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THE BRACERO PROGRAM AND THE EXPLOITABILITY OF MIGRANT WORKERS

by

KAYLA DANTONA

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
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APPROVAL

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Kayla Dantona

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Thesis Advisor: David Brotherton

Acting Executive Officer: David T. Humphries

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ABSTRACT

The Bracero Program and the Exploitability of Migrant Workers

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Kayla Dantona

Advisor: David Brotherton

This thesis explores the exploitability of migrants working in the United States. Historically, the United States government has emphasized the economic utility of migrant workers, while ignoring their basic human rights. Policymakers have viewed these people as a disposable work force and seek to control them by generating widespread fear of deportation, racialized segregation, discriminatory treatment, and with the help of governing and policing entities willing to turn a blind eye to these injustices, as long as they continue to profit financially.

This thesis will look at the Bracero Program with a historic lens to exemplify the system of exploitation created by the United States. Understanding the history of immigration policies and situating the Bracero Program within American history is helpful in understanding the lived experiences of Mexican migrants contracted to work in the country, and better understand why people chose to work illegally instead. Understanding the ramifications of this contract labor system and the immigration patterns it inspired, is important when examining the treatment of immigrants entering the United States today.

The exploitability of Bracero workers was perpetrated by purposeful methods of control. The entire program intended to incentivize an ultimate return to Mexico and operated by instilling fear and uncertainty amongst these people. Braceros were forced to endure atrocious living and

working conditions with no ability to resolve their situation, for fear of deportability and the inability to create a better life.

The United States has historically established immigration policies that place greater emphasis on the economic needs of the country as opposed to the livelihood and well-being of migrants. The evident abuse and manipulation of migrant worker's contractually employed under the Bracero Program, was purposefully not addressed and there was no accountability to ensure their human rights were being upheld.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background Information

The United States has historically prided itself on being a melting pot yet has systematically criminalized and controlled the migration of people into the country. This has been done through racial profiling and discriminatory methods of control, while actively working to deport people who have made lives in the United States. Today's immigration system is built upon policies that place the economic goals of the country and capitalist elites above the lives of human beings who believed the United States could offer opportunities to create a more prosperous and safe future. This has culminated in a perpetual cycle of hardship for those entering or living in the United States without citizenship.

The geographic proximity of the United States and Mexico enables recurrent patterns of migration between the two countries. Historically, many Mexican people have sought to enter the United States in search of employment and to hopefully create better lives for their families. This has caused both domestic political and social contention and led to international discussions regarding the need to control the influx of non-US citizens entering and living within the country. In theory, the system of labor migration between the two countries should be complementary and mutually beneficial. "For one country it is a process for immigrant arrivals, and for the other a process of emigration and people in transit. In order for the system to work, the logic of how these components interact does not necessarily reflect the judicial and institutional frameworks that ideally should regulate people entering or leaving a country.¹" In this case, the United States is

¹ Santibáñez Romellón, Jorge. "Migration and Borders: The Space for Contradiction." Social Science Research Council, August 31, 2006. <https://items.ssrc.org/border-battles/migration-and-borders-the-space-for-contradiction/>.

receiving the market force demand for manual labor. The labor is cheap and convenient which ultimately results in the United States' profiting financially. For Mexico, the inability to employ its people in their labor market is problematic, yet the ability for laborers to send earnings home, can benefit their economy. This has culminated in a system of exploitation of migrant Mexican workers at the hands of the United States' employers.

In their history, United States policymakers have emphasized the importance and encouraged the utilization of immigration to increase and expand the workforce to grow the labor supply as needed, to expand the economy. The first ever federal immigration law was passed in 1864 and called, "An Act to Encourage Immigration." Its purpose was to encourage emigration from Europe with the promise of transportation to the United States and a job upon arrival. During this time, there was a labor shortage and the need to bolster and keep the economy booming was a priority. The idea was that those who came to the United States would find employment and assimilate to American values and cultural norms. The priority here was to utilize migrant labor to strengthen the economy during the Civil War, with little regard for migrant lives other than that. Exploitation of migrant workers is not a new phenomenon; in fact, it is quintessential to American immigration policy. Exploitability of the migrant fits perfectly into the needs of United States capitalism, so for this thesis I examine why, by using the Bracero Program as an example. I will answer the question: How do United States immigration policies place greater emphasis on economic needs, as opposed to the livelihood of migrants through exploitability?

