's Commission on Migratory Labor Submitted by the National Farm Labor Union, July 1951," EGP, Box 24, Folder 3, GLDSCSU; Henry Pope Anderson, "Health Attitudes and Practices of Braceros: Report of Progress, January 1 - December 32, 1957," EGP, Box 14, Folder 4, GLDSCSU.

Mexican National workers by employers in Arkansas "had displaced Negroes who for generations had lived and worked on, causing a considerable exodus of the Negroes who thereafter sought work as migrants elsewhere." Similarly, the Reverend J.A. McDaniels from the Memphis Urban League noted that outside labor was unnecessary. "The cotton-picking season is welcomed by hundreds of them [local farm labor] living in our area, for it means an income," stated the Reverend. As one example, he noted that Memphis, Tennessee served as primary destination for 12,000 and 15,000 Black farmworkers who experienced unemployment and underemployment during World War Two. Their numbers, however, only increased after the expansion of the Bracero Program into the Delta. Towns and cities became important destinations for displaced Black farmworkers, particularly Memphis, and, similar to South Texas, reflected a process of rural to urban labor migration.<sup>34</sup>

As *Tejano* diasporic migration reached unprecedented numbers nationwide during the 1950s, they were preceded and accompanied by a southern Black diaspora that included the Mississippi Delta. In response to the conditions they encountered, Black

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<sup>34</sup> Letter to Ernesto Galarza from Ted Le Berthon, January 29, 1958, EGP, Box 10, Folder 61, GLDSCSU; "Statement of Reverend J.A. McDaniels, Secretary of the Memphis Urban League, Memphis, Tennessee," August 31, 1950, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, HSTLM, 139; "Memorandum Report: Immigration from Mexico, December 31, 1948," PDHS, Box 6, HSTLM, 7.

farmworkers too sought employment elsewhere. Historian James N. Gregory partly described this process of labor migration, including *Tejanos* and Black workers, as a "Southern Diaspora," documenting the impact of southern communities in northern and western states of this country.<sup>35</sup>

South Florida, however, was also an important destination for the Southern Diaspora. In 1956, one state report on migrant health noted that the majority of workers involved in the Atlantic Migrant Stream originally came "from the cotton sub-culture of Georgia, South Carolina, and other Southern states where they have been displaced by the westward movement of cotton production, the depletion of the land in former cotton areas, and the replacement of farming by industry in some parts of the South." According to interviews with Black farmworkers in the Belle Glade area of Florida in 1953, William Metzler also concluded that the majority had traveled to South Florida from other southeast states, including in the Mississippi Delta. While Black labor migration to South Florida was heaviest during the early 1940s, Metzler noted that 20 percent of those he interviewed had migrated during the last four years. In addition, Earl Lomon Koos conducted a survey on agricultural labor in Florida in 1957, and found that approximately 129 out

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<sup>35</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*.

of 202 Black households listed Georgia as their state of birth. Additional states of origin, in numerical order, included South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Arkansas, respectively. The majority of those interviewed by Koos indicated that they left their homes because they could not find local employment.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has continued our discussion on the Bracero Program by focusing on the experiences of Mexican National workers, Texas Mexicans, and U.S. citizen agricultural labor from the Mississippi Delta. As we have learned, each farmworker population experienced displacement, although in different ways.

Mexican National workers were guaranteed work and certain work-related protections under an international agreement, yet did not have the means for enforce their rights on their own accord. They depended on others to act on their behalf. Texas Mexicans were also recruited for work in the Delta, yet they

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<sup>36</sup> "Agricultural Migrant Health Conference, April 1956," COML, Box 1, SANC; William H. Metzler, "Migratory Farm Workers in the Atlantic Coast Stream: A Study in the Belle Glade area of Florida," U.S. Department of Agriculture Circular No. 966, January 1955, USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 1; Earl Lomon Koos, "The Follow the Sun," Florida State Board of Health, Jacksonville, Florida, 1957, USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 13; Memorandum to County Superintendents of Public Instruction, from W.H. Marshall, General Consultant in Instruction, Subject: Migrant Education, January 16, 1956, COML, Box 1, SANC, 12.



lacked any formal agreement to address their complaints. At the same time, their U.S. citizenship enabled them to move freely, without being confined to one place of employment. Local agricultural workers also faced unemployment and under-employment that limited their economic mobility, which increased with employer recruitment of outside farm labor. Similar to Texas Mexicans, however, the migrant stream served as an important recourse for these workers to follow.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ON THE MOVE: ORGANIZED MIGRANTS IN SOUTH FLORIDA, 1950s-1970s

*"We don't want the farmers to run the camp. If they do, you will have to work for one farmer. If you don't want to work for that farmer, he will throw you out. If there is a freeze and there's no work, the farmer will throw you out."*

-- Matilda García,  
Everglades Labor Camp resident, 1981<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The final two chapters in this dissertation analyze the significance of *Tejano* labor migration within the Atlantic Migrant Stream. In this chapter, I turn to southern Florida, and in chapter five, North Carolina. Southern Florida and, subsequently, eastern North Carolina became primary destinations of migration. Employer recruitment in the fields, plant nurseries in Florida and dairy farms in North Carolina enabled workers to eventually settle out of the migrant stream in both locations. This also allowed them to pursue similar employment elsewhere in the South.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Susan Burnside, "Farm Workers Protest Farmer Takeover Plan," *The Miami Herald*, June 1, 1981, Steve Kirk Personal Collection (hereafter SKPC).

In this chapter, I examine how *Tejanos* responded to conditions they encountered in southern Florida between their initial experiences in the 1950s, and the 1970s. By analyzing the significance of community activism in southern Florida, this brief discussion also contributes to related scholarship on the *Tejano* diaspora in Texas and Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup>

### **Quiet Riot**

*Tejano* labor migration into southern Florida took place through out-migration from the Mississippi Delta and employer recruitment in Texas. Florida quickly emerged as an important destination and home-base because of the available year-long employment and additional seasonal jobs following the crops in the Atlantic Migrant Stream. This section examines their initial experiences in Immokalee and Homestead.

When *Tejanos* began to work in southern Florida in 1950, there was already a defined "migrant stream" of workers following the crops along the Eastern Seaboard.<sup>3</sup> The Atlantic

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<sup>2</sup> Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora*.

<sup>3</sup> In one oral history interview, Lupe Pérez Rivera explained that her family first migrated to South Florida in 1950. One additional source noted that Texas Mexican migrants began to appear in 1951, and others indicated the turning point to be 1953; oral history interview with Lupe Comse Rivera, May 1, 2013, interview with author; "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advocacy Committee on Migrant Agricultural Labor,

Migrant Stream dates from before the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1890s, unskilled Italian immigrants from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Polish immigrants from Baltimore, Maryland, traveled to New Jersey as seasonal harvest labor. Black farmworkers from Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina also began to travel north for farm work. In 1901, according to the U.S. Industrial Commission, "colored labor from the South was used in the New England States and that migration from crop to crop and area to area was an established pattern involving thousands of workers." Growers increasingly relied upon Black farm labor from southern states. By 1921, according the Farm Placement Service, labor migration along the Atlantic Coast had assumed a definite pattern.<sup>4</sup>

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Immokalee, Florida, March 28, 1956," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 37; "Resource Paper on Children and Youth of Domestic Agricultural Migrant Families, September 11, 1959," USPCML, RG 220, Box 47, DDEPLM, 3; "Children and Youth of Domestic Agricultural Migrant Families," Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1960, COML, Box 3, SANC, 205; letter to Elizabeth B. Herring, from Rocco C. Siciliano, June 1, 1956, NCALLC, Box 20, Folder 19, BLSCUCB.

<sup>4</sup> Donald H. Grubbs, "The Story of Florida's Migrant Farm Workers," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (October 1961): 104; Metzler, "Migratory Farm Workers in the Atlantic Coast Stream," 2-3; L.A. Winokur, and Chip Hughes, "Workers at the Harvest: Laborers of the East Coast Migrant Stream," *Southern Exposure*, Volume XI, No. 6 (November/December 1983): 57, Joan Preiss Papers (hereafter JPP), 1970-2006, Box 31, DURBML.

The migrant stream soon extended southward toward Florida when the "Everglades" area around Lake Okeechobee began to be cleared out for agricultural endeavors, primarily for fruits, vegetables, and sugar-cane production. Through federal drainage and irrigation practices, thousands of acres were reclaimed in southern Florida for agriculture. This expansion permanently altered the movement of farmworkers. The majority of agricultural laborers continued to conclude their seasonal employment in the north, such as New York or New England. At the same time, available winter-time employment in South Florida became a principal focal point to the entire migrant stream. According to one official study conducted in 1950, the majority of the 1,754 migrant crews active in the Atlantic Migrant Stream were based in Florida. By comparison, second-ranked North Carolina was home to 60 migrant crews.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Winokur and Hughes, "Workers at the Harvest," JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 58; Koos, "The Follow the Sun," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 2; Scruggs, *Braceros, "Wetbacks," and the Farm Labor Program*, 29; Carolyn Corrie, "And Justice for All? The Migrant Farmworker Crisis and the Failure of Liberal Reform," Senior History Thesis, Duke University, April 15, 1991, SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DDEPLM, 15; Louis Persh, "An Analysis of the Agricultural Migratory Movements on the Atlantic Seaboard and the Socio-Economic Implications for the Community of the Migrants, 1930-1950" (Dissertation: The American University, 1953), 21; Olaf F. Larson, and Emmitt F. Sharp, *Migratory Farm Workers in the Atlantic Coast Stream* (Ithaca, New York: New York State College of Agriculture, 1960), 8; "Migratory Labor, June 22, 1950," USPCML, RG 220, Box 1, HSTLM.

A principal destination for *Tejanos* was Immokalee, Florida, located in western Collier County of South Florida. During the 1950s, Immokalee transitioned from a remote small town to an important destination for agricultural workers. Grower Joe Brown testified before the Florida Citizens Advisory Committee on Migrant Agricultural Labor in 1956: "I came here [Immokalee, Florida] in 1949 to live, and I think there were four packing sheds here when I came in. Now I believe there are 17 different packing operators here...It has really grown tremendously in the last five years." When he first arrived in Immokalee, "there were hardly any roads, but now we have several new hard roads which have opened up all this other farm land and the people are just flocking in here." Workers traveled to Immokalee to pursue possible employment.<sup>6</sup>

Expansion of commercial agriculture was accompanied by the dramatic expanse of land devoted to harvesting crops. As a state county agent in Immokalee, Mr. Landrum, also testified in 1956, "I have been here four years...when I came in here at first we had two major crops, tomatoes and cucumbers. Since that time, we are quite diversified." In Collier County, approximately 18,000 acres were devoted to crops in 1956, compared to "less than a thousand acres" in the 1946 and 1947.

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<sup>6</sup> "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advocacy Committee," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 30-32.

In 1956, 6,800 acres were used for the tomato crop, which also required the most farm labor. This was followed by cucumbers at 6,000 acres, watermelons at 5,800 acres, corn at 4,000 acres, and potatoes at 3,900 acres. These were then were followed by, in numerical order, the cultivation of squash, pepper, and eggplant. Together, these crops took up approximately 26,500 acres of land in southwestern Florida, with the majority again in Collier County. By the end of the 1950s, the town of Immokalee was surrounded by a sea of crops, and there were no beaches.<sup>7</sup>

Texas Mexicans traveled to southern Florida through employer recruitment efforts and, subsequently, social networks. This was the case for Texas Mexican crew leader Severo Anzaldúa, whose migrant crew first traveled to southern Florida in the 1950s. With dim possibilities for employment in South Texas, Anzaldúa was recruited to Immokalee, Florida. During his first visit, growers then met with him directly to request more workers from Texas the following year, which he did.<sup>8</sup>

Like Texas, Arkansas, and Michigan, the state of Florida quickly became important for *Tejanos* in the migrant stream that

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<sup>7</sup> "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advocacy Committee," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 2, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Oral history interview with Rolando Contreras, April 30, 2013, interview with author.

began in the 1950s. One common experience was for Texas Mexicans to work around Immokalee and, upon completion of the work, continue their journey back to Texas or other locations in need of farm labor. One grower from Immokalee, Roy Miller, relied upon two Texas Mexican migrant crews. One crew numbered around 100 and the second around 40 workers. "They leave here," according to Miller, "and go to Arkansas and Texas and come back in the fall." Similarly, Texas Mexican crew leader Mr. Romodiz had been migrating to Immokalee since 1951. For the next five years, he had migrated to South Florida and yet still maintained his permanent home in Texas. "We close them up," he stated. For other workers, they instead returned to the Mississippi Delta or further north to the Great Lake states. As Romodiz stated, "Some of the people go to Arkansas and to Mississippi to work, but most of my life I've been in Texas." For his work as crew leader, Romodiz was paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 by the grower. He used this compensation to pay back his own expenses and workers in his migrant crew.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advocacy Committee," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 22, 37; see also, "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advisory Committee on Migrant Agricultural Labor, Winter Haven, Florida, April 24, 1956," from Papers of the President's Committee on Migratory Labor, 1955-1963, Part I: Correspondence with States, 1955-1963, microfilm reel 18, 27-28.



While most *Tejanos* returned to familiar corridors of migration, some chose to seek employment elsewhere in Florida. One important destination further southeast of Immokalee was Homestead, in Dade County. As one observer noted in 1956, "The increase of Texas-Mexicans has been tremendous. In two years, they have increased from 300 to 2,400." In 1957, a report from the U.S. Department of Labor also highlighted the growth. "Increasing numbers of Spanish-Americans from Texas," according to the report, "are beginning to appear. Last year [in 1956] when we visited Dade County, we estimated that there were about 2,400 in that county alone. Four years ago, Texas Mexicans were virtually unknown in Florida." By 1958, a housing survey on Dade County estimated that among Texas Mexicans in that county, one-third came directly from Texas.<sup>10</sup>

The Gómez family was one of the families who traveled to Dade County for farm work in the late 1950s. The family, consisting of Juan Gómez, "a wife, two grown sons, and two little ones," had traveled annually as farmworkers from South

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<sup>10</sup> Memorandum to County Superintendents of Public Instruction, from W.H. Marshall, General Consultant in Instruction, January 16, 1956, COML, Box 1, SANC, 12; "Proceedings of Consultation on Migratory Farm Labor, 1957," Bureau of Employment Security, United States Department of Labor, COML, Box 1, SANC, 32; "Housing for Florida's Migrants: A Survey of Migratory Farm Labor Housing in Dade County, Florida," Florida Industrial Commission, United States Department of Labor, August 1958, COML, Box 3, SANC.

Texas to the Great Lake states. Their migration pattern shifted when a crew leader from Brownsville, Texas, recruited them and three additional families for work in Dade County, Florida. Part of their decision to travel to Florida was also influenced by friends who previously made the journey to Dade County, and returned with favorable accounts regarding employment.<sup>11</sup>

An additional incentive for traveling to South Florida was the opportunity to follow the crops in the Atlantic Migrant Stream. This decision was indicated as early as 1952, when missionary worker from Ecuador, Ed Jaramilla, visited North Carolina. According to a news bulletin from North Carolina Council of Churches, Jaramilla reportedly also "lectured to the Mexicans" during his visit in the state. In addition, Texas Mexican farmworkers were recruited by at least one asparagus grower in Virginia in 1955. According to the Virginia State Employment Service, approximately 571 workers "found their way to the Eastern Shore of Virginia, many of whom remained throughout the entire harvest season." These workers had also been employed by the same grower "in previous years," according to the same report.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Housing for Florida's Migrants," COML, Box 3, SANC.

<sup>12</sup> "Hands: The News Bulletin of the N.C. Ministry to Migrants, August 15, 1952," NCCC, Box 51, DMRRBML; "Annual Agricultural

With the availability of work in South Florida and along the Eastern Seaboard, *Tejanos* soon began to cast their lot in places like Immokalee, Homestead, and Florida City in the 1950s. They became Florida Mexican residents. A representative from the Florida State Employment Service, Mr. Tooke, highlighted this trend in 1956. "Really, it's Immokalee they are interested in. It isn't the other parts of the area. They especially prefer Immokalee, and most of it is just sort of word by mouth news, and they decide they would like to come here. Sometimes for the first time in Immokalee, they come and settle in Immokalee." This included the Pérez family. Lupe Pérez Rivera was only ten years old when her family was recruited in San Antonio, Texas, for farm work in Immokalee in 1950. "The kids are going to make a lot of money," claimed the crew leader. Her parents, María Esquivel and Cosme Pérez, had never heard of Immokalee but decided to take the trip from Texas.<sup>13</sup>

When they arrived at their place of employment in Immokalee, they discovered that there was no available housing

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and Food Processing Report, Virginia, 1955," Virginia State Employment Service, USPCML, RG 220, Box 4, DDEPLM.

<sup>13</sup> "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advocacy Committee," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 3; oral history interview with Lupe Pérez Rivera, May 1, 2013, interview with author. At 95 years old, Cosme Pérez was still alive and well in May 2013, living in Homestead, Florida. His life partner, María Esquivel, passed away in 2000.

and they had to sleep out in the woods, with a tent supplied by the grower. Lupe did not know what was going on. She was raised in a city and her family had never lived in a tent before. She did know that something happened when they saw alligators near the creek where they were located. Immediately, her mother started gathering their belongings and declared that they were leaving Immokalee. She decided that her children were not going to sleep near the alligators. The family then traveled further southeast and arrived in Homestead, where more farm work was available. Although they continued to follow the crops in the Atlantic Migrant Stream through New York, the Pérez family returned and settled in Florida because of year-round employment. They became one of the first Mexican American families to call Homestead home.<sup>14</sup>

Like the Pérez family, lack of housing was consistent with different testimonies on migrant agricultural labor in Immokalee, Florida, in 1956. One Florida Employment Service representative noted, "It's frequently the case though these [Texas Mexican] crews are needed most, living accommodation for them are hard to find, and it has happened on occasion that suitable living quarters weren't to be had." Similarly, grower Roy Miller described the situation as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> Oral history interview with Lupe Pérez Rivera, May 1, 2013, interview with author.

We've got to have these laborers if we keep farming, and, of course, when the Texas Mexicans first started coming down to this country, we didn't have housing for them. The very first ones that came were put in tents. The following years we made a little money and built them some houses, trained them, pretty nice little houses to live in, with electricity in some of them, but there's still not enough.

According to another testimony by grower Joe Brown in the same year, Texas Mexicans lived in some of the worst conditions among farmworkers because they were isolated and had no shelter or sewage. "We didn't look at the bad places in Immokalee today," he noted. "We didn't have time to go out in the woods to see them. There's plenty of them here." Although lack of housing was a chronic problem that faced all farmworkers who migrated to South Florida, Texas Mexicans once again turned to themselves by creating their own encampments.<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, *Tejano* labor migration to South Florida reflected a certain collective resolve that was formed by their varied experiences traveling to and from Texas. This sentiment was clearly demonstrated in a publicized conflict between Texas Mexican farmworkers recruited for work in Dade County in 1957, and their employer. Similar to Immokalee, housing in Homestead was an "acute problem." Among the few options available were labor camps developed and owned by growers, and public facilities. As well, Texas Mexicans were

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<sup>15</sup> "Hearing Before the Florida Citizens Advocacy Committee," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 3, 22, 31.

still "housed in tarpaulin roofed houses," according to one report.<sup>16</sup>

One large labor camp was located northeast of the city and became known simply as "Mexico City." This was the same labor camp that was described years later to be like a prison because of the deplorable housing conditions and guards that stood with shotguns. In subsequent years, this same camp was set ablaze in mysterious fashion, and completely burned to the ground. No one was hurt because the premises were vacant at the time.<sup>17</sup>

One Saturday morning in April 1957, according to a *Miami Herald* article, local law enforcement was called to the labor camp because of a "threatened riot" waged by the workers. The farmworkers were upset because their extra bonus pay was not included in their final disbursement from their employer, B&L Farms. Their complaint was based on a prior agreement made between them and a labor agent representing B&L Farms, who had first traveled to Texas to recruit them. When the workers decided to travel to Florida from Texas, they did so with the

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<sup>16</sup> Memorandum to County Superintendent of Public Instruction, from W. H. Marshall, General Consultant in Instruction, January 16, 1956, COML, Box 1, SANC, 13, 14; "Migrant Farm Worker Housing Survey, Dade County, Florida, April 1956," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, DDEPLM, xii.

<sup>17</sup> Oral history interview with Lupe Pérez Rivera, May 1, 2013, interview with author; oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author.

understanding that part of their pay was going to be withheld and returned to them upon completion of the work. As one worker stated, "Most of us were hired in Texas...They told us there we would get 65 cents an hour, and the company would hold back 5 cents per hour until the end of the season." Through this agreement, the employer was guaranteed the necessary work to be completed. Concomitantly, the workers were to receive more money in their final pay, which they needed to return to their homes.<sup>18</sup>

In response to worker complaints, company manager, Jack Branch, explained that the workers did not follow part of the agreement that included working six days a week, and ten hours per day. As a result, they did not deserve the bonus. "We've allowed them [the workers] all one day of unexplained absence," according to Branch, "but if they were off work oftener than that, we refused to pay the bonus unless the absences had been okayed by a doctor." For Branch, missing more than one day without any notice to their employer proved enough to deny the bonus. "We did it [the agreement] in an effort to get workers and keep them throughout the entire season," he continued. "They knew the provisions when they signed on in Texas with the hiring agent." As proof, terms of the agreement were posted

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<sup>18</sup> "Show of Guns Quiets Pay Riots by Laborers," *The Miami Herald*, April 28, 1957, USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, DDEPLM.

throughout the labor camp and in Spanish, according to Branch. The workers stated, however, that they never signed a contract with the stipulation about missing days. They were not informed of claims made by Branch until they received their last pay.

Out of frustration, 700 workers went together to the company office to confront their employer and retrieve their owed money. According to a *Miami Herald* article, some attempted to overturn a company truck and others damaged housing facilities at the camp. They met the camp manager, Ed Tilly, who quickly ran from the workers and sought refuge in the company office. Tilly then called law enforcement to come to the camp and restore order. A deputy sheriff arrived to stop the workers. "I showed them a tear gas bomb I was carrying in my hand," claimed the deputy. Three additional sheriff vehicles and deputy officers returned to patrol the camp throughout the day, and armed with shotguns.<sup>19</sup>

Behind the explanations used by their employer, the bottom line was that the Texas Mexican workers were being robbed, and they knew it. This was evident in the "bonus" bonanza that served two main purposes for the employer. The scheme, first of all, provided another means for B&L Farms to increase revenue for the season. With an average extra pay of \$30 per worker,

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<sup>19</sup> "Show of Guns," USPCML, RG 220, Box 2, DDEPLM.



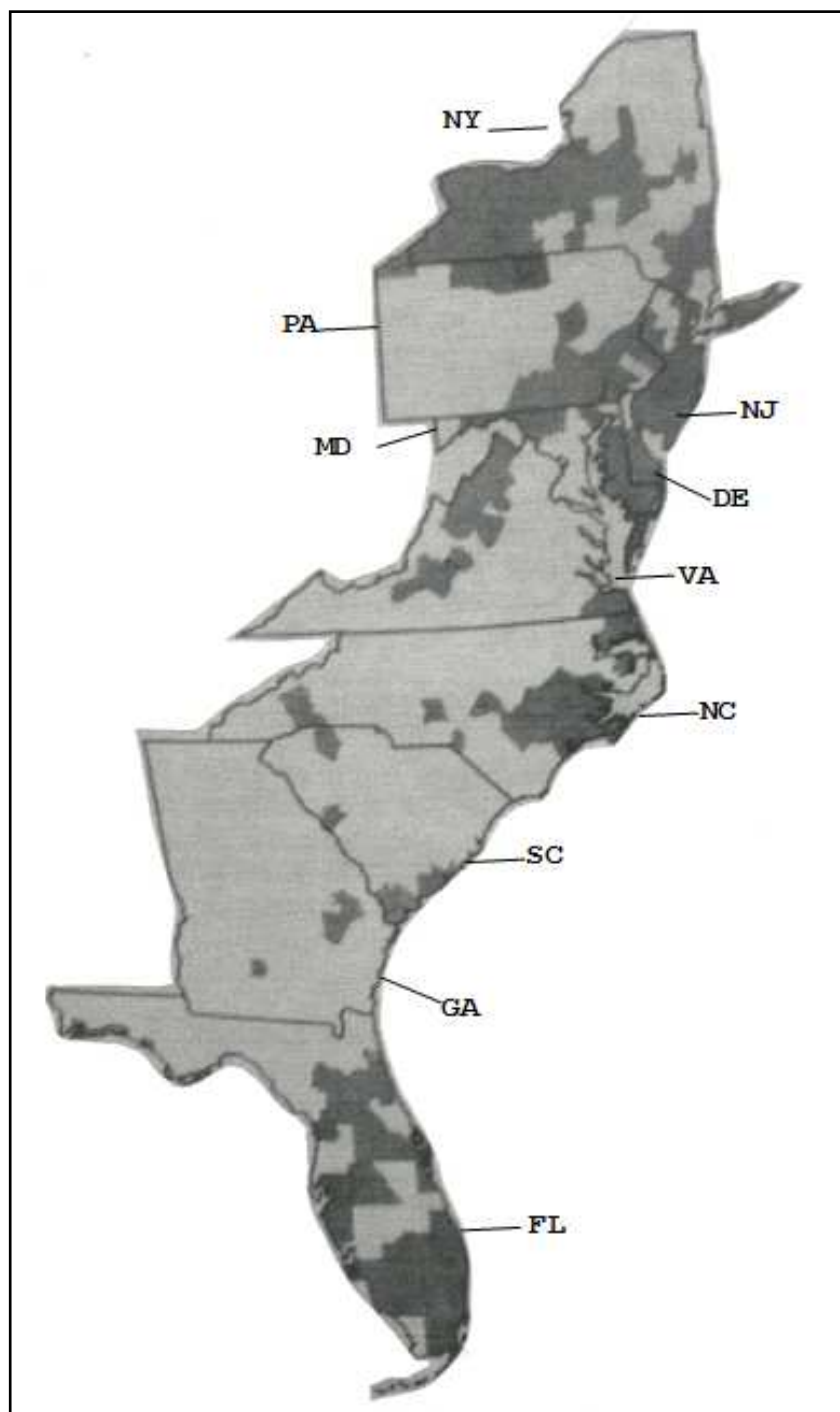
this amounted to more than \$21,000. This estimated amount is based on the number of workers who went to complain about their pay, according to the article. Second, the use of the term "bonus" enabled the company to portray itself as giving and benevolent. Since the extra pay was a "bonus," the company was not obligated to award all workers, only those who followed the rules. This concept though was misleading because the extra pay did not come from B&L Farms but from workers themselves. The final disbursement reflected what the workers had already accrued for the season, from their own hands.

The actions of labor agent who recruited the Texas Mexican workers also illustrate the extent of trickery involved in this game of theft. Representing B&L Farms, the labor agent assumed an important position to recruit the desired workers from Texas to Florida, which involved making whatever agreement necessary. When the work was completed and the workers served their purpose in Florida, B&L Farms only had to change the terms of the prior agreement, operating from a position of dominance. As the workers were well aware, however, this only amounted to lies.

By responding to unfavorable conditions they encountered, the workers still demonstrated a certain determination to assert their collective will. In other words, they were not just passive workers, ready to jump as high or wide for their employer, without question or debate. Nor were they willing

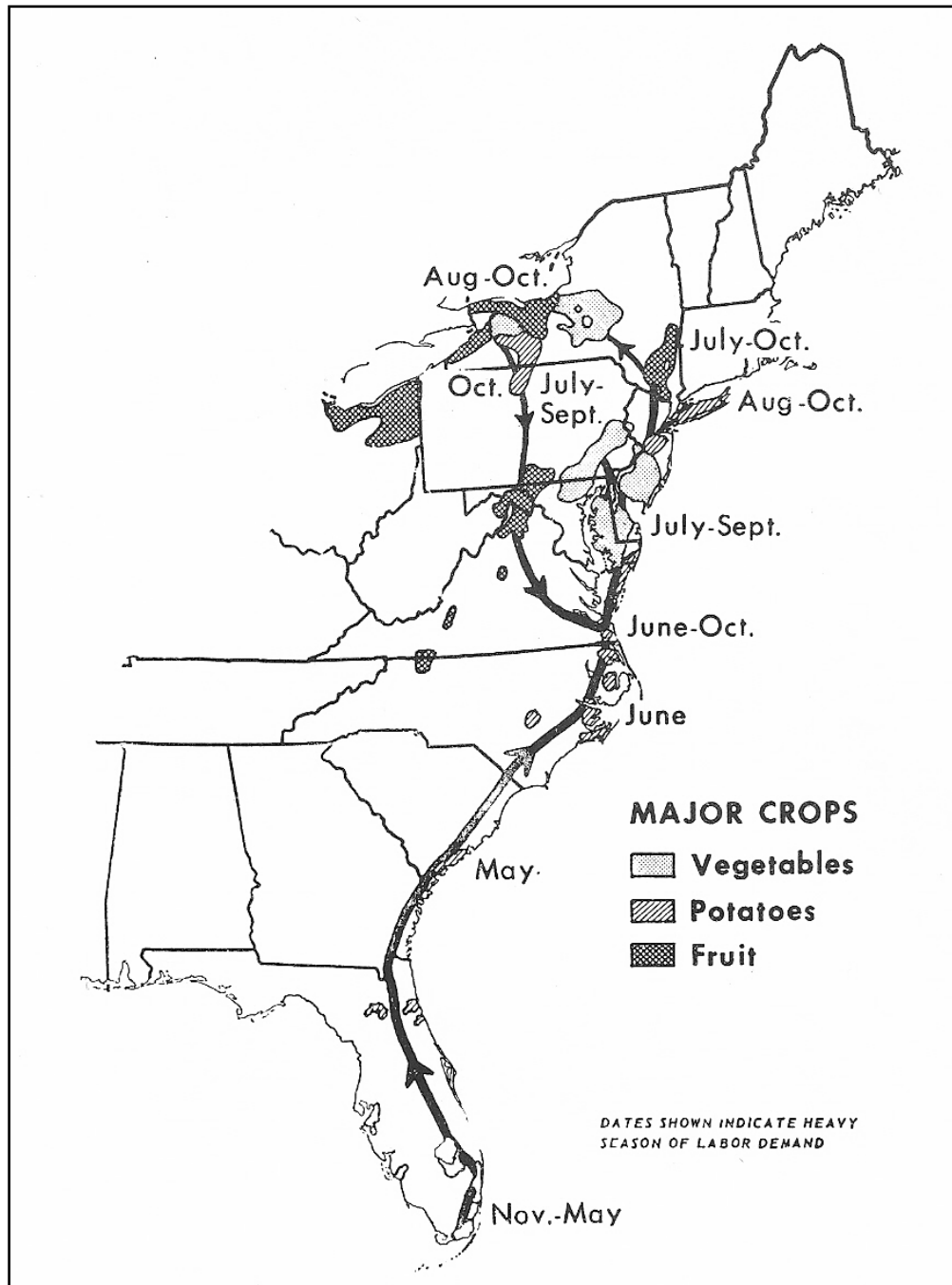
participants in a game that already sealed their fate. An awareness of their rights as workers and their lives as human beings was present, reflective of a sense of agency formed, in part, through their respective experiences on the road.

Figure 8. "Major Migrant Work Areas in Ten East Coast States, 1956"<sup>20</sup>



<sup>20</sup> Source: "Health Services in Major Migrant Work Areas: East Coast Guide, June 1956," U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, COML, Box 1, SANC, 4.

Figure 9. "The Atlantic Coast Migratory Stream, 1957"<sup>21</sup>



<sup>21</sup> Small text reads: "Dates Shown Indicate Heavy Season of Labor Demand." Source: Koos, "The Follow the Sun," USPCML, RG 220, Box 55, DDEPLM, 3.

Figure 10. "Show of Guns Quiets Pay Riot by Laborers, April 28, 1957"<sup>22</sup>



<sup>22</sup> Caption in photo reads: "Police, Guns Keep Workers Sullenly Quiet in South Dade Ruckus." Small text in article partly reads: "A threatened riot by some 700 Mexican tomato pickers over wage payments dissolved Saturday in the face of sheriff's deputies armed with tear gas and shotguns." Source: Papers of the President's Committee on Migratory Labor, 1955-1963, Part I: Correspondence with States, 1955-1963, microfilm reel 1.

Figure 11. "Girl Leader of Migrant Crew Will Quit Road and Buy Farm, Goulds, Florida, March 2, 1958"<sup>23</sup>



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<sup>23</sup> Title reads: "Girl Leader of Migrant Crew Will Quit Road and Buy Farm, March 2, 1958." Source: News-clipping, USPCML, RG 220, Box 48, DDEPLM.

## Organized Migrants

The collective unrest continued to grow as more *Tejanos* settled out in South Florida in the 1960s and the 1970s. In this section, I examine the formation of Florida Mexican community activism in South Florida during this time period. The work of the Organized Migrants in Community Action (OMICA) emerged as an important community organization for migrants and former migrants to amplify their voices over issues that affected their lives. Most problems related to affordable, available, and clean housing. Although OMICA officially closed its doors in 1980, I demonstrate here the historical significance of this organization in the lives of farmworkers in South Florida.

In the late 1960s, farmworker organizing was on the rise in Florida. In 1966, farmworker organizations founded by and for farmworkers in the state were rare. By 1971, according to a *Miami Herald* article, there were at least 13 related organizations in South Florida alone. One example was the United Farm Workers of Florida (UFWOF) that was founded in Palm Beach County in 1971. Distinct from the Florida organizing work by the California-based United Farm Workers, the UFWOF was founded by *Tejano* agricultural workers in response to a major winter freeze that same year. The UFWOF sought to provide direct support to families establishing permanent homes in Palm

Beach County, as they became Florida Mexicans. "The main aim of UFWOF," according to José Suárez in 1971, "is to give our children a better life than we've had." Suárez was a former agricultural worker who first traveled to South Florida from South Texas in the late 1950s.<sup>24</sup>

OMICA was among the earlier organizations to be established in South Florida, officially incorporated in 1967. The organization from its inception was an "independent organization formed and operated by farmworkers themselves," recalled OMICA organizer Juanita Alvarez. With the exception of a small fellowship to the OMICA co-founder Rudy Juárez from 1968 to 1972, in the amount of \$10,000 annually, the organization was completely independent of external funding through the first five years of operation. Farmworkers composed the majority of the OMICA membership, and they used their own resources collectively to fund the organization. "We decided farmworkers know their problems best and can solve their problems better than other agencies," as OMICA organizer Victor García stated in 1971. This financial independence enhanced the grassroots

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<sup>24</sup> Georgina Martinez, "The Migrants' Return: Desperation Renewed," *The Miami Herald*, December 27, 1971, SKPC; James J. Horgan, "The Union Makes a Difference: The United Farm Workers Organize in Florida," *Southern Exposure*, Volume XI, No. 6, November/December 1983, JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 62-65.



organizing efforts among farmworkers, and enabled OMICA to take more aggressive positions on behalf of the membership.<sup>25</sup>

The impetus was oppressive working conditions that farmworkers experienced as well as challenges faced by more settled farmworker families. Widespread negative experiences toward children of farmworkers in schools also prompted the formation of OMICA. In 1961, a "Spanish-for-Spanish speakers" program was initiated in Dade County, and in 1963, a "full-fledged bilingual program" was adopted at Coral Way Elementary School in Dade County, the first in the United States in nearly 50 years. This signaled the rise of similar programs nationwide, including in North Carolina in the 1970s, and yet children of migrant farmworkers were not the primary beneficiaries in South Florida. Part of the problem, according to Fernando Cuevas Jr. who was raised migrating between Central Florida and Ohio in the 1970s and 1980s, was the social stigma associated with "migrant." "Once you're stamped, you're stamped," he bemoaned, as he recalled how this label affected his own schooling. In addition, parents in Dade County had no direct representation in the schools, which made their children more susceptible to abuses. Similar to the UFWOF, OMICA sought

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<sup>25</sup> Email correspondence between author and Juanita Alvarez Mainster, August 12, 2013; Martinez, "The Migrants' Return," SKPC.

to direct supported farmworker families who established permanent homes in South Florida.<sup>26</sup>

Steve Mainster recalled the first time he traveled to South Florida to meet with OMICA members in 1973. He had previously volunteered for the U.S. Peace Corps in Peru, which instilled in him a desire to work with Spanish-speaking peoples on return. He decided to work with farmworkers in New York, where he first met Puerto Rican and Mexican American farmworkers from Homestead. Through a friend in Miami, Steve then received an invitation to visit with a civil rights farmworker group in South Florida. They met at an old abandoned labor camp in Homestead. As Steve described, the place was vibrant and full of energy. People were coming and going, and they had great discussions, talking about real problems that affected their lives in Homestead. "All the things I cared about," Steve said. Although the organization initially had no money to pay him,

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<sup>26</sup> Amado Padilla, "Bilingual Schools: Gateways to Integration or Roads to Separation," in *Bilingual Education for Hispanic Students in the United States*, eds. Joshua A. Fishman, and Gary D. Keller (New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1982), 50; James Crawford, *Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory, and Practice* (Trenton, New Jersey: Crane Publishing Company, 1989), 26-28; Guadalupe San Miguel, *Contest Policy: The Rise and Fall of Federal Bilingual Education in the United States, 1960-2001* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2004); email correspondence between author and Juanita Alvarez Mainster, August 12, 2013; oral history interview with Rolando Contreras, April 30, 2013, interview with author; oral history interview with Fernando Cuevas Jr., March 29, 2013, interview with author.