To understand the exploitation perpetrated by the Bracero Program it is important to understand the history of immigration policies in the United States that led to the program's creation and explain the role it plays in America's capitalist society. The Bracero Program would eventually begin in 1942 after years of contentious immigration policies.

The Act to Encourage Immigration established the first Bureau of Immigration within the Treasury Department. Its “primary function was to encourage emigration from Europe and to arrange transportation and distribution of immigrant workers upon arrival in the US.”² Immediately this effort was praised by industrialists, who were receiving a steady flow of foreign workers. Andrew Carnegie, one of the wealthiest industrialists/capitalists of his time, was quoted by the *New York Journal of Commerce* denoting immigration to, “A golden stream which flows into the country each year and values each adult immigrant at \$1,500, for in former days and efficient slave sold for that sum.”³ Comments like these show that in its earliest days, America’s immigration policies viewed an immigrant in terms of their economic value and utility. The mass influx of migrants provided a cheap and unskilled workforce, which resulted in a decrease in wages and ultimately weakening the growing support for the labor movement. The capitalist employers were pushing for more migrant workers because they were able to pay migrants less money and blatantly ignore calls for safe working conditions, resulting in exploitation of the immigrants and capitalist influence over policy decisions.

The unskilled and underpaid immigrants were most often severely impoverished and valued as nothing more than a cheap business expenditure, as opposed to human beings. The 1864 immigration policy which allowed for increased labor supply and depressed wages, simultaneously increased the fiscal burden associated with expanding population of incredibly poor people.⁴ This meant the American government needed to balance the economic boom supplied by the immigrant

² Calavita, Kitty. *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New Orleans, LA: Quid Pro, 2010), 4.

³ Carnegie, Andrew. *Triumphant Democracy, or Fifty Years’ March of the Republic.* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886) 34-35. From Calavita, *Inside the State*, 4.

⁴ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 5.

labor force and the expense of creating facilities and the necessary infrastructure to manage them (poorhouses, asylums, hospitals, jails, schools, etc.).⁵ The more immigrants welcomed into the United States the better for employers, however providing immigrants with a place to live was neglected and increasingly problematic for cities trying to house the inflow of migrant workers and their families.

The United States attempted to rectify these issues by placing quotas on immigrants during the 1920s. This quota system restricted people from Europe but made exemptions for those migrating from Mexico. This is a prime example of the United States being selective of groups of people they felt were needed at the time to benefit the economy. Following the first World War, American governing officials were particularly interested in the Mexican labor supply, particularly because of their ability to leave the United States after work had been completed.⁶ The historical contradictions and modifications within United States immigration policies have allowed for the exploitation of the human beings that have uprooted their lives in hope of improving the livelihood of their families. The problem is that historically, the migrant is not seen as a human being, but as a “golden stream” leading to economic expansion and maximization of profits for America’s wealthiest individuals. The United States can be defined as a bulimic society. A bulimic society is determined by a “massive cultural inclusion, accompanied by systematic structural exclusion. It is a society which has both strong centrifugal and centripetal currents: it absorbs, and it rejects.”⁷ As you will see American immigration policies both include and reject the same group of people,

⁵ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 6.

⁶ United States Congress House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization 1919, 24-25.

⁷ Brotherton, David C and Laura Naegler. “Jock Young and Social Bulimia: Crime and the Contradictions of Capitalism,” *Theoretical Criminology* 2014 18:4, 441.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480614557194>.

forcing them to survive the outcome determined by policymakers who do not have their best interest in mind, resulting in migrant exploitability.