Steve still agreed to work with them as a volunteer staff. "I was thrilled," he said. Eventually, Steve received a pay of \$100 per week, which he gladly accepted.<sup>27</sup>

At this first gathering, Steve also recalled meeting Rudy Juarez, whom he described as the "César Chávez of South Florida" and the face of OMICA. Born in San Benito, Texas, in 1938, Rudy was raised as a migrant farmworker with his family, part of the *Tejano* diasporic migration that traveled from South Texas to the Mississippi Delta and the Great Lake states. Similar to other Texas Mexicans, the Juárez family first traveled to South Florida in 1950s, arriving directly from Blytheville, Arkansas. Eventually, they too became Florida Mexican residents. During his formative teenage years, Rudy recalled one incident he witnessed in South Dade that infuriated him. "I saw a bunch of my people beaten up by Homestead police at the corner of Krome and Mowrey," he stated, "when they tried to use a gas station restroom." His own experiences growing up in South Florida, and the conditions his family encountered in the migrant stream, exposed Rudy to daily injustices faced by farmworkers. They also influenced his desire to work for change. Prior to helping

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<sup>27</sup> Oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author; oral history interview with Steve Mainster, August 4, 2010, interview with Charles Numrich, Art in Action Oral Histories Project (hereafter AAOHP), University of Miami Special Collections (hereafter UMSC).

establish OMICA in 1967, Rudy worked as an investigator with Florida Rural Legal Services. He passed away in 2010.<sup>28</sup>

Two highly publicized incidents highlighted key problems that agricultural laborers faced in South Florida in the 1970s. In 1971, a major winter freeze affected the entire agricultural industry in the region. Then in 1973, one of the worst typhoid epidemics in the twentieth century broke out at a farmworker labor camp in Homestead. The work of OMICA was critical in both.

When an unexpected winter freeze took place in January 1971, thousands of farmworkers were left with no work and no pay. This was the case for Hank Torres, who traveled to Florida with his family. "We're getting deeper in debt and there's no way out," stated Torres, who had to borrow money from his employer to feed his family. "We are already behind in payments on the car, groceries, and rent," he stated. According to Al Aguet who represented the Florida State Employment Service in South Dade, the winter freeze was disastrous. "This is the about the worst I've seen it around here in the 16 years I've been here," he claimed. The federal government offered aid to

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<sup>28</sup> Sam Jacobs, "Emergency Programs Insufficient," *The Miami Herald*, February 20, 1971, SKPC; Edith Robertsen, "Dade Migrant Leader Resigns but He's Not Ending the Fight," *Miami News*, June 2, 1977; "Centro Campesino-Farmworker Center, Inc., Historical Overview: October 1975 to the Present;" oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author.

growers in South Dade to help them recover from the winter freeze. Farmworkers, however, received nothing.<sup>29</sup>

Concern for the affected farmworkers was the priority for OMICA members. According to OMICA organizer and leader Rudy Juarez, many faced either eviction or threats of eviction because they had no money to pay their rent. In response, OMICA members sought to make Dade County as a "disaster area" so that federal relief funds could be used to support the more than 25,000 workers affected by the freeze. In this way, they could at least obtain food stamps for the first time as well as unemployment compensation.<sup>30</sup>

To make this happen, OMICA members first contacted Governor of Florida, Reubin Askew. When they received no response, a 33-member delegation representing the organization traveled from Homestead to Tallahassee, Florida, in early March 1971. They went directly to the Governor's Mansion where they staged a demonstration, demanding to speak with Askew. Although the delegation did not meet with the Governor that day, he finally

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<sup>29</sup> Earl DeHart, "Food Rolls to S. Dade," News-clipping, February 25, 1971, SKPC; Sam Jacobs, "Emergency Programs Insufficient," *The Miami Herald*, February 20, 1971, SKPC; oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author.

<sup>30</sup> "Migrant Unit Agrees to Back Disaster Area Bid by Juarez," News-clipping, SKPC.

relented a few days later and asked President Richard Nixon to declare freeze-stricken areas in Dade County a disaster zone.<sup>31</sup>

But Nixon was not inclined to act. After learning that the President was at his winter home in Florida (Key Biscayne White House), OMICA members then decided to take their requests directly there. Approximately 10 busloads and 15 carloads of Mexican American farmworkers from South Dade, Immokalee, La Belle, and Fort Myers arrived at the compound on March 13, 1971. Together, 700 persons representing mostly farmworkers as well as clergy and attorneys were present for the demonstration. A vigil was held and OMICA President Ramon Rodríguez prepared a petition to give to Nixon. Part of the petition read,

We are without work, without hope of work. We have no money for food, for rent, for gas and electricity. We cannot provide for the necessities of life—our children are weak and sick—we don't even have enough money to escape these dehumanizing conditions. If this country can airlift emergency aid to Pakistan, if this country can provide relief for starving people over 15,000 miles away, surely it can take care of its own people who find themselves, through no fault of their own, in a disaster situation here in Florida.

Only a Secret Service agent came forward to greet the delegation. After unsuccessfully waiting 20 hours to speak directly with President Nixon or a close aide, the group walked

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<sup>31</sup> "South Dade Migrants Picket at Askew's Office," *The Miami Herald*, March 7, 1971, SKPC; Georgina Martinez, "Askew Rapped for Disaster Area," *The Miami Herald*, March 12, 1971, SKPC; Earl DeHart, "January Freeze is Blamed," News-clipping, March 6, 1971, SKPC.

to the nearby beach and slept. Eventually, they all returned to their respective communities in South Florida, without meeting with the President.<sup>32</sup>

All was not lost, as Nixon relented and responded a few days later. He then declared South Florida a disaster area. This was the first time that a federal relief program was approved for farmworkers affected by crop freezing in the United States. An initial allocation of \$2.5 million dollars in unemployment funds was included as federal aid.<sup>33</sup>

An additional concern still affected the farmworkers with the food relief program that accompanied federal aid. Items such as powdered milk, powdered eggs, canned meats, peanut butter were disbursed in bulk as part of the program, but these did not meet the dietary needs of the farmworkers. "You have to buy other stuff to mix with commodity foods and the people don't have the money," added Connie Treviño. Rather than accept items they could not use, more than 500 Mexican Americans gathered together in Homestead and voted to boycott the food relief

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<sup>32</sup> Hunter George, "Bid to See President a Failure," News-clipping, March 14, 1971, SKPC; oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author; Carolyn Jay Wright, "Desperate Migrants Quit Vigil near Nixon Home," News-clipping, March 15, 1975, SKPC.

<sup>33</sup> Mike Baxter, "2.5 Million in Funds Allocated," *The Miami Herald*, March 16, 1971, SKPC.

program. Instead, they requested a food stamp program that enabled them to obtain foods of their own choice. Russell James, the regional director of the U.S. Food and Nutritional Service that supplied the items, stated that the farmworkers were being "uptight."<sup>34</sup>

To demonstrate their discontent, two truckloads containing several hundred pounds of disbursed food items were taken by farmworkers to a food relief center in Florida City, where they were dumped. This action along with the boycott finally prompted a response by the federal government. Thereafter, federal officials purchased 20 crates of bell peppers from Texas, bags of onions from Michigan, and sacks of potatoes from South Dade. In addition, Governor Askew approved the disbursement of food stamps for the farmworkers.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of this unprecedented political victory, Florida Mexican farmworkers continued to face problems related to housing. Even as migrants began to receive federal support, for example, they still lacked the necessary funds to pay their

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<sup>34</sup> Earl DeHart, and Mike Baxter, "Decision May Stifle Complaints," News-clipping, March 20, 1971, SKPC; "Migrants Boycott Federal Food Handout," News-clipping, March 18, 1971, SKPC.

<sup>35</sup> DeHart and Baxter, "Decision May Stifle Complaints," SKPC; Tom Jones, "Food Dumped as Others Wait for It," News-clipping, March 19, 1971, SKPC; Dick Holland, "Power Cut to 200 Migrant Homes," *Miami News*, March 22, 1971, SKPC.



bills. In March 1971, electricity was disconnected for 200 migrant families at labor camps in Homestead because of overdue payment. "There's nothing we can do about it," according to George Eicher from the Homestead Housing Authority. In this one incident, the Greater Miami Coalition was able to raise \$2,000 to restore electricity for the 200 migrant families in South Dade and Redlands Labor Camps, both of which were operated by the Homestead Housing Authority. One additional problem that year was a housing shortage. "There's just no housing," stated Victor García on behalf of OMICA. "People are squeezing into rooms and apartments and doubling up because there's no housing." In response, the OMICA offices in Immokalee and Homestead both stayed open at night to provide shelter.<sup>36</sup>

The housing shortage caused by the 1971 winter freeze demonstrated to the distinct strategic positioning of South Florida. The region represented a principal location for commercial agriculture, including nursery and landscaping. To meet demands of commercial agriculture, the farmworker population consisting of outside workers and local residents constantly fluctuated. This, in turn, caused sporadic issues related to lower pay, over-population, and social service

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<sup>36</sup> Holland, "Power Cut to 200 Migrant Homes," SKPC; Sam Jacobs, and Earl DeHart, "Homestead Restores Power," *The Miami Herald*, March 23, 1971, SKPC; Martinez, "The Migrants' Return," SKPC.

neglect. At the same time, South Florida was located in a geographic area prone to unexpected calamities, particularly winter freezes and summer hurricanes. In 1971, those who bore the brunt of the winter freeze were farmworkers. As "buffers," they were rendered disposable.<sup>37</sup>

One catastrophic event related to housing took place two years later in 1973. In January 20, 1973, a child from South Dade Labor Camp in Homestead was admitted to the Variety Children's Hospital as the first case of typhoid fever in the area. The South Dade labor camp was operated by the Homestead Housing Authority. A month later, his younger sibling and a pregnant woman from the South Dade labor camp were also hospitalized for typhoid fever. Six more cases were diagnosed on February 27th, and 13 more the next day. By March 1, 1973, 30 additional persons were found with typhoid. An emergency clinic was then established at the labor camp on March 2nd, when then a serious case of typhoid outbreak was finally recognized by the Dade County public health officials.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> According to Webster's Dictionary, typhoid is a "communicable disease characterized by fever, diarrhea, prostration, apathy, headache, splenomegaly, eruption of rose spots, leukopenia, and inflammation of the intestinal mucosa caused by bacterium" (2476); Webster's *Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Massachusetts:

Lack of hospital beds at the local hospital were a major reason why public health officials delayed recognizing the typhoid epidemic. "It was difficult to tell people we suspected they had typhoid fever, and then tell them we couldn't find a hospital bed for them," stated Dr. Jerome S. Beloff from the South Dade Community Health Center. Furthermore, he continued, the Dade County Department of Public Health was "reluctant to call this outbreak a community crisis [even] when 20 patients had been hospitalized and a larger number sent home for lack of hospitals." The county health expert on infectious diseases, Dr. Joel Nitzkin, argued rather that medical differences of opinion delayed the outbreak admission. "There was disagreement about whether every patient needed hospitalization, or whether this should be reserved for the most seriously ill," he stated. Prior to recognizing the outbreak, approximately 81 women, men, and children with typhoid symptoms were refused admission at the Jackson Memorial Hospital. Instead, they were told to go back to the labor camp.<sup>39</sup>

News of the outbreak also increased mistreatment toward the residents at the South Dade Labor Camp. "We have been used to discrimination for long years," stated Rudy Juarez of OMICA.

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Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2002), 2476; Fraser Kent, "Typhoid Action Called 10 Days Late," *The Miami Herald*, April 11, 1973, SKPC.

<sup>39</sup> Kent, "Typhoid Action Called 10 Days Late," SKPC.

"But now we are suffering the worst problems in my memory because people think they are going to get the fever merely by looking at us." Similarly, Enrique Martínez described one unsettling experience in the following manner: "At a local supermarket where we buy food the girls at the counters began to run away as soon as we went to the cashiers to pay for our food." At least four residents of the labor camp were fired by their employers who feared the spread of the disease. In addition, at least 70 families who lived at the camp could not pay their rent, and 30 migrant families were reported leaving the property. According to attorney Truman Skinner who represented the Homestead Housing Authority, the amount owed, which totaled more than \$8,000, was directly related to the loss of earnings by those infected with typhoid. Instead, the families chose to return to South Texas, where they had homes in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties.<sup>40</sup>

Once the epidemic was declared, several organizations became involved. The OMICA Homestead office became the coordinating center for transportation, registration, distribution of de-contaminated water, and moral support. OMICA

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<sup>40</sup> Roberto Fabricio, "One New Case is Reported," *The Miami Herald*, undated, SKPC; H. Drew Upright, "Stricken Migrants Owe \$8,000 Rent," *Miami News*, April 3, 1973, SKPC; Phil Gailey, and Joel Greenberg, "18 More Migrants in Hospitals," *The Miami Herald*, March 10, 1973, SKPC.

members, some of whom were also affected, became the principal advocates. They were the most vocal in opposing the decision by the county quarantine the labor camp. According to the county public health officials, the decision was made to prevent typhoid from spreading to other locations in the area and to treat those affected in their own homes. And there were no hospital beds. OMICA members, however, disagreed and demanded the best medical treatment at a proper hospital for those infected. They needed to be hospitalized, they insisted.<sup>41</sup>

Rudy Juárez contacted the county manager directly to express their collective demand. The response was that there was no room at Jackson Memorial. If they did not find a way, countered Juarez, an OMICA delegation was going to organize a press conference that lambasted the county. They were also going to do this on the front lawn of the county manager. Two days later, the members learned that Coral Reef Hospital, subsequently re-named Jackson South Hospital, was to open nearby and one wing was ready to treat the farmworkers. "OMICA opened a new hospital," stated Steve Mainster. Later, those infected

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<sup>41</sup> Morton Lucoff, and Helga Silva, "Typhoid Victims to get \$800 Each," *Miami News*, August 27, 1976, SKPC.

were finally transferred to Jackson Memorial Hospital, once they had enough space.<sup>42</sup>

After much inquiry, the county public health officials confirmed that the entire water supply under South Dade labor camp had been contaminated. A drainage ditch surrounding the camp affected the water for the camp, which caused the contamination. In the following, Dr. Jerome Beloff described why the outbreak occurred in greater detail:

Although some of the housing units at the South Dade Labor Camp have private bathrooms, many have no toilets and the occupants must use communal toilet and shower resources scattered about the camp. Sewage flows through a network of pipes to a disposal plant about one-half mile from the camp center. It is treated with chlorine and the effluent is put into a canal system that surrounds the camp on three sides. The sewage collection system is reported to have frequent breakdowns, with backed-up sinks and overflowing toilets. A 20-foot deep well supplies the camp with all its water for drinking, washing, and cooking. Tests performed by the Public Health Department showed frequent contamination by bacteria since 1970. A test of the water on December 29, 1970, showed such organism and a low chlorine content.

Due to the contamination, at least 189 persons from the South Dade labor camp were hospitalized for typhoid, and more than 300 families were in some way affected. Three years later in 1976, an out-of-court settlement was finalized for 115 families to receive \$800.06 each. Although lawyers had earlier stated this

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<sup>42</sup> Oral history interview with Steve Mainster, August 4, 2010, interview with Charles Numrich, AAHP, UMSC; oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author.

amount, another article noted that the actual disbursement was lowered to \$443.69. The remaining compensation was slated for attorney fees, reimbursement to the Jackson Memorial Hospital for patient treatment, and reimbursement to the state for Medicaid payments.<sup>43</sup>

The settlement, of course, did not extend to all families. Some learned too late, many left South Florida and did not come back, or others declined to participate. Regardless, the proposed compensation could not erase the horrible experiences from 1973, like when then-10 year old Marisela Cruz started feeling chunks of her own hair falling to the ground.<sup>44</sup>

For members of OMICA, the typhoid catastrophe also demonstrated the greater need for farmworker-owned housing. In Dade County, for example, workers were dependent on rental housing that either operated haphazardly by the city, such as the South Dade labor camp where the typhoid epidemic took place, or were controlled completely by their employer. They subsequently envisioned a new non-profit agency for workers to own and control the type of neighborhood housing they wanted.

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<sup>43</sup> Roberto Fabricio, "One New Case is Reported," *The Miami Herald*, undated, SKPC; Kent, "Typhoid Action Called 10 Days Late," SKPC; Morton Lucoff, "Migrant Typhoid Suit Settlement Blocked," *Miami News*, September 10, 1976, SKPC.

<sup>44</sup> Lucoff, "Migrant Typhoid Suit Settlement Blocked," SKPC.