Freedom of movement should be a given right to every human being, but capitalism prevents this sovereign ideal by constraining people into systems of purposeful control by governing bodies. “Capitalism commands the great mass of humanity to “willingly” deliver themselves to one or another contractually delimited employer (likewise free of any permanent obligations), to work in exchange for money, without which they would face certain destitution and likely starve. In contrast, other (historically prior) forms of exploitation largely relied on unfree labor, bound to a definite spatial location in an enduring condition of servitude and indefinitely or permanently beholden to a particular master.”⁸ Immigrants, legal or not, are subjected to subordination within designated and contracted labor systems in which they are essentially controlled by the decisions of those on top. This allows for the exploitation of these people who are deemed powerless and as nothing more than a pawn in a larger plan to keep wealthy individuals and institutions, wealthy, therefore ignoring basic human needs and civil rights. Furthermore, Nicholas DeGenova argues that “A recurrent feature in the larger struggle to subordinate labor to the requirements of capital accumulation, predictably, has nonetheless been its intermittent mobilization (as in the event of labor shortages) in the form of migration.”⁹ He continues on to explain that to maintain a “captive and tractable workforce, labor subordination requires enduring mobilization - an effective suppression of working people’s freedom to

⁸ DeGenova, Nicholas, and Nathalie Mae Peutz. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010, 57.

⁹ DeGenova and Peutz, *The Deportation Regime*, 57-58.

escape”¹⁰ their current situation, and seek an alternative situation elsewhere. This theory presents itself prominently when examining the lives of Bracero workers. Therefore, in order for expansion of capital to continue, freedom of mobility must be regulated. This idea is perpetually present in the American immigration laws historically and through modern day. The United States government has created a system designed to control and predict the flow of migration in ways that will foster fiscal objectives while simultaneously exploiting basic human rights which contradict the capitalist agenda.

In the book, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* William Robinson argues that “States must play a balancing act by finding a formula for supplying stable, cheap labor to employers while at the same providing greater state control over immigrants.”¹¹ He claims this exploitability and idea of control can be achieved in one of two ways. First by creating a division within the working class that segregates the immigrants from the citizens. Next, racialize the immigrants, as this is an “instrument in the politics of domination,”¹² which has been seen throughout American history by way of white racial hegemonic dominance and creating fear of downward social mobility. Using this logic, we can see how immigration policies walk the fine line between easily attaining and exploiting a cheap labor force to bolster the economy and wealthy elites by promoting an anti-immigration rhetoric in political and social discourse. However, immigration policies have been highly contradictory throughout American history. Policymakers have created legislation that invites migrants into the country by promoting freedoms and fair

¹⁰ DeGenova and Peutz, *The Deportation Regime*, 58.

¹¹ Robinson, William I. *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*. New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 201.

¹² Robinson, William I. *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, 198-202.

employment opportunities, while simultaneously exploiting their labor and value to enhance economic goals. The Bracero Program is a prime example of this exploitation and exposes how the Immigration and Naturalization Services acted as the gatekeeper for migrant workers. This institution, “Controlled entries, departures, and bracero desertions, giving the agency substantial power, not only over the braceros themselves, but ultimately the entire program.”¹³

Historically, Mexico has provided the United States with a cheap and steady flow of labor. This became most notable in the 1880s, with the rapid expansion of agricultural production in the Southwestern part of the United States. Because of this, immigration restrictions did not always apply to Mexican workers and policymakers made exemptions to ensure their continued work within the country. Their stay in the United States was ostensibly contingent on the demand for labor. However, there was always the possibility that workers would not return to Mexico and would continue to reside illegally in the US. As a result, during the 1920s the Department of Labor required employers to withhold 20% of their pay, which would be given to them on their way back to Mexico. The policy exceptions of the 1920s and onward show the United States’ intention of using the immigrants as a “malleable supply of labor.”¹⁴ It was believed people would return to Mexico to receive their earnings. Wage retention during this time was a method of subordination utilized by the United States government to control the movement of migrant workers within the United States. This practice exploited a desperate need for money and misrepresented the alleged mutually beneficial employment agreement that encouraged workers to enter the United States in

¹³ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 1.

¹⁴ United States Congress House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization 1919, 24-25. United States Congress Senate Committee on Immigration 192, 87. From Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 7.

the first place.