Equally important, the OMICA membership desired a new agency to compete with growers and city housing authority over the living conditions of farmworkers. In 1973, the OMICA Housing Corporation, Inc. was officially established by the OMICA Board of Directors to meet this challenge.<sup>45</sup>

As with other farmworker organizations of the period, OMICA did not survive past the decade. More than just a temporal passing, or "a splash," the organization still added to a legacy of farmworker activism in South Florida for future generations to behold, and left a lasting imprint through subsequent community organizations and initiatives, which continue into the present. Former OMICA members, in other words, continued to stay engaged, including with the Coalition of Florida Farmworker Organizations founded in 1980, and *Centro Campesino*-Farmworker Center, Incorporated, in 1981.

One important example, to be discussed in more detail in the near future, involved the devastation of a farmworker labor camp in 1992, following Hurricane Andrew. What was initially established in Florida City as temporary housing for families affected by the typhoid epidemic, as discussed in this chapter, the Everglades Labor Camp remained in haphazard condition for the remainder of the 1970s and 1980s. Hurricane Andrew provided

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<sup>45</sup> Oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author.



a unique opportunity for former OMICA members to provide direct emergency support to affected families and address the issue of farmworker-owned housing once again.

The office of *Centro Campesino*, a direct outgrowth of the OMICA Housing Corporation, served as a central organizing hub in the wake of the hurricane. Over one million dollars in donated food, clothing, diapers, and medical supplies were distributed by the organization, and a "tent city" was built that accommodated over 500 people on the same property. Through *Centro Campesino* and the Everglades Community Association, the Everglades Labor Camp subsequently became a model of farmworker-owned housing for the first time in South Florida.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Oral history interview with Juanita Alvarez Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author; oral history interview with Steve Mainster, April 29, 2013, interview with author.

Figure 12. "Camp Quarter in South Dade Labor Camp, March 15, 1973"<sup>47</sup>



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<sup>47</sup> Former military barracks that served as housing units for agricultural migrants at the South Dade Labor Camp is shown above. Today, according to Juanita Alvarez Mainster, these same barracks are now the location for a childhood development center. Source: *Miami News Collection* (hereafter MNC), Box 37, History Miami Archives and Research Center (hereafter HMARC).

Figure 13. "Typhoid Hits Florida Workers, March 23, 1973"<sup>48</sup>



<sup>48</sup> Small text reads: "Two children suffering from typhoid fever are loaded onto an ambulance at the South Dade Labor Camp, Dade County, Florida." Small text at top reads: "The official voice of the United Farmworkers." Source: Farmworker Movement Documentation Project; available at <http://farmworkermovement.org>.

Figure 14. "Migrant Worker Demonstration, August 1, 1973"<sup>49</sup>



<sup>49</sup> Small-text on far poster show multiple farmworker organizations active in South Florida, including PROOF, OMICA, LOOK, and FAMU. Other small-texts partly read: "Puerto Rican Migrant Power," "Washington Help Save our Program MMDS," "We Need Help for Better Living," and "Please Help Us Migrants, Our Dream Come True." Source: MNC, Box 67, HMARC.

Figure 15. "Nuestra Lucha Newspaper, August 1976"<sup>50</sup>



<sup>50</sup> Small text at bottom right reads: "At the shovel is Martin Gomez, chairperson of the C.D. migrant farmworkers task force accompanied by C.D. coordinator Sergio Pereira and Vice Mayor Clara Oesterle at the ceremony to mark the fill of the South Dade Labor Camp canal." Source: SKPC.

Figure 16. "OMICA Food Trailer at South Dade Labor Camp,  
December 15, 1976"<sup>51</sup>



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<sup>51</sup> The background banner on the trailer reads: "OMICA." Source: MNC, Box 67, HMARC.

Figure 17. "Striking Migrant Workers in Florida City, Florida, January 26, 1979"<sup>52</sup>



## Conclusion

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<sup>52</sup> Photo caption reads: "Striking migrant workers kneel in front of tomato-laden trucks at Florida Tomato Packers Inc. in Florida City." Source: "Despite Arrests, Migrants Vow to Picket Today," *Miami News*, January 26, 1979, Miami-Dade Main Public Library, microfilm reel.

In this chapter, I examined early community activism in South Florida by farmworkers of the *Tejano* diaspora. Their varied responses reflected the problems they encountered, particularly around housing. The issues they addressed were partly distinct to South Florida because of its geographic location and strategic position within the Atlantic Migrant Stream.

This chapter also enriches our understanding of the *Tejano* diaspora. As we have learned, *Tejano* workers and their families turned to the migrant stream due to economic displacement, reflective of a systemic phenomenon between the United States and Mexico. In spite of their circumstances, *Tejanos* still exercised resources available to them.

This was evident as early as 1957, when 700 workers gathered together to protest wages withheld from their final pay at the infamous "Mexico City" labor camp. As more migrant families from Texas established permanent homes in the 1960s and 1970s, this practice continued. The emergence of Florida Mexican activism, embodied here in the work of OMICA, was, thus, not happenstance but rather a culmination of their experiences traveling to and from South Florida and Texas since the 1950s. Focusing on South Florida from the 1950s through the 1970s also demonstrates the national scope of Mexican American community activism in the same period. While "Mexican Americanism" was



present in states such as Wisconsin and Texas, according to Marc Simon Rodriguez, South Florida also proved to be a critical location. The unfolding of the *Tejano* diaspora provided one critical link in this process.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "ATROCIOUS, INTOLERABLE, AND SINFUL:" SILENCE AND SOLIDARITY IN THE FIELDS OF NORTH CAROLINA, 1970s-1990s

*"Something's not right when 300 years  
after bringing Africans here in chains,  
even after the civil rights movement,  
there are still African Americans living  
here in plantation conditions."*

--Ventura Gutiérrez,  
Johnston County, North Carolina<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

In August 1977, a delegation of women, men, and children representing farmworkers from South Texas and their allies gathered together for a rally in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. Under the banner "Texas Farmworkers March for Human Rights," the rally was part of a historic 1,600-mile march the delegation was undertaking by foot from Austin, Texas, to Washington, D.C. When they decided head to the nation's capital, after they already marched from San Juan to Austin that same year, the marchers had two goals in mind. The first goal was to obtain collective bargaining rights for all agricultural workers. The second related goal was to repeal Section 14(b) of

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in "Group Urges Farm Workers to Fight Back," *The News and Observer*, July 5, 1998, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

the Taft-Hartley Act, a provision that established "right-to-work" laws that became prevalent in the southern United States.<sup>2</sup>

"The decision [to march] was a difficult one to make," according to a press release on behalf of the Texas Farm Workers Union (TFW) delegation. "But the union board felt that the violence and restrictive laws that farmworkers must confront while organizing, and the lack of a strike fund necessitated a different form of activity." When the South Texas farmworkers marched and rallied in North Carolina in 1977, there was already a visible presence of Mexican American and Mexican farmworkers in the state.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I demonstrate two main points. By the end of the 1970s, growers in North Carolina increasingly turned to Florida Mexicans and workers from Mexico to meet their needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Letter to Dear Reader, from Antonio Orendain, Texas Farm Workers Union Collection, 1977-1980 (hereafter TFWUC), Box 1, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection (hereafter NLBLAC), University of Texas at Austin Libraries (hereafter UTAL). The late Esteban Jordan commemorated the 1977 farmworker march from San Juan to Austin, Texas in one song, and then from Austin to Washington, D.C. in another. Part of the former reads: "From the Rio Grande Valley/from the small town of San Juan/the farmworkers gathered/to begin to march/To fight for a cause/that the *gringo* does not want to give/these are human rights/that we must win." Currently available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W013XtEaBk>.

<sup>3</sup> "Austin Friends of the Farmworkers Press Release, August 16, 1977," María G. Flores Papers (hereafter MGFP), Box 1, NLBLAC, UTAL; Johanna Seltz, "Farm Workers March Here," *The News and Observer*, August 24, 1977.

Employer labor recruitment of non-local agricultural workers did not begin in the 1970s, but developed several decades earlier amid the expansion of commercial agriculture in the mid-twentieth century. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 reinforced employer reliance on outside labor through the H2A guest worker program. By the end of the 1990s, more H2A workers from Mexico were contracted on farms in North Carolina than any other state in the country.

Although a small concentration of Florida Mexicans was part of the outside farm labor employed in North Carolina in the 1950s and 1960s, as a direct outgrowth of *Tejano* diasporic migration, their presence, along with workers from Mexico, became more visible in the 1970s. By the 1990s, Mexican American and Mexican farmworkers from the migrant stream, and subsequently H2A workers from Mexico, were predominant on farms in the state. The demographic make-up of farm labor changed in North Carolina by the 1990s, yet practices of labor control that workers encountered resonated with existent colonial configurations in the state. Their experiences, in other words, added to a culture of violence endemic to the growth of the agricultural political economy.

This chapter is divided into three sections. I first analyze the initial experiences of migration and settlement for Florida Mexican workers who traveled and settled in North

Carolina from the Atlantic Migrant Stream, as well as from Texas and Mexico. The next section examines ways in which farmworkers experienced forms of labor control on farms in North Carolina. In the last section, I focus on the significance of the H2A program, which reflected more of the same for agricultural laborers in the state.

### **Migration and Settlement**

This section traces the initial experiences of migration and eventual settlement for Florida Mexican and Mexican migrants in North Carolina. Although few worked in the state in the 1950s and 1960s, I demonstrate how employer recruitment and subsequent social network processes made their presence more visible in the 1970s. By the 1980s, North Carolina was well-established as a primary destination. Year-long employment in the fields, including dairy farms and poultry processing, enabled workers and their families to settle out of the migrant stream.

In North Carolina, employer recruitment of non-local farm labor was not unique to the 1970s. As early as 1940, there were less than 1,500 agricultural workers who entered the state from the migrant stream, and by 1950, the official number swelled to 30,000 workers. According to the U.S. Employment Service in 1949, North Carolina received the fourth largest number of

migrant farmworkers in the Atlantic Migrant Stream, following Florida, Virginia, and New York. Farms in North Carolina received the next largest concentration of inter-state agricultural workers traveling northward from Florida.

By 1962, among the 12,153 farmworkers officially recruited by the Employment Security Commission in North Carolina on behalf of growers, 10,165 came from the migrant stream, primarily Florida, while the remaining 1,988 farmworkers listed were North Carolinians. These figures did not include international workers also recruited by employers. During World War Two, growers employed workers from the British West Indies, primarily Jamaica, as well as German prisoners-of-war for work in apple orchards near Hendersonville. In addition, at least 410 Mexican National workers were contracted in North Carolina through the Bracero Program in 1947.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Facts About Migrants, September 22, 1950," COML, Box 2, SANC; "Migratory Workers in North Carolina," NCCC, Box 51, DURBML; Wayne D. Rasmussen, *A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program 1943-1947, Agricultural Monograph No. 13* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1951), 226; Richard Lyons, "The Legal Status of American and Mexican Migratory Farm Labor: An Analysis of United States Farm-Labor Legislation, Policy, and Administration" (Dissertation: Cornell University, 1954), 217; Ronald L. Mize and Alicia C.S. Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 5; oral history interview with Mack Edward Canipe, August 28, 2011, interview with author.

The predominantly Black farmworkers who traveled to North Carolina from the migrant stream were recruited mainly for work in vegetable and tobacco crops in the eastern region of the state, including Camden, Pasquotank, Tyrrell, Beaufort, and Carteret counties. In western North Carolina, growers in Henderson and Transylvania counties also employed workers for apple orchards, beans, squash, cabbage, and potatoes. In addition, farmworkers from other states were recruited outside of Florida. In 1956, 3,000 agricultural laborers from Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi traveled to North Carolina for work in tobacco, and thereafter returned to their home states.<sup>5</sup>

The decision by growers employ non-local labor was partly in response to increased mechanized farming, which shortened the season and required fewer workers year-round. Perhaps most importantly, workers were only needed on a short-term basis, and then would leave, having no opportunity to establish community roots and removing further responsibility from growers. Unlike

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<sup>5</sup> Morgan Kurtz, "North Carolina's 30,000 Migrant Workers," NCCC, Box 51, DURBML; Hannah Miller, "As Many as 12 Persons May Share 1 Small Room," News-clipping, NCCC, Box 51, DURBML; "Services to Migrant Workers Through Public Welfare," COML, Box 2, SANC; letter to Ada McRacken, State Department of Public Welfare, from J.W. Beach, Employment Service Commission of North Carolina, September 30, 1957, COML, Box 2, SANC; letter to Ada McRacken, from Employment Security of North Carolina, December 5, 1956, COML, Box 2, SANC.

available North Carolina Black labor, farmworkers recruited from the migrant stream had no collective memory to the locations where they labored. One story consisted of a migrant crew of Black farmworkers from Florida who were recruited to Henderson County, in western North Carolina. According to the newspaper reporter, "The migrant, his family and his co-workers live to themselves in 11 camps, 'foreigners' to the local community." The practice of inter-state labor recruitment continued in North Carolina into the 1960s and 1970s, and by 1977, "local field labor is being displaced by migrant crews," a *New York Times* article reported. Farmworkers from the migrant stream "are both cheaper and easier to control because they can be held within the camps, totally dependent on the crew leaders," the article continued.<sup>6</sup>

There are certainly other considerations that explain the decrease of North Carolina Black agricultural labor as the predominant workforce and, in turn, the rise of inter-state migrant farmworkers. These include greater employment opportunities in other industries, such as poultry, as well as the historical stigma between farm labor and enslavement that prompted younger generations to pursue work opportunities

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<sup>6</sup> Hannah Miller, "As Many as 12 Persons May Share 1 Small Room," News-clipping, NCCC, Box 51, DURBML; Charles R. Pugh, "The Agricultural Economy of North Carolina as it Affects the Migrant Worker, August 11, 1970," NCCC, Box 56, DURBML.



elsewhere. According to educator Mack Edward Canipe, social gains from the civil rights movement prompted Black farmworkers in North Carolina to settle out in cities in the 1970s. My analysis does not discount these views. Rather, what is being emphasized here is the systemic out-migration of North Carolina Black agricultural workers from the fields, voluntarily or otherwise, in response to the needs and desires of commercial agriculture. This dimension also, then, adds another important layering to this varied story of dispossession and migration.<sup>7</sup>

Although few Florida Mexicans traveled to North Carolina for farm work in the 1950s, they appeared more frequently through the 1960s. In 1962, one reported indicated that the majority of the 1,400 out-of-state farmworkers in Camden County in northeastern North Carolina were "Negro, with a few of Spanish descent." The following year, the North Carolina State

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<sup>7</sup> For considerations, see, "Near-Slavery is Found in Southern Migrant Camps," *New York Times*, August 28, 1977, JPP, Box 20, DURBML; Joan Morgan, "African Americans and Agriculture," *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 17, no. 8 (June 2000): 23; David C. Griffith, "Rural Industry and Mexican Immigration and Settlement in North Carolina," in *New Destinations*, 60-61; David Griffith, *American Guestworkers: Jamaicans and Mexicans in the U.S. Labor Market* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 59-61; Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land*, 198-199; Craig Heinicke, "African-American Migration and Urban Labor Skills: 1950 and 1960," *Agricultural History*, Volume 68, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 185; "Expert Cites Negro Shift," *Charlotte Observer*, November 25, 1958, Terry Sanford Papers, Box 38, Wilson Library Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; oral history interview with Mack Edward Canipe, August 28, 2011, interview with author.

Board of Health news bulletin highlighted "Spanish-speaking Americans" entering the migrant stream. "Many of them are recruited by agricultural associations or large growers to work as part of a crew," the bulletin noted. In 1964, an estimated 150 to 200 Spanish-speaking migrants traveled to North Carolina. Another report indicated that over 12,000 migrants were contracted for work through the Employment Security Commission in 1965. The "vast majority of these migrants are home-based in the Florida-Georgia area and are predominantly American Negro laborers, although approximately 10 percent are American Indians with the rest a scattering of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and British West Indies," according to the report.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Camden County, North Carolina Reports on its 1962 Child Welfare Program for Migrant Workers," State Board of Public Welfare, COML, Box 3, SANC; "The Health Bulletin, The Official Publication of the North Carolina State Board of Health, March 1963," NCCC, Box 51, DURBML; "Plans for 1965 Migrant Labor Program, November 17, 1964," Sanitary Engineering Section: Migrant Labor Camps Tabulations File, 1959-1969, Box 1, SANC; "Migrant Labor Proposal, Title III-B, North Carolina Council of Churches, February 18, 1965," NCCC, Box 65, DURBML; letter from Cromer H. Curtis, Forest City, N.C., August 26, 1963, Sanitary Engineering Section: Migrant Labor Camps Tabulations File, 1959-1969, Box 1, SANC; "State Migrant Ministry Report in North Carolina for 1964," NCCC, Box 65, DURBML; "State Migrant Ministry Report in North Carolina for 1965," NCCC, Box 65, DURBML; letter to William Oakley, from Samuel S. Wiley, July 21, 1965, NCCC, Box 65, DURBML; memorandum to State and Area Directors, from Edith E. Lowry, Subject, 'Amigo Mio,' May 18, 1961, NCCC, Box 51, DURBML; "Report of the Pender County Migrant Council, 1967," NCCC, Box 56, DURBML; Harold L. White, "Coordinator's Report, June-July 1968, Albemarle Migrant Health Service Project," NCCC, Box 56, DURBML; "Minutes of the

In the 1970s, numbers of Florida Mexican workers in North Carolina increased substantially. Tommy Rhodes of the Rural Manpower of the State Employment Security Commission reported that 10,000 inter-state farmworkers traveled to the state in 1974. Approximately 1,500 of these were "Spanish-speaking migrants and there will probably be 2,000 in 1975." A 1978 report by the North Carolina Council of Churches estimated that 15 to 30 percent of all out-of-state workers were Spanish-speaking. In 1980, Joshua S. Reichert indicated that the number of migrants who traveled to North Carolina from other states reached 30,000, an almost three-fold increase since 1974. The bulk of the growth occurred "among Spanish-speaking migrants, many of whom are women and children who need impatient care," Reichert stated. By 1980, it was also estimated that Mexican Americans and undocumented Mexican workers composed about half of the total migrant farmworkers in the Atlantic Migrant Stream.<sup>9</sup>

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Committee on Ministry to Migrants, October 30, 1967," NCCC, Box 65, DURBML.

<sup>9</sup> "Minutes of the Committee on Ministry with Migrants, April 4, 1975," NCCC, Box 53, DURBML; "Farmers Count More on Migrant Laborers," *Durham Morning Herald*, August 11, 1976, JPP, Box 8, DURBML; "Raleigh Report, Office of Social Ministries, North Carolina Council of Churches, May 12, 1978," JPP, Box 8, DURBML; Joshua S. Reichert, "The Agricultural Labor System in North Carolina: Recommendations for Change," A Report Submitted to Division of Policy Development, Department of Administration, June 1980, 5; Reichert, "The Agricultural Labor System," 14; Alma Blount, Martin Gonzalez, and Steven Petrow, "Lost in the Stream: Three Portraits of Migrant Farmworkers, With a Report

In 1976, staff at the State Employment Security Commission office in Burlington, North Carolina, sought to recruit out-of-state agricultural labor to meet the needs of tobacco growers in the Central Piedmont area of the state. They recruited from Florida, South Carolina, and Texas. Ted Davis from the employment security office highlighted the importance of outside labor recruitment, and particularly Spanish-speaking workers. "It started with just a few five years ago." Among the estimated 1,500 migrants in Central Piedmont counties in 1976, approximately 75 percent were Spanish-speaking. In addition to tobacco, migrant crews also worked in fruit orchards and on vegetable farms. Despite high unemployment rates in Person, Alamance, and other counties, growers still requested outside farmworkers.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the decade, North Carolina served as the important primary destination for Florida Mexicans. Towns in South Florida, such as Homestead, continued to serve as the point of origin for most farmworkers traveling to North Carolina. At the same time, the geographic trajectory of labor

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of Jamaican Cane Cutters in Florida," *Southern Exposure* VII, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 67, JPP, Box 31, DURBML.

<sup>10</sup> The Central Piedmont area included ten counties: Alamance, Caswell, Chatham, Granville, Person, Vance, Orange, Guilford, Rockingham, and Randolph. "Farmers Count More on Migrant Laborers," *Durham Morning Herald*, August 11, 1976, JPP, Box 8, DURBML.

migration expanded. Increasingly, agricultural workers did not stop in South Florida but continued directly to North Carolina, arriving from places such as Brownsville, Texas, and Mexico City. South Texas represented an important geographic center and corridor for labor migration to North Carolina.

Nereida López partly reflected this expanse of labor migration. Born in Texas, López traveled directly to North Carolina in 1975, where she worked on a farm picking zucchini squash. Unlike Florida Mexican workers from the Atlantic Migrant Stream, López did not have previous ties to North Carolina or Florida. Her permanent home was in Texas. According to the reporter, Rick Nichols, she also spoke only Spanish and maintained close family relationships with loved ones in Mexico, and sent part of her earnings to her mother.

Long-time Duplin County resident Juvencio Rocha-Peralta recalled the first time he arrived in North Carolina in 1980, from his hometown in Veracruz, Mexico. He first traveled to Texas, and then went directly to North Carolina. Some workers, he stated, traveled southward to South Florida from North Carolina for work, en route back to Texas or Mexico. U.S. immigration authorities also noted the increase of workers from Mexico in North Carolina. INS staff person Louis M. Richard estimated that 200 to 250 undocumented workers were apprehended annually in the late 1970s. "The problem is just beginning to

surface here," he indicated. In turn, the INS established an office in Charlotte in 1979.<sup>11</sup>

Available year-round employment in agriculture and related industries provided a means for workers to travel and eventually settle out in North Carolina. Employment on poultry and dairy farms, as well as construction, factories, and landscaping provided a means for migrants to stay. According to Peggy Pardue Canipe of Yadkin County in the north central area of the state, "If you had a dairy farm, you had hired a man. Then his wife and children lived there on the farm year-round because that was not seasonal work. There were a lot of dairy farms. Through the dairy farms, they would stay." Similarly, Esteban Echevarría recalled how his family eventually settled in North Carolina from Guerrero, Mexico in the late 1970s. "Back then, there was a huge dairy industry [in North Carolina]," he stated. Although his father worked the tobacco crop in the summer, employment in dairy was how he eventually settled out of the migrant stream. Shortly thereafter, he brought the rest of his

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<sup>11</sup> "Inspection for Agricultural Camps, Division of Health Service," Sanitary Engineering Section: Migrant Labor Camps File, 1963-1977, Box 3, SANC; "Some Illegal Aliens are Settling in N.C.," *The News and Observer*, July 2, 1979; oral history interview with Juvencio Rocha-Peralta, June 22, 2011, interview with the author; email correspondence between author and Juvencio Rocha-Peralta, November 4, 2013; Rick Nichols, "Migrant Labor Camp is Hardship Only to Those Who See It," *The News and Observer*, June 15, 1975.

family with him. "That's how we first ended up in North Carolina," according to Esteban. Although the Echevarría family subsequently followed the migrant stream to South Florida from North Carolina, and then separated for one year in Texas and Mexico, they eventually returned together and called North Carolina home.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the dairy industry, poultry production provided necessary employment for workers to settle out in the state. The rapid expansion of the poultry industry dated from 1950s, when North Carolina transitioned from an import to export state economy in the production of poultry and eggs. "By the mid-1960s," noted one study, "the chicken business had evolved from a sideline on the family farm to a giant Southern-based agribusiness," which included North Carolina. By 1966, seventeen different companies merged "to form one of the largest broiler producing corporations in the world, processing nearly 52,000,000 broilers a year." Meanwhile, Ralston Purina financed the production broilers, turkeys, broiler hatching eggs and replacement birds in eastern North Carolina. By 1967, they were seeking to accelerate their production of birds to 35 million

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<sup>12</sup> "Migrant Farmworkers in the East Coast Stream," Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina Packet, Spring 1991, JPP, Box 31, DURBML; oral history interview with Peggy Pardue Canipe, August 28, 2011, interview with author; oral history interview with Esteban Echevarría, July 6, 2011, interview with author.

per year. Similarly, Central Soy Company operated in Martin County in the eastern region of the state, calling for an annual production of 25 million birds for gastronomic consumption. Related industries also experienced similar growth. Whereas hog production was virtually non-existent in the early 1960s, North Carolina became home to the largest-scale hog operations in the country in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Our Incredible North Carolina Poultry Industry," *The News and Observer*, March 14, 1966; Charles E. Brewer, "Poultry Expanding in Coastal Plain," *The News and Observer*, March 13, 1967; "N.C. Leader in Hog Industry," *The News and Observer*, June 21, 1976; "Migrant Farmworkers in the East Coast Stream," *Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina Packet*, Spring 1991, JPP, Box 31, DURBML; Hope Shand, "Billions of Chickens: The Business of the South," *Southern Exposure* XI, no. 6 (November/December 1983): 77, in JPP, Box 31, DURBML. Tyson Foods represents one noteworthy example of poultry industry expansion in the southern United States. Founded in 1930s, by grower John Tyson in Northwest Arkansas, the company further extended its reach in the late 1960s, by acquiring nineteen additional businesses in this period (14); *Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers' Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants* (New York, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), 14.



Figure 18. "Summer Migrant Education Class in Kenly, North Carolina, August 8, 1979"<sup>14</sup>



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<sup>14</sup> For educator Mack Edward Canipe who directed the first migrant education program in Yadkin County, the purpose was to help students become more successful as they began to make roots in North Carolina. "Some of these students are going to stay," he noted in 1980. The photo caption reads: "Pupils of the Summer Migrant School and their art teacher, Miss Debbie Christian, show their pride in the art work produced during the program sponsored by the Johnston County school system. The pupils are, left to right, Yolanda Gonzales, Peggy Soto, Theresa Andrade, Maria Barajas and Carmen Alvarez; second row, Abel Alvarez, Norma Alvarez and Carmelita Rodriguez." Source: "Summer Migrant School's Program Made Learning Fun for Its Pupils," *Kenly News*, August 8, 1979, Support Services Area, Division of Support Programs, Migrant Education Section: Regular School Term Migrant Education Projects File, 1979-1980, Alamance-Martin, Box 1, SANC; "The Cow Goes 'Moo' and the Dog Goes 'Hwa Hwa,'" *Enterprise*, August 13, 1980, Support Services Area, Division of Support Programs, Migrant Education Section: Annual Evaluation Report File, 1980, Box 1, SANC.

Figure 19. "14 Year Old Salvadoran Refugee Collecting Eggs in Breeder House, Iredell County, North Carolina, 1989"<sup>15</sup>



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<sup>15</sup> Source: Ron Amberg Photographs, 1975-2004 (hereafter RAP), Box 17, Archive of Documentary Arts (hereafter ADA), DURBML.

## **"Atrocious, Intolerable, and Sinful"**

I now turn to an analysis of the experiences of migrant farmworkers employed in the expanding agribusiness of North Carolina in the 1970s and 1980s, and demonstrate employers' varied practices of labor control. Through their dependence on the crew leader system, workers experienced wage theft, debt peonage, physical violence, coercion, and geographic isolation. Unlike South Florida, housing was completely grower-controlled and privately-owned, which further exacerbated these conditions. Florida Mexicans from the Atlantic Migrant Stream, as well as from Texas and Mexico, too faced similar abuses.

When attorney George Carr visited farms in North Carolina in 1977, he was shocked. "The worst thing that could happen to a farmworker," according to Carr, "is for him [or her] to go to North Carolina." He was part of an investigative team from the Florida Rural Legal Services with more than a dozen investigators, who spent two weeks in Johnston County in eastern North Carolina. The team concluded that the conditions they observed in North Carolina represented forms of "modern-day slavery." Their conclusion resonated with another study conducted by Joshua S. Reichert in 1980, who asserted, "It would be difficult to find a part of the country where agricultural laborers are abused more and protected less than in North Carolina." The crew leader system that farmworkers relied upon

for economic survival reinforced this culture of violence. This also meant that success of the crew leader system depended on effective collaboration with individual crew leaders, who functioned as "buffers." Though this form of labor contracting was widespread and grew with increased employer demands for outside farm labor, grower-controlled isolated housing in North Carolina made experiences of violence more prevalent for agricultural workers in the state.<sup>16</sup>

Crew leaders used various means to rob from their workers in North Carolina. One was to increase the economic debt each worker owed to the crew leader. "Most weeks I worked I came up short and I'd have to borrow money from the boss," noted one migrant farmworker in 1980 when referring to his crew leader. "If I'd borrow \$5, it would cost me \$10 to pay him back. He always charged double," he continued. Workers were also charged excessive fees for transportation, lodging, food, cheap wine, beer, and cigarettes, which added to their debt. Another tactic crew leaders used was to pay their workers less than the full amount for their work. In 1980, Farmworker Legal Services of

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<sup>16</sup> Joan Preiss, "Perspectives on Food and Hunger Speech, February 19, 1981," JPP, Box 25, DURBML; "Migrant Conditions Labeled as Slavery," *The News and Observer*, August 1977; Reichert, "The Agricultural Labor System," 1.

North Carolina estimated that this practice affected 85-90 percent of all migrant farmworkers in the state.<sup>17</sup>

Stevin Levin of *The News and Observer* uncovered abuses in 1980, when he worked "undercover" harvesting cucumbers at a farm in Wilson County, in eastern North Carolina. He lived and worked as a farmworker for seven days. Levin reported that the workers in the camp were not paid the federal minimum wage of \$3.10 per hour, but instead, received pay only for the amount picked, called the "piece rate." Levine also observed that the crew leader, Walter Lee Claboine, sold beer, wine, and moonshine liquor, and deducted the amount owed from wages.<sup>18</sup>

Workers also experienced physical violence and coercion. A long-time resident from eastern North Carolina recalled one instance when two farmworkers tried to run away from their labor camp. When they were caught and returned, the crew leader and assistants forced the workers to fight each other, and even placed bets on which would win the match. Eventually, one knocked down his counterpart. And when he stopped, the crew

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<sup>17</sup> Blount, Gonzalez, and Petrow, "Lost in the Stream," JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 70; Joan Preiss, "We'll See That Day Come 'Round, 1980," JPP, Box 25, DURBML.

<sup>18</sup> Steve Levin, "Violations of Law Evident Even at Relatively Good Camp," *The News and Observer*, July 1980.

leader pounced on him. The crew leader forced him to continue to punching harder, while the other worker lay on the ground.<sup>19</sup>

In another case reported by *The News and Observer*, Gary Lee Walters and Joseph D. Romeo tried to leave their labor camp near Benson, North Carolina in April 1979. They were walking to a nearby store to purchase toiletries for their living quarter. When they were caught by the crew leader, Tony Booker Jr. and his assistants, they were immediately beaten along the road. Walters and Romeo were then forced to return to the labor camp against their will. The crew leader pursued and physically abused Walters and Romeo because they left the labor camp without permission and still owed money.<sup>20</sup>

In another incident, Steve Kirk recalled one summer when he interviewed agricultural workers in the state as a student at Duke University in the 1970s. One day, he noticed that two Black farmworkers were running down an unpaved road. After speaking with the two men, Steve then learned that their boss had tied them to a tree to prevent them from escaping. During the same period when Steve interviewed workers as a student, he

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<sup>19</sup> This story was expressed to me during an informal interview with a long-time resident from the eastern part of the state, while visiting Raleigh, North Carolina on August 24, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> David McKinnon, and Mary Donne Peters, "Jury Convicts Crew Bosses of Kidnapping, Enslavement," *The News and Observer*, August 22, 1980.

also recalled reading a billboard that stated, "The United Clans of America welcome you to Smithfield." While workers were subjected to forced confinement and humiliation, as Steve learned, their treatment added to a culture of violence already present in the state.<sup>21</sup>

As another case, one woman responded to a newspaper advertisement for domestic employment. Unbeknownst to her, the advertisement was placed by a crew leader in Nash County, in eastern North Carolina. "Three months later," according to reporting article, "she managed to get word to her family that she was being held prisoner." According to Amin Khali, Johnston and Sampson counties in eastern North Carolina had the "worst quality of crew leaders in the state." Khali worked for the Migrant Health Program and frequently observed migrant farmworkers admitted for medical care. "We have many people who are admitted to the hospital because of gunshot wounds, stab wounds, and other acts of violence," Khali stated.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed our Most Alluring Fruit* (Kansas City, Sydney, and London: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2012), 161; oral history interview with Steve Kirk, July 28, 2010, interview with Kathiana Desir, AAOHP, UMSC.

<sup>22</sup> Ginny Carroll, "Migrant Slavery Difficult to Prove," *The News and Observer*, July 8, 1980; Corrie, "And Justice for All," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DDEPLM, 78.

One highly publicized incident of physical violence and coercion took place in September, 1981, when two brothers, Dennis Warren and Richard Warren, forced one worker in their crew to work one day despite feeling sick. They were contracted at a farm in Nash County, owned by Cecil Williams. When the worker suddenly stopped picking sweet potatoes and vomited blood, the Warren brothers refused him medical attention. Instead, he was beaten by the brothers and two assistants. He continued working until he eventually collapsed, and was then placed in a closed hot bus. When medical help was called four hours later, "it was too late."<sup>23</sup>

One year after this incident, farmworkers testified in court against their former crew leaders, the Warren brothers. According to their testimonies, the brothers used different methods ranging from deception to actual kidnapping. When some workers tried to run away and were caught, they were confined to a "jail house" at the labor camp. The crew leaders often carried pieces of rubber hose to force workers to do their job. The Warren brothers were eventually convicted of slavery. From 1979 to 1982, there were at least 16 federal slavery charges issued against crew leaders operating in North Carolina alone. Out of the 21 federal convictions of slavery in the five-year

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<sup>23</sup> Corrie, "And Justice for All," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DDEPLM, 98.



period of 1978 to 1983, approximately ten were based in North Carolina.<sup>24</sup>

During the same period from 1979 to 1982, farmworker advocates in the state sought to enact an anti-slavery statute in the North Carolina State Legislature. Growers, however, frequently lobbied to stop proposed legislation through the North Carolina Farm Bureau. From the perspective of growers, enacting an anti-slavery statute implied that "slavery existed in the state," and which they considered an insult. When an anti-slavery statute was proposed and passed in the state legislature, growers were only required to report "known incidences to the county sheriff." This meant that crew leaders could be prosecuted, but not the growers who employed them. While crew leaders faced prosecution for slavery, growers in North Carolina were only required to report suspicions to the county sheriff, and they avoided any accountability over the treatment of workers on their own property.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Corrie, "And Justice for All," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DDEPLM, 99; Winokur and Hughes, "Workers at the Harvest," JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 60; Catherine Rebecca Rhodes, "Modern-Day Slavery: The Involuntary Servitude of North Carolina's H-2A Farmworkers Today," Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000, SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>25</sup> Winokur and Hughes, "Workers at the Harvest," JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 60.

Grower-controlled housing conditions reinforced violence that workers encountered in North Carolina. According to a study by the Sanitary Engineering Division of the North Carolina State Board of Health in 1963, living quarters for 100 labor camps were inspected in the state, and the 93 percent of all units lacked adequate bathrooms like flushing toilets, while 70 percent of the water supplies were unprotected and unsanitary. Half of the camps also had housing structures with "unsound construction," including insufficient windows, according to the report.<sup>26</sup>

By 1975, federal inspectors visited labor camps in North Carolina and found numerous violations of sanitation regulations. After visiting one labor camp near Benson in eastern North Carolina, they described the housing conditions to be "atrocious, intolerable, and sinful." A farmworker who traveled to North Carolina for the first time in the late 1970s similarly commented,

I'd heard that they'd take you up to North Carolina and wouldn't pay you, that they'd take you out in the woods and keep you on that camp, but I wanted to find out for myself if it was true. You know, you can't believe everything you hear. I've worked migrant work all over the United States. I was in Yuma, Arizona last year; I've picked lemons and lettuce. I've picked apples in Oregon and Washington. In

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<sup>26</sup> George V. Elliot, "Migrant Labor Project Report for 1963-1964, and Plans and Objectives for 1965 Season," Sanitary Engineering Section: Migrant Labor Camps Tabulations File, 1959-1969, Box 1, SANC.

California, I've done grapes. In the five years I've been doing this, and I've never seen anything quite like this. I've never seen it this bad. This is the worst I've ever seen!