The concept social bulimia is when a “bulimic society is one where massive cultural inclusion is accompanied by systematic structural exclusion.”¹⁵ This concept, inspired by Jock Young, is a prevalent theory that can be used to understand the Bracero Program. The United States government and growers/ranchers invited migrants into the country but through purposeful and systematic methods managed to exclude them from attaining true freedoms and improved livelihoods in their new communities. The inherent desire of immigrants to find social and political inclusion in the country in which they now live is incredibly important to their successful livelihoods. As discussed in *Banished to the Homeland: Social Exclusion, Resistance and the Dominican Deportee* by David Brotherton and Luis Barrios, social bulimia can best be described as, “A societal condition brought about by a highly contradictory process occasioned through several intersecting processes and dynamics.”¹⁶ Like De Genova, Jock Young’s concept of social bulimia examines the contradictory nature of immigration and deportation practices. There are contradictory factors at play and both paradigms highlight this. Essentially, Jock Young brought forward the contradictions of dependency and colonialism that an immigrant facing deportation experiences. Capitalism pulls the person into the country by offering the ability to create a better life, while the wealthy or governing elites dictate policy that makes the lives of these same people incredibly difficult and targets them. Capitalist economies, such as the United States, exploit immigrants that have entered their country as a source of cheap labor, while simultaneously

¹⁵ Brotherton, David C., and Luis Barrios. *Banished to the Homeland: The Social Experiences of Dominican Deportees in Exile*, 31.

¹⁶ Brotherton, David C., and Luis Barrios. *Banished to the Homeland: The Social Experiences of Dominican Deportees in Exile*, 31.

neglecting the basic civil liberties in which they are entitled. This is a clear contradiction that was blatantly executed by the Bracero Program.

The contradictory immigration policies are filled with inconsistencies that make abiding by guidelines and laws knowingly complicating. In *Inside the State*, Kitty Calavita equates this notion to William Chambliss' dialectical-structural model of law and the state, saying the model "posits that the political economy of a capitalist democracy contains within it specific contradictions, and that law often represents the state's attempt to grapple with or reconcile the conflicts derived from those contradictions. To the extent that the contradictions are entrenched in the political-economic structure, the attempted resolutions are not only doomed to failure but give rise to further conflict."¹⁷ Given this logic we can understand that American immigration policies build upon one another and underlying inconsistencies which arise or are not resolved, result in new and more complex problems. The notion of immigration has been "both a temporary resolution and a trigger for future dilemmas"¹⁸ throughout American history. The United States immigration system seeks to find balance between responding to economic threats (such as the labor shortages during times of war) and immediate political and capitalistic needs. This balancing act between institutions and governing bodies allows for the average people to fall through the cracks and become victim to a broken system. As you will see, the Bracero Program is no exception. In this case, immigration policies have enabled the exploitation of migrant workers who ultimately become pawns, trapped in a larger capitalist agenda.

The following chapters will explain in more detail the intricacies of the Bracero Program

¹⁷ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 9.

¹⁸ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 9.

and the factors that purposefully allowed for the exploitation of migrant workers. This for-profit and contract labor system cultivated a legacy that continues to impact American immigration policies and procedures to this day, and even more so impacts the lives of human beings trying to create better future for themselves.

Chapter 2: Bracero Program 1942-1951

The Bracero Program was established in 1942 during World War II. At that time, the United States utilized all of its available resources and citizens to aid in the war effort. The youngest and healthiest individuals, almost exclusively men, were drafted to the war and had to abandon their employment positions. This provided an opportunity for women and the remaining men to take higher paying positions and abandon work primarily in rural areas, thus resulting in an unprecedented labor shortage that drastically affected the agricultural industry. To find a solution to this problem, The Immigration Service, State Department, as well as the Departments of Agriculture, and Labor, came together with the 'War Manpower Commission' to form the 'Committee on Importation of Mexican Labor,' that would ultimately create a 22-year labor contract for Mexican laborers working in the United States, known as the Bracero Program. The program was ultimately approved and declared a wartime emergency program that was originally intended to last only through the duration of the world war. Consequently