By 1980, farmworkers frequently faced a dual-wage system through wage theft and debt peonage, labor repression through physical abuse and coercion, occupational stratification, isolation, and "squalid living conditions" in the Tar Heel state.<sup>27</sup>

Florida Mexicans traveled to North Carolina in large numbers in the 1970s and 1980s, and they too faced similar methods of labor control. In 1982, Sandra Martínez-Ruíz partly documented incidences of wage theft and debt peonage she observed. One method that the crew leader frequently kept two different sets of account books that documented worker expenses. One book represented the official version and the other was the actual amount deducted from wages. "When people come in or to get something," she stated, "the only one that writes it down is him [the crew leader] or his wife, and they are the only ones that collect that money." Consequently, the workers were paid less than the full amount for their work. In one instance, Martínez-Ruíz recalled when one worker asked for help to make

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<sup>27</sup> Rick Nichols, "N.S. Officials to Probe Migrant Camp Issue," *The News and Observer*, June 19, 1975; Blount, Gonzalez, and Petrow, "Lost in the Stream," JPP, Box 31, DURBML, 72; David McKinnon, and Mary Donne Peters, "Jury Convicts Crew Bosses of Kidnapping, Enslavement," *The News and Observer*, August 22, 1980.

sure his pay reflected what he was due. "They had paid him \$62.00 and when I added up his hours in my room in the house where I live, it was \$93-\$94," she stated. This practice took place on a weekly basis.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, crew leaders gave preference to workers who had already accumulated the most debt, as they were the most vulnerable. According to her testimony, "right now, I am not working. I have four children. My husband works down in the field. For most of the time he [the crew leader] sends the people that drink a lot, the people that have big bills—those are the ones who get the good jobs." To demonstrate this point, the mother of four indicated that her husband only earned \$1.75 for working all day, which was not enough to sustain them economically.<sup>29</sup>

Another type of wage theft involved crew leaders who charged extra fees for housing. The Martínez-Ruíz family had to pay \$5.00 each for light and for gas expenses directly to the crew leader, despite having no stove or gas tank, or hot running water. "That means that right now when I get home I haven't cooked," she stated. "I don't have a stove to cook and I don't

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<sup>28</sup> "Legislative Research Committee on Migrant Workers, September 8, 1982," JPP, Box 25, DURBML, 16.

<sup>29</sup> "Legislative Research Committee on Migrant Workers," JPP, Box 25, DURBML, 15.

know where I am going to make breakfast for my kids before they go to school tomorrow," she continued.

The geographic isolation also made them completely dependent on the crew leader. Martínez-Ruíz recalled one instance when her youngest child had just turned one year old. For three consecutive weeks, her baby boy had a very high fever and diarrhea. Unfortunately, she and her partner had no transportation, and no way of contacting a doctor or hospital without the crew leader. "They [the crew leader and spouse] don't take us anywhere," explained Martínez-Ruíz. Despite the urgency of the situation, the crew leader offered no assistance.<sup>30</sup>

Although growers avoided responsibility, their actions also affected the livelihood of workers on their property. In 1981, James H. Parker III, and David C. Hemingway from National Lawyers Guild documented an incident of physical violence by one grower in Wilson County. According to their report, the grower physically assaulted a Mexican farmworker. One woman witnessed the incident and noticed that a sheriff deputy was present when this happened. When the worker fell to the ground after being

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<sup>30</sup> "Legislative Research Committee on Migrant Workers," JPP, Box 25, DURBML, 18-19.

hit, the sheriff did nothing. "I thought the sheriff was there for protection but he just stood there," she stated.<sup>31</sup>

Growers also controlled the living conditions that migrants encountered. Peggy Pardue Canipe vividly recalled visiting labor camps in Yadkin County in the late 1970s. "They [the growers] did not want just anyone there because the conditions were less than human," she stated. While the living conditions were similar to grower-controlled housing elsewhere in the state, she was still in shock. "The big challenge for me," as she stated, "was to try to figure out why the farmers would allow the conditions to be that low, knowing the people [the farmers] like I know them." There was, thus, a double-standard. Even as growers in Yadkin County adhered to the dictum that "cleanliness was next to godliness" within their respective households, according to Peggy, they simply turned their backs on workers on their own property.<sup>32</sup>

One publicized incident that demonstrated the influence of growers took place near Spring Hope, North Carolina, in 1975. According to the article, approximately 80 Florida Mexican

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<sup>31</sup> James H. Parker III, and David C. Hemingway, "Crewleader Violence Against Farmworkers in North Carolina," A Report Prepared for the North Carolina Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, 1981, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Oral history interview with Peggy Pardue Canipe, August 28, 2011, interview with author.

farmworkers, including 20 children, were left stranded, with no work or money. Although the crew leader had contracted with the grower, the workers became upset and voiced their concerns directly over the low wages and horrid living conditions. In response, the grower turned off the water and gas at the labor camp, and forced the migrants off his property. Some workers thereafter found farm work for two days a week in Nash County, but this was not enough.

Eventually, the North Carolina Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers Association provided temporary shelter at a local hotel for the migrants. According to Carolyn Corrie, the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Association was formerly under the auspices of the North Carolina Council of Churches Migrant Project. Due to the name, the staff of the migrant advocacy organization had trouble securing political support, and, thus, changed the official name in 1975. "The way they [the press] have been talking about us is that we have been living the easy way. It's not true," stated Sergio Salinas on behalf of the migrant crew. "We left home for one reason, to come here and work," he continued.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Corrie, "And Justice for All," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DDEPLM, 66; Jerry Allegood, "Effort to Find Place for Migrants Fails to Evacuate Hotel," *The News and Observer*, July 4, 1975.

Another situation took place in 1977, when Alicia and Guramo Acosta applied and were denied food stamp assistance near Benson, North Carolina. The grower of the labor camp, C.C. Barefoot, refused to cooperate. The Acostas were one of three migrant families who had traveled to Johnston County from Florida for farm work, to pick potatoes. When Sixto Durand from Florida Rural Legal Services visited the labor camp, he observed that the three families lived in "a small, clapboard house with no running water." Alicia and Guramo Acosta and their daughter lived in one room, and they were expecting their second child. Outside the house, he also noticed that boards were falling from the side, and flies were floating in the water barrel used as drinking water.<sup>34</sup>

With no money to move on, the Acostas decided to apply for food stamp assistance. They had already met the 30-day stay requirement needed for eligibility, and they were also U.S. citizens. Still, they were denied service by the local office. As Sixto Duran from Florida Rural Legal Services described, "I went with them to the food stamp office, but the people there would not accept their word that they were unemployed." The Acostas were also denied because they could not complete the income verification form to prove their unemployment. When they

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<sup>34</sup> "Migrant Condition Labeled as Slavery," *The News and Observer*, August 1977.



approached C.C. Barefoot to sign the form as the grower, he refused. "He said workers had enough money to buy cars and beer and he refused to help them obtain state assistance," according to the reporting article.<sup>35</sup>

Threats of immigration detention and deportation compounded labor repression used by crew leaders and growers toward workers from Mexico who traveled to North Carolina in the 1970s, and like U.S. citizen farm labor, faced violence such as wage theft, physical abuse and coercion. In 1977, one article pointed out that extra wages were being withheld by crew leaders for "social security." These deductions were being made, even though the workers had no social security numbers. Lack of U.S. citizenship, however, meant that workers from Mexico who encountered similar abuses waged fewer complaints. As Steve Adams from the North Carolina Employment Security Commission commented in 1979, growers in the North Carolina-Virginia Tobacco Growers Association preferred undocumented workers "because they don't have a lot of mouth." The North Carolina-Virginia Tobacco Association was initially formed by 100 employers, with the specific purpose of recruiting H2 guest

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<sup>35</sup> Janet Guyon, "Food Stamps Refused for Migrant Families," *The News and Observer*, September 19, 1977; "Migrant Condition Labeled as Slavery," *The News and Observer*, August 1977.

workers from Mexico for farm labor in both states.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, farmworkers without legal status were recruited by crew leaders because they were the most vulnerable.

This was also demonstrated in another article that documented farm labor conditions near Benson, North Carolina, in 1977. "The hardest working and the most easily exploited workers are the illegal aliens," according to the article. An estimated 500 to 1,500 undocumented migrants from Mexico were working in the area. In contrast, one Mexican American migrant farmworker interviewed in the same article could not find employment.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Guyon, "Food Stamps Refused for Migrant Families;" letter to Chris Hartmire, National Farm Worker Ministry, from Joan Preiss, Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers, February 20, 1979, NCCC, Box 77, DURBML.

<sup>37</sup> "Near-Slavery is Found in Southern Migrant Camps," *New York Times*, August 28, 1977, JPP, Box 20, DURBML.

Figure 20. "Farm in Newton Grove, North Carolina, 1980"<sup>38</sup>



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<sup>38</sup> Small text in photo reads: "Do not enter without permission of owner or crew leader violators will be prosecuted." Source: SANC.

## Silence and Solidarity in the Fields<sup>39</sup>

The IRCA legislation in 1986 was important political victory for the nearly 3 million persons who applied for permanent residency as a result. The IRCA legislation provided an opportunity for undocumented persons living in the United States before 1982 to apply for permanent residency by May 1998. This included farmworkers in North Carolina who were able to obtain legal status and move into other areas of employment besides farm labor, including fast food restaurants and construction in cities. According to INS officer Donald Young, the Charlotte office processed more than 30,000 applications for permanent residency through IRCA, approximately 80 percent of whom were "Hispanic."<sup>40</sup>

Equally important, IRCA enabled workers and families from other states, such as California, to migrate and settle in North Carolina and throughout the South. One study by Holly M. Hapke, E. Jeffrey Popke, and Rebecca Torres noted that IRCA, anti-

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<sup>39</sup> The title of this section is partly adapted from Barry Yeoman, "Silence in the Fields," *Mother Jones*, January/February 2001, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>40</sup> "Some Immigrants Live in Fear of Authorities," *Burlington Times-News*, August 20, 1997, SAWF, Box SF12, DHRA, DURBML; "N.C. Farmers Want Foreign Field Hands," *Wilmington Morning Star*, April 9, 1990, Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina Packet, Spring 1991, JPP, Box 31, DURBML; "Some Immigrants Live in Fear of Authorities," *Burlington Times-News*, August 20, 1997, SAWF, Box SF12, DHRA, DURBML.

immigrant polarization in traditional "gateway" communities, and economic instability in Mexico contributed to Latino migration to the South. Heather A. Smith likewise identified California, Florida, New York, and Texas as major sending states for Latinos who migrated to North Carolina from 1985 to 1990.<sup>41</sup>

A more problematic facet of the IRCA legislation has been the H2A guest worker program that provided another important means for growers to recruit outside farm labor. Instead of just turning to the migrant stream in the United States, growers recruited workers directly from Mexico. In this section, I analyze experiences of H2A migrant farmworkers in North Carolina. I then briefly discuss how the Ohio-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a product of the *Tejano* diaspora, has challenged the agricultural political system by defending the rights of H2A workers in the state.

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<sup>41</sup> Holly M. Hapke, E. Jeffrey Popke, and Rebecca M. Torres, "The South's Silent Bargain: Rural Restructuring, Latino Labor and the Ambiguities of Migrant Experience," in *Latinos in the New South: Transformation of Place*, eds. Owen J. Furuseth and Heather A. Smith (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 37; Heather A. Smith, "The Untraditional Geography of Hispanic Settlement in a New South City: Charlotte, North Carolina," in *Immigrants Outside Megapolis: Ethnic Transformation in the Heartland*, ed. Richard C. Jones (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008), 240-241; Jorge Durand, Douglas S. Massey, and Chiara Capoferro, "The New Geography of Mexican Immigration," in *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States*, eds. Víctor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), 9-16.

While my focus is centered on the H2A program, one corollary in North Carolina has been the H2B program. The largest employer of H2B workers has been the crab processing industry in eastern North Carolina, recruiting primarily women workers from Mexico. In addition, H2B workers have worked in the rock quarry industry in the western part of the state.<sup>42</sup>

Formed in 1989, the North Carolina Growers Association (NCGA) quickly became the principal organization that contracted and dispersed H2A guest workers in North Carolina. Founder Stan Eury relied upon his 12-year experience as rural manpower labor recruiter for the North Carolina State Employment Commission. He had worked for several years recruiting workers from Florida for tobacco farms in Lee County. The workers were contracted through crew leaders and were primarily "American citizens, but of Spanish speaking descent." Although he spoke some Spanish, reportedly, Eury preferred to shift his duties to his full-time assistant, Henry Salazar, which included handling complaints about work contracts, wages, and emergencies.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "Migrant Workers in North Carolina: Where Do They Come From?" *Migrant Housing Bulletin*, N.C. Department of Labor, February 1992, SAWF, Box SF12, DHRA, DURBML; Kathleen C. Mosher, "Delicate Art, Low Pay: The Legacy of Crab Pickers in North Carolina," Thesis, North Carolina State University, May 1993, SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>43</sup> "Fired Worker Finds Success in Recruiting," *Charlotte Observer*, November 1, 1999, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML;

Eury was suspended and eventually fired for "felonious manufacture of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia," and turned to private labor contracting work for local farmers in North Carolina. "Before long," according to Eury, "several [growers] approached me about forming the association."<sup>44</sup> The NCGA thereafter established headquarters in Vass, North Carolina, with the specific purpose of contracting H2A guest workers from Mexico. Growers in North Carolina employed the fourth largest number of inter-state farmworkers, behind growers in California, Florida, and Texas. Through the NCGA, they became the largest users of H2A workers in the country.<sup>45</sup>

The NCGA dramatically expanded the H2A program and the North Carolina Employment Security Commission decreased its activities. According to one article, federal investigators found that the state employment offices "are reluctant to refer U.S. workers to H2A employers because they will not hire them."

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Francesca Coin, "Pickles and Pickets After NAFTA: Globalization, Agribusiness, the U.S.-Mexico Food-Chain, and Farm-Worker Struggles in North Carolina" (Dissertation: Georgia State University, 2007), 87; "Lee Officials Gird for Migrant Worker Influx," JPP, Box 24, DURBML.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Coin, "Pickles and Pickets after NAFTA," 87.

<sup>45</sup> "Fired Worker Finds Success in Recruiting," *Charlotte Observer*, November 1, 1999, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML; Cynthia Hill, and Charles Thompson, Jr., "The Guestworker *Bienvenidos a Carolina del Norte*: A Study Guide to the Film," SAWF, Box PM7, DHRA, DURBML.

As early as 1990, when growers began to employ H2A workers, the North Carolina Farmworkers Legal Services filed two grievances against the state employment commission. These grievances were filed on behalf of two U.S. citizen agricultural workers who sought employment in eastern North Carolina and were told that no farm labor jobs were available. Still, the NCGA recruitment of H2A workers continued unabated.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, Eury's labor contracting business extended to at least 17 states. This made him and the association the largest importer nationwide of legalized farm labor from Mexico. As Barry Yeoman noted in 2001, the NCGA "is the nation's largest distribution point for Third World farm labor." To meet this need, two additional for-profit companies were created and affiliated with the NCGA. The International Labor Management Corporation served as an inter-state labor management company, and Amerimex Financial Service helped workers send remittances to their respective families in Mexico, for a designated fee.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Lax Regulations Trouble Critics of Labor Pipeline," *Charlotte Observer*, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML; "N.C. Farmers Want Foreign Field Hands," *Wilmington Morning Star*, April 9, 1990, Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina Packet, Spring 1991, JPP, Box 31, DURBML.

<sup>47</sup> Rhodes, "Modern-Day Slavery," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DURBML; "Fired Worker Finds Success in Recruiting," *Charlotte Observer*,



For growers in North Carolina, utilizing the H2A program provided additional advantages than solely relying on interstate farmworkers. Unlike the latter, for example, H2A workers were bound by contract to one specific place of employment. Unable to leave and find employment elsewhere, they were completely dependent on the grower for their livelihood. According to one grower in North Carolina, H2A workers "are more dependable, because they can't just get up and leave the job, and if they do, they will never be able to come back."<sup>48</sup> Additionally, H2A workers were only paid for the work they did, nothing more. When unexpected calamities occurred, such as Hurricane Floyd in 1999, or when there was "downtime," growers were not obligated to pay any wages to the workers they employed, which saved them more money.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Florida Mexican farmworkers, H2A workers were also composed of single male workers who lived in mostly isolated, privately-owned housing. Lacking family members or community support, they were vulnerable to abuses. Perhaps most importantly, they faced

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November 1, 1999, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML; Yeoman, "Silence in the Fields," SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in "FLOC Summer Organizing Report 2003," SAWF, Box PM7, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>49</sup> "Lax Regulations Trouble Critics of Labor Pipeline," *Charlotte Observer*, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

retaliation by growers, including blacklisting, if they reported injuries on the job or voiced complaints regarding working and housing conditions.

In 1996, the Farmworker Legal Services of North Carolina submitted a complaint to demonstrate the extent of these abuses in the state. Accordingly, H2A workers who reported health injuries or requested medical treatment at their places employment were harassed, blacklisted, or denied future employment. This was the case in 14 separate incidences that took place from 1992 to 1995. In each situation, the complaint highlighted that the H2A worker was denied medical treatment or the very minimum after reporting their injuries. Workers were also coerced to return to Mexico without appropriate follow-up treatment. Some growers "intimidate and blacklist those who do assert their rights to receive compensation and who seek the assistance of an attorney," according to the complaint.

One H2A worker twisted his foot while emptying a bucket of peppers. When he reported this injury, he was told that he would have to pay his own doctor's bills. The worker continued to work in pain because he did not want to be fired and he was unable to pay the extra expenses. Another case highlighted a H2A worker injured his back while working in North Carolina in 1994, but when he sought to return the following year, he was denied. "The recruiter showed him his name on a list of workers

who couldn't be rehired for 1995 because they had reported accident," according to the complaint.<sup>50</sup>

In a separate case, two H2A workers became sick while working in tobacco in 1998. "The stickiness is very bad. There is also the heat. We work very low to the ground," described H2A worker Tomás García Vásquez when working in tobacco in North Carolina. "It burns the eyes when the sweat runs in the eyes. It makes one sick when the sweat runs in the mouth. The chemicals also do damage when they run into the mouth and stomach," he continued. Two workers from the same migrant crew reported their sickness to the grower, Keith Parrish, near Benson, North Carolina. Immediately, they were dismissed from their jobs and sent back to Mexico.

The remaining workers responded by putting their resources together as a small offering for their displaced co-workers. Another H2A worker, José Luis López Sánchez, described how he felt when his co-workers were dismissed:

We have eaten together, one with the others. If one feels a little bad, we try to help the other, to pick up the slack for him to get the work done for the boss. [Now that they have had to leave] we want to put together a little money for their families. I feel sad for their families. We all came together, all at the same time, to work. I felt sad because they felt sick. They're companions. The little bit of money that they made, well, it wasn't much. I felt sad because they left sick, with the little money

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<sup>50</sup> "Mexican Laborers Complaint Probed," *Charlotte Observer*, January 1, 1996, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

that will help a little. It will serve for something, but it's not as much as we were thinking, right? More than anything, it made me want to cry.

According to Adolfo Lorenzo Rosales Rosas, who was part of the same migrant crew, growers easily replaced H2A workers when they became sick. "The boss just has to tell the association they need another worker," he stated when referring to the grower. This was especially the case when harvesting tobacco.<sup>51</sup>

Another incident took place in 1999, when Carmelo Fuentes was contracted for work in Sampson County, located in eastern North Carolina. As he worked picking tomatoes, Fuentes began feeling weak and dehydrated. For fear of being blacklisted, he did not want to report the seriousness of his medical state. "That boy said he was fine and just needed to rest," commented the grower. With no medical treatment, the 36 years-old man suddenly felt all his internal organs shut down. He had heat stroke, and thereafter could not speak or move again. Eventually, Fuentes was transported back to his home in Central

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<sup>51</sup> Oral history interview with José Luis López Sánchez, Adolfo Lorenzo Rosales Rosa, and Tomás García Vásquez, July 26, 1998, interview with Charles D. Thompson, Jr., Southern Oral History Program Collection, Interview Number K-0232, WLSHC, UNCCH, 10, 12-13.

Mexico, where he was to live out the rest of his life both mute and motionless.<sup>52</sup>

Other incidences ended in death. This was the case for Raymundo Hernández, who was from small rural town in San Luis Potosí, located 100 miles north of Mexico City. Although Hernández was contracted through the NCGA as a H2A worker, he was initially recruited by a labor agent in Mexico. His hometown, Tamazunchale, eventually became known as "*el Segundo Carolina del Norte*" due to the large number of H2A workers recruited there and sent directly to North Carolina. In a qualitative study published in 2000, Joe Bagby underscored the significance of San Luís Potosí, where Tamazunchale is located, as one of several important sending states in Mexico. The farmworker population from Mexico to North Carolina, he concluded, was overwhelmingly rural, with agricultural origins.<sup>53</sup>

In 1995, Raymundo Hernández was transported by bus for work on a tobacco farm in Sampson County, in eastern North Carolina.

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<sup>52</sup> "Farm Worker Program Draws Scrutiny," *Charlotte Observer*, October 31, 1999, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>53</sup> Babby identified eleven major sending states in his study: Aguascalientes, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, and Zacatecas. "Farm Worker Program Draws Scrutiny," *Charlotte Observer*, October 31, 1999, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML; Joe Bagby, "Sweat Inequity: The Social Alienation of Mexican Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina, 2000," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DURBML, 42-43.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, Raymundo began feeling sick but did not want to stop working. Eventually, he started to vomit in the fields. The grower put him in his truck with the intent of driving him to the local health clinic to be checked. When the grower stopped to speak with another grower, Raymundo exited the vehicle. In October 1995, his skull was eventually found under a pecan tree, and with his other bones nearby. His remains were found by dogs, along with his photo i.d. and clothing.

Subsequent to his untimely death at 39 years of age, his family was approached in Mexico by the same labor agent who recruited him. The agent demanded repayment for the debt that Raymundo still owed him for securing the H2A visa. When one family member replied that they had no money, the agent then "filled up his truck with oranges from the [family] grove." The oranges represented only part of the debt. "Raymundo still owes him money," commented the family member, even in his death.<sup>54</sup>

In 1990, Mary Lee Hall criticized the H2A program within the history of agricultural labor in the state. "We have basically gone from a situation involving debt servitude with African Americans through the 1970s, to exploitation of undocumented workers in the 1980s," stated Hall. "So we don't

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<sup>54</sup> "They Don't Want Their Men Coming to N.C. Anymore," News-clipping, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML; "Vigil Calls Attention to Field Hand's Death, November 22, 1995," News-clipping, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

see the importation of H-2A workers," she continued, "as getting any closer to having farm workers being treated like regular workers in our society." In 2000, Catherine Rebecca Rhodes concluded that the H2A program in North Carolina represented another form of involuntary servitude, defined as "the use or threatened use of physical coercion or state imposed legal coercion to compel work." Rhodes continued to connect this definition with the H2A program in the following manner:

Under this institution, migrant farmworkers live in substandard housing, receive little to no health care, are paid low wages, are isolated and tied to one grower, have no means of mobility, and are completely dependent upon the grower for food, housing, and transportation. Thus, the H-2A program is a system that provides for conditions that can, and do, lead to involuntary servitude in the present day.<sup>55</sup>

Labor repression, occupational stratification, geographic isolation, and disposability have characterized the H2A guest worker program in North Carolina. As H2A worker Efrain Madrigal commented in 2001, "They say it's the Mexican's dream to be here. But many times it isn't true. There's a lot of suffering here."<sup>56</sup> These conditions were not exceptional but rather

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<sup>55</sup> "N.C. Farmers Want Foreign Field Hands," *Wilmington Morning Star*, April 9, 1990, Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina Packet, Spring 1991, JPP, Box 31, DURBML; Rhodes, "Modern-Day Slaver," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DURBML.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Barry Yeoman, "Silence in the Fields," SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.

intrinsic to the growth and development of the agricultural political economy in the state.

Similar to their predecessors, H2A workers did not simply conform to conditions they encountered, but utilized resources available to them. On farms in North Carolina, one effective tactic was to leave when they found growers violating their contracts. In 1997, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that 40 percent of all H2A workers left their places of employment before their work contracts ended. Though Stan Eury estimated the number in North Carolina to be closer to 15 percent, this proportion still illustrates the magnitude of discontent among workers as well as their desire to act. In addition, former H2A workers chose to join the migrant stream or pursue employment in other industries, such as construction and poultry and meat processing.<sup>57</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, H2A farmworkers in North Carolina also turned to an Ohio-based farm labor union founded in 1967, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), to amplify their voices and secure their rights. The work of FLOC adds to this discussion in significant ways. While FLOC had previously worked in other states outside of Ohio, particularly in Florida and Texas, former FLOC organizer Fernando Cuevas Jr. noted that

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<sup>57</sup> "Lax Regulations Trouble Critics of Labor Pipeline," *Charlotte Observer*, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML.



organizing efforts in North Carolina focused primarily on H2A workers from Mexico, which began in the 1990s. This, of course, contrasted with existent family-based social networks that formed the bulk of FLOC membership in Ohio.<sup>58</sup>

When the union president made the decision to support H2A workers in North Carolina, there too was a consciousness of solidarity among local residents and community organizations to support their work. This culture of solidarity was born in the 1990s, but, rather, several decades prior amid the rise of farmworker organizing in the late 1960s and 1970s. Between 1968 and 1974, farmworker solidarity committees emerged in cities across the southern United States, including Atlanta, Georgia, Jackson, Mississippi, Memphis, Tennessee, New Orleans, Louisiana, Raleigh, North Carolina, and Richmond, Virginia. Most were organized by volunteers and part-time staff to support the farmworker movement based in California.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "FLOC Turns Focus to North Carolina Workers," *The Blade*, August 13, 1996, SAWF, Box SF11, DHRA, DURBML; oral history interview with Fernando Cuevas Jr., March 29, 2013, interview with author.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, UFW Boycott Central files, UFWOC New Orleans Boycott Office files, and United Farm Workers Collection, Virginia Boycott Office, Series I files, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Records and Manuscript Collection (hereafter WPRL), Wayne State University (hereafter WSU).

One of the more effective solidarity committees during this period took place in Jackson, Mississippi. As one staff member from the United Farm Workers commented in 1974, "The Jackson Boycott had the best record of any volunteer committee in the country, better than most cities with Union staff." According to then full-time volunteer Rick Abraham in Jackson, part of the reason was a class consciousness already present in the state. "It is working-class blacks and whites who can understand and sympathize with your struggle," noted Abraham in 1974, "and it is they who have given their support." While supporters in Mississippi hardly purchased boycotted products, they were effective in pressuring local stores to not sell them. In another letter in 1974, Abraham explained why the committee was effective: "We did this because we wanted and needed to win not only for you but for the movement and the people in Mississippi. People here have lost too many fights. They stuck their necks out and made commitments and they needed to win." The issue of farmworker justice resonated with the working poor in Jackson, and they provided the necessary base to affect change.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Letter to Rick Abraham, from Jim Lynch, April 18, 1974, UFW Boycott Central, Box 7, Folder 9, WPRL, WSU; letter to Office of President, UFW, from Rick Abraham, April 18, 1974, UFW Boycott Central, Box 7, Folder 9, WPRL, WSU; letter to UFW, from Rick Abraham, June 18, 1974, UFW Boycott Central, Box 7, Folder 9, WPRL, WSU.

In 1971, the related committee in Raleigh, North Carolina, issued a statement of support. "Since we have some first-hand acquaintance with the plight of the migrant worker in our own state," according to their statement, "we might have instant sympathy...We call upon our citizens to give moral and actual support to this commitment." Similarly in 1971, Lloyd P. Tyler from the American Friends Service Committee office in Raleigh expressed complete support "to secure better working conditions and economic security for the nation's agricultural workers." The North Carolina State AFL-CIO also offered office space and staff when possible in the same year.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most consistent vocal organization for farmworker rights in the 1970s and 1980s in North Carolina was the Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers (TFUFW), which held its first official meeting in 1973. In a letter of appreciation on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the TFUFW, FLOC founder Baldemar Velasquez commented: "You have been there when we needed you and you have helped us become stronger and stronger in gaining dignity and respect that is important to each and

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<sup>61</sup> "Lettuce Boycott Sought by Group," *The Raleigh Times*, April 1, 1971, UFW Boycott Central, Box 7, Folder 18, WPRL, WSU; letter to UFW Charles R. Wrightston, from Lloyd P. Tyler, AFSC Southeastern Regional Office, March 19, 1971, UFW Boycott Central, Box 7, Folder 18, WPRL, WSU; "N.C. State AFL-CIO Backs Farm Workers," News Release, March 18, 1971, UFW Boycott Central, Box 7, Folder 18, WPRL, WSU.

every one of us and our families." Long-time TFUFW community activist, Joan Preiss, passed away during the writing of this dissertation.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, the first office of Farmworker Legal Services opened its doors in Newton Grove, North Carolina, in 1978. In 1982, the Carolina Interfaith Taskforce on Central America (CITCA) was initially established. While CITCA formed to raise awareness about the violent U.S. government intervention in Central America, particularly Nicaragua, their work too expanded to support the rights of working people in North Carolina and Latin America. CITCA has consistently supported FLOC through an annual pilgrimage for justice and peace organized across the state, which serves as a tool for critical consciousness-raising and advocacy.<sup>63</sup>

One additional noteworthy expression of solidarity has been the long-standing work between FLOC and Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), which was founded in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in 1981. As one example, FLOC, BWFJ, and the AFL-CIO

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<sup>62</sup> Joan Preiss, "UFW after the Boycott Speech, February 23, 1978," JPP, Box 25, DURBML; "Farm Union's Velasquez to Visit Area," *Durham Morning Herald*, March 20, 1986, JPP, Box 25, DURBML; "20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reflections," JPP, Box 8, DURBML.

<sup>63</sup> Corrie, "And Justice for All," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DDEPLM, 81; oral history interview with Gail Phares, June 23, 2011, interview with author.

held a Juneteenth March and Rally on June 16, 2001. The celebration rally focused on varied issues, including an end to racial profiling, legalization for undocumented workers, rights of workers to organize, a living wage, and reparations for Black farmers and Mexican *bracero* workers. In addition, FLOC and the BWFJ have organized "Black-Brown Freedom Schools." Commenting on this critical work, the FLOC president has stated, "It is a lifetime commitment." These relationships and others have given some legitimacy to the union work in the state, and which continue into the present.<sup>64</sup>

FLOC expanded its geographic reach by establishing an office in North Carolina, and, subsequently, Monterrey, Mexico. In 1999, the farmworker union began a campaign to unionize and secure the rights of H2A workers in the state, what the president called then "a new civil rights movement." In 2004, FLOC succeeded in signing a three-way collective bargaining agreement between Mt. Olive Pickle Company and the North Carolina Growers Association. This political victory marked the first time that guest workers obtained a labor contract and union representation in the United States. FLOC has since

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<sup>64</sup> "Juneteenth March and Rally in North Carolina," *The FLOC Update*, Spring 2001, JPP, Box 8, DURBML; "Black Workers for Justice and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee," in *Across Races and Nations: Building New Communities in the U.S. South* (Memphis, TN: Center for Research on Women, 2006), 87-88.

turned attention to pressuring North Carolina's tobacco industry and tobacco corporation, RJ Reynolds, based in Winston-Salem.<sup>65</sup>

Organizing H2A workers from Mexico in North Carolina represents a significant shift in the history of the FLOC, yet reinforces a long held critical analysis that the union brings to its work. In contrast to the history of the United Farm Workers in California, FLOC from its inception was focused on holding corporations accountable for the conditions that farmworkers encountered in the every day. In this view, the agricultural workers play an important role within a larger supply chain dictated by commercial agriculture. The important cross-border organizing work that the union has undertaken in North Carolina and Mexico, while recent, builds upon this perspective.<sup>66</sup>

I would add here that the international class consciousness that has defined the work of FLOC is also reflective of the history of the union as a product of the *Tejano* diaspora. The

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<sup>65</sup> Bagby, "Sweat Inequity," SAWF, Box PM4, DHRA, DURBML, 94; Coin, "Pickles and Pickets after NAFTA," 2; oral history interview with Justin Flores, July 6, 2011, interview with author.

<sup>66</sup> Dennis Nodín Valdés, "From Following the Crops to Chasing the Corporations: The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, 1967-1983," in *The Chicano Struggle: Analyses of Past and Present Efforts*, ed. National Association for Chicano Studies (Binghamton, New York: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue, 1984), 46-47; ode to *sh*, to *un*, to *ke*.

majority of the founding members, including the leadership, trace their roots to South Texas and the widespread displacement that affected thousands of Texas Mexicans during the Bracero Program, as I examined in chapter two. From South Texas, they, consequently, were quite aware of the power of commercial agriculture in controlling the lives of agricultural workers on both sides of the border.

Similar to FLOC, members of the Texas Farm Workers Union in South Texas also understood this dynamic quite well. "Under the present system," noted one statement on behalf of TFW, "it is a divide and conquer philosophy that tries to separate workers of the United States and Mexico. There is a damaging separation between classes and groups that work against the interests of all workers." According to then-TFW organizer Jorge Zaragoza in 1977, "Texas is key. When we organize Texas, we can organize any state in the union."<sup>67</sup> FLOC union organizers too have embraced this challenge. Instead of Texas, they have chosen North Carolina, another southern state prone to violence in the fields and, yet, filled with the promise of change.

When TFW members took their steps through the heart of the South in 1977, including North Carolina, and they were met with

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<sup>67</sup> *The Struggle of the Texas Farmworker Union*, Santa Cruz, California Texas Farm Workers Support Committee Pamphlet (Chicago, Illinois: Vanguard Books, 1977), TFWUC, Box 1, NLBLAC, UTAL.

various acts solidarity, both large and small. In New Orleans, Louisiana, more than 150 persons gathered together at a rally, and the marchers received endorsements from different groups. These included the Tremé Improvement Association, New Orleans chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization of Women, U.S. Steel Workers Local 1300, Amalgated Meat Cutters Local 1101, NAACP Youth Council, Latin American Apostolate, and A. Phillip Randolph Institute. When they continued into Pearl River County in neighboring Mississippi, the marchers were stopped by local sheriff deputies, and arrested for "obstructing traffic" on a two-lane highway.

Through intervention from Equal Rights Congress and Texas State Representative Irma Rangel, they were not charged and released. From the jail cell, the marchers continued to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where a "Freedom Ride" rally was organized. Fourteen more organizations from towns and cities near and far endorsed the march. John Slaughter of the Equal Rights Council spoke about the impact of the march. "When the farmworker left Texas on June 18<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated Juneteenth in Mobile, Alabama with a festival in support of the Texas farmworkers. I might say that this was the first time that Juneteenth was celebrated in the state of Alabama!" Roy Wilson from Seattle, Washington, also shared news that he and a TFW support committee had traveled along the West Coast en route to



Mississippi, and they collected food, donations, and medical supplies to give to the marchers.

Members of the TFW delegation also spoke at the Freedom Ride rally. Representing the marchers, one woman stated, "Without knowing us, you have supported us." TFW member Señora Salas also spoke through an interpreter: "I feel very proud to be walking in these places and states." Additional endorsements and actions of solidarity continued as they made their way through Georgia and North Carolina.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, where the marchers rested at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, one unique opportunity took place when the organized rally to support the march coincided with a congressional sub-committee meeting to discuss transportation of farmworkers. TFW co-founder Antonio Orendain spoke to the congressional sub-committee on behalf of the delegation and U.S. Representative William F. Goodling of Pennsylvania responded by stating, "I'm sympathetic." Orendain replied that sympathy was not enough, that collective bargaining rights and a repeal of the "right-to-work" laws were needed for farmworkers to organize themselves. Representative Goodling then stated that allowing farmworkers to strike would only "devastate the economy." As a sign of things to come, U.S. Representative Ike F. Andrews of North Carolina, who chaired the sub-committee, encouraged the delegation to find a congressman

to introduce legislation on their behalf, and then turned the other way.

The marchers were successful in arriving in Washington D.C. on September 5, 1977, on Labor Day, yet did not realize their goals in changing legislation. The "Texas Farmworkers March for Human Rights," at the very least, gave more meaning to the work and lives of the members. Gloria Ynguanzo, who was raised working in the fields in South Texas, marched so that her children would not share the same fate. "A sacrifice was made when we made the decision to march," she stated during the march. "We had to leave our families and many had to quit jobs. But, we believe in what we're doing. And that makes us strong." By taking their steps for the rights of all agricultural workers, the TFW also built upon and added to a culture of solidarity throughout the South, and left an important path for present and future generations to follow.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> "Austin Friends of the Farmworkers Press Release, July 21, 1977," MGFP, Box 1, NLBLAC, UTAL; "Deputies Slow Farmworkers March," *The Daily Texas*, July 20, 1977, TFWUC, Box 1, NLBLAC, UTAL; "Texas Farm Workers Are Back on Road," *Hattiesburg American*, July 19, 1977, TFWUC, Box 1, NLBLAC, UTAL; "Audiocassette: March for Human Rights Freedom Rally, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 1977," MGFP, Box 3, NLBLAC, UTAL; Johanna Seltz, "Farm Workers March Here," *The News and Observer*, August 24, 1977.

Figure 21. "Migrant Farm Worker Cutting Tobacco, 1993"<sup>69</sup>



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<sup>69</sup> Source: RAP, Box 14, ADA, DURBML.

Figure 22. "Migrant Farm Worker Hauling Tobacco to the Truck,  
1993"<sup>70</sup>



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<sup>70</sup> Source: RAP, Box 14, ADA, DURBML.

Figure 23. "Farmworker Solidarity Demonstration in Raleigh, North Carolina, May 21, 1985"<sup>71</sup>



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<sup>71</sup> Far poster reads: "Boycott Campbells, Support Farm Workers."  
Source: SANC.



Figure 24. "Farmworker Solidarity Demonstration in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 6, 2008"<sup>72</sup>



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<sup>72</sup> Source: author's collection.

## Conclusion

Prior to IRCA in 1986, North Carolina was already an established primary destination and home-base. Florida Mexican workers were recruited from the Atlantic Migrant Stream directly by the state employment commission and indirectly by growers. Their presence in North Carolina became more visible as growers sought more outside farm labor to meet their needs. Employer practice of outside labor recruitment was not new to farms in North Carolina, but expanded in the mid-twentieth century onward. Following the IRCA legislation, this practice continued when growers increasingly turned to H2A guest workers directly from Mexico through the North Carolina Growers Association.

Also prior and subsequent to IRCA, increasing numbers of undocumented farmworkers joined Florida Mexicans on farms in North Carolina. Their growing presence enriches our discussion on the *Tejano* diaspora in two important ways. Continued labor migration from Mexico, including through the H2A guest worker program, reinforces our understanding of continued unequal international relations between the United States and Mexico. As I have argued, these contested relations were formed amid U.S. economic conquest in Mexico in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The *Tejano* diaspora, in this regard, has served as a conduit for a Mexican diaspora in the southern United States.

Second, while undocumented workers joined Florida Mexicans in the migrant stream, their lack of U.S. citizenship status became another form of labor control used by crew leaders and growers in North Carolina. This practice of using citizenship to divide workers and increase revenue, as I have also argued, was not formed in North Carolina but rather in South Texas as a result of U.S. military conquest. Threats of detention and deportation only added to existent colonial configurations present in the state, which were also critical to the growth and development of the agricultural political economy. Whereas in South Texas, practices of labor control wrested upon the violence of conquest; in North Carolina, they stemmed fully from the business of enslavement.



## CONCLUSION

"I started my journey toward becoming a poet  
with the idea of the beautiful. I understand  
now what the beautiful is. The beautiful is  
to be engaged in a struggle that matters. The  
beautiful is to be grateful for the ground  
that was given me."

--Benjamin Alire Sáenz,  
from *Elegies in Blue*<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation has examined the historical significance of the *Tejano* diaspora, the large-scale displacement of thousands of workers from their home communities in South Texas to other principal locations in the southern United States. In one respect, this study referenced one historic period that involved the lives of Texas Mexicans through the latter twentieth century, which is also critical to understanding Latino migration and settlement in the region. The experience of displacement, however, did not stop in South Texas but continued to manifest throughout Mexico and beyond, reflective on continued U.S. economic and military presence abroad.

The disastrous impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed between Canada, Mexico, and the United States in 1994, stands out for displacing subsequent generations

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Alire Sáenz, *Elegies in Blue* (El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntos Press, 2002), 113-114; ode to the t, to the m; c to the s.

of Mexican workers and their families on a much larger scale than South Texas in the mid-twentieth century. U.S. government representatives have also used NAFTA as a model to pursue and secure related flawed agreements with countries in Central and South America, including the Dominican Republic. Partly described in the *Latinos in the Nuevo South* scholarship, these displaced Mexican workers and their loved ones now call places like Charlotte, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, and Murfreesboro, Tennessee, home.

They also represent an important population to potentially benefit from the still nationwide movement for comprehensive immigration reform in the United States. Through this legislation, an estimated 12 million persons would finally secure a path to permanent residency, and, eventually, full-fledged U.S. citizenship. Thousands of actions, large and small, have literally taken place by proponents for immigration reform in the past nearly two decades. Part of this push, indeed, has come from and on behalf of Latino high school students, college-aged young adults, and their allies.

One highly publicized local event took place in downtown Charlotte, North Carolina, in September 2011, when a rally was organized at the main campus of the Central Piedmont Community College. At the rally, 200 participants gathered together from different towns and cities near and far in the state. In

conjunction with the rally, some of the participants decided to take their steps to the nearby traffic intersection on Kings Drive and Fourth Street in Charlotte. They used their bodies to block car traffic. As they did this, the participants chanted, "education not deportation" and, "undocumented and unafraid." One student with a bullhorn then declared, "My name is Alicia Torres and I'm risking it all...I am no longer going to be afraid. I am no longer going to wait around and watch my mom pray." A total of 15 persons were arrested from this one event, 10 of whom without U.S. legal status.<sup>2</sup>

Thousands of similar demonstrations have taken place all across the United States in the past few years, all in pursuit of one goal. In 2010, as another example, 15 persons were arrested at the local office of then-U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson in San Antonio, Texas, including college-aged students, community elders, and a Methodist minister. Most recently, another significant nationwide rally was organized in Washington D.C. in October 2013, where an estimated 20,000

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<sup>2</sup> Gary L. Wright, "Protestors Won't Face ICE," *Charlotte Observer*, September 7, 2011; Franco Ordoñez, "Immigrants Arrested at 'Coming Out' Rally," *Charlotte Observer*, September 7, 2011.

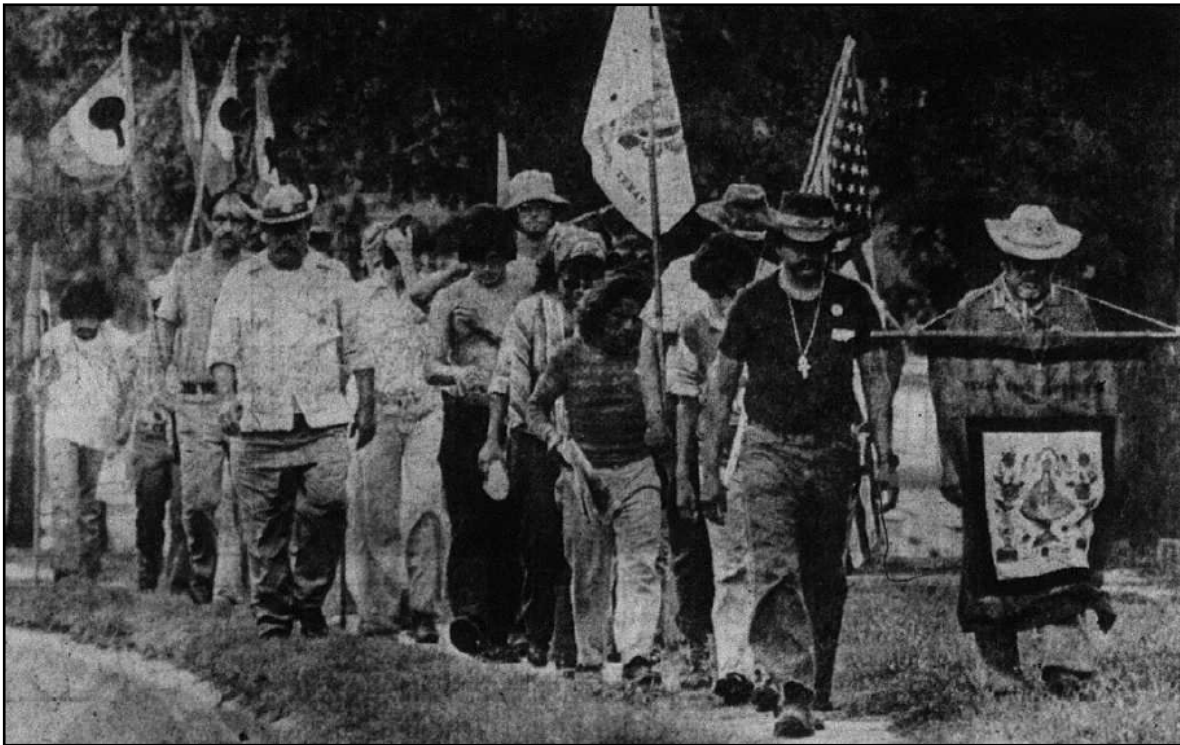
persons gathered together and around 200 were arrested, including participants from Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

As I conclude this dissertation, I am thinking about all the sacrifices that have been made in this nationwide movement for comprehensive immigration reform, and the challenges that will remain. Whether some form of legislation is realized in the current administration or the next—to lean on the side of hope—the question before us, really, is what comes next. For those of us who call and will call the southern United States home, you see, our steps are just beginning.

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<sup>3</sup> Melissa Ludwig, "DREAM Act Rally Ends with Arrests," *San Antonio Express-News*, November 29, 2010; "Congress Members Among Hundreds Arrested in Immigration Rally at U.S. Capitol," *RT News*, October 8, 2013, available at <http://on.rt.com/y5dbhf>.

Figure 25. "Texas Farm Workers Union Marching in Raleigh, North Carolina, August 24, 1977"<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> The photo caption reads: "Texas farm workers enter Raleigh marching down Glenwood Avenue." Source: "Farm Workers March Here," *The News and Observer*, August 24, 1977, microfilm reel.

## **APPENDIX**

Table 1. "U.S.-and Mexico-Born Mexican Population in Texas, By Decade"<sup>1</sup>

Year	Mexico-Born From Census	U.S.-Born Calculated	Total Predicted From Model
1850	*	*	5,000
1860	12,443	6,850	19,293
1870	22,510	13,988	36,498
1880	43,161	27,492	70,653
1890	51,559	53,634	105,193
1900	71,062	92,555	163,617
1910	124,238	153,093	277,331
1920	249,652	255,705	505,357

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 211. Zamora credits these estimates to a model developed by Roberto Villarreal.

Table 2. "Foreign Born Persons of Mexican Origin in Southeast United States Region, 1910-1970"<sup>2</sup>

State	1910	1930	1950	1960	1970
Alabama	75	45	125	141	214
Arkansas	105	194	553	209	216
Florida	116	59	431	1,312	3,018
Georgia	*	23	132	161	294
Louisiana	996	1,895	1,106	1,237	1,351
Kentucky	*	73	82	116	127
Mississippi	72	88	259	232	149
North Carolina	*	7	96	207	331
South Carolina	*	4	28	52	107
Tennessee	*	35	145	232	238
Texas	124,238	242,735	196,077	202,315	193,639
Virginia	*	25	145	270	724
West Virginia	*	42	177	194	135

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Clark, "Mexican Migration to the United States," 61.



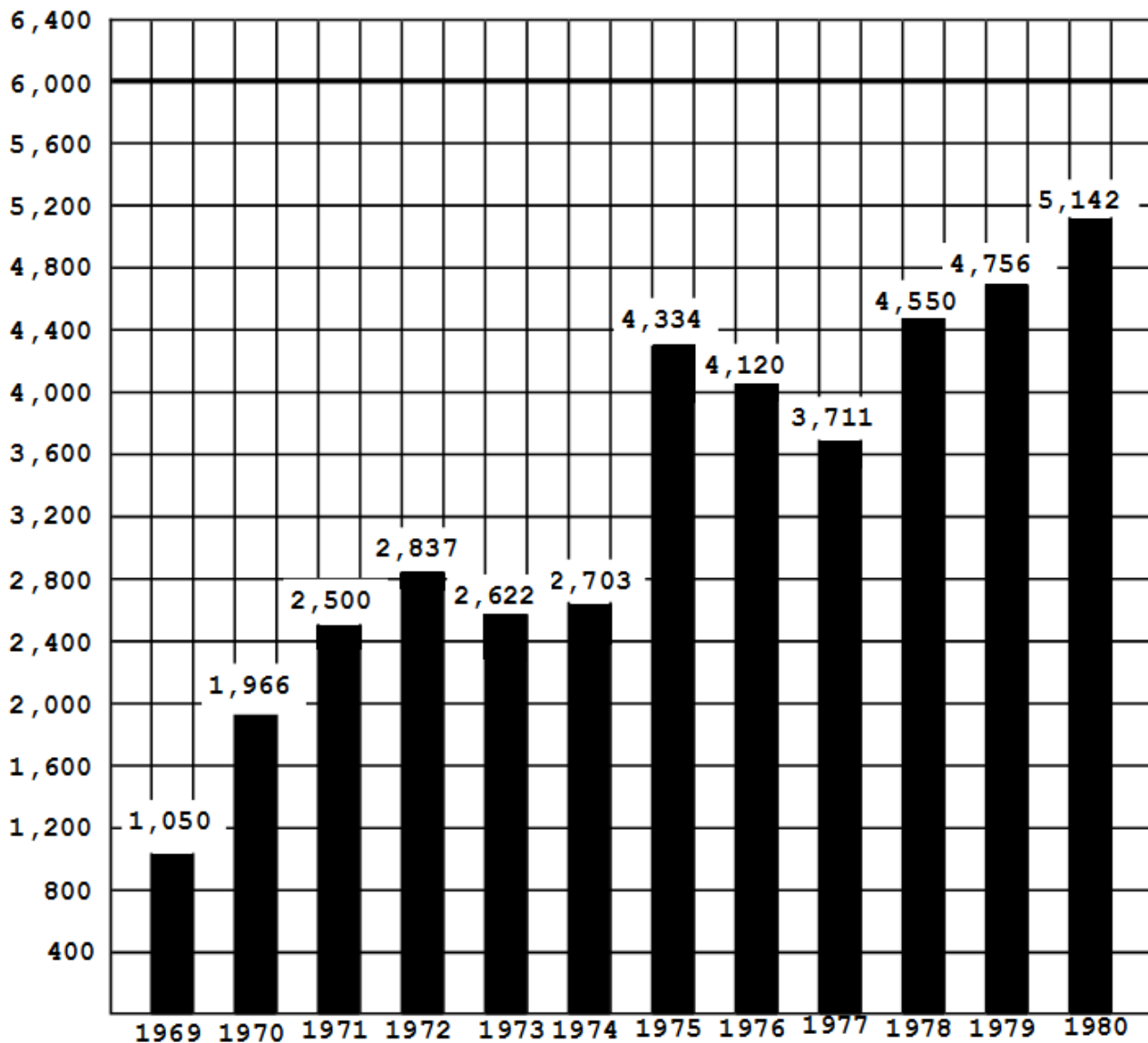
Table 3. "North Carolina Counties Estimated to Have 100 or More Agricultural Migrants at Peak of the Crop Season, 1956"<sup>3</sup>

Counties A -J	Counties L - Z
Beaufort County	Lenoir County
Buncombe County	Montgomery County
Camden County	Onslow County
Carteret County	Pamlico County
Craven County	Pasquotank County
Currituck County	Pitt County
Duplin County	Sampson County
Greene County	Scotland County
Harnett County	Tyrrell County
Henderson County	Wayne County
Jones County	

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<sup>3</sup> Source: "Health Services in Major Migrant Work Areas: East Coast Guide, June 1956," U.S. Department of Health , Education, and Welfare, COML, Box 1, SANC, 4.

Figure 26. "North Carolina Summer Term Migrant Enrollments, 1969-1980"<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Source: "1980 State Evaluation Report," Migrant Education Section, North Carolina Department of Education. Support Services Area, Division of Support Programs, Migrant Education Section: Annual Evaluation Report File, 1980, SANC.

Table 4. "List of FLOC Campbell Boycott Supporters in North Carolina"<sup>5</sup>

Supporters
Baileys Chapel AME Church Missionary Society
Church Women United of N.C.
Commission on Social Ministries of the N.C. Council of Churches
Duke Campus Ministry
Duke Workers Grievance Committee
Durham Central Labor Union
Durham NOW
Hunger Awareness Group—Asheville/Buncombe County
Migrant Ministry Committee of the N.C. Council of Churches
N.C. Farmworkers Network
N.C. Prison & Jail Project
National Farm Worker Ministry
National Sharecroppers Fund/Rural Advancement Fund
Newman Catholic Community of East Carolina University
Peace & Justice Committee of the Diocese of Raleigh
Peoples Alliance—Durham Chapter
Prophetic Concerns Committee, DCM
Religious Emphasis Group of the Durham YWCA
St. Joseph's AME Church Missionary Society
Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers
United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 525
Western N.C. Conference Branch/Women's Missionary Society AME Church
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom—Chapel Hill/Durham Branch

<sup>5</sup> Source: JPP, Box 25, DURBML.

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North Carolina Council of Churches Papers  
Joan Preiss Papers, 1970-2006  
Student Action with Farmworkers Papers

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene,  
Kansas

Arthur S. Flemming Papers, 1939-1975  
Clyde A. Wheeler Papers, 1934-1989  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President, Ann Whitman  
Files  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Records as President, White House  
Central Files  
Fred A. Seaton Papers, 1900-1972  
Herbert Brownell Jr. Papers  
John Foster Dulles Papers, 1951-1959  
James C. Hagerty Papers, 1952-1974  
James P. Mitchell Papers, 1953-1961, 1964  
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*Miami News* Collection

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Archives, Stanford, California  
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Records, 1909-1950  
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Harry S. Kantor Papers, 1948-1977  
Ray Lyman Wilbur Papers, 1906-1964  
Louis Bloch Mimeograph, 1928

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### **Miscellaneous**

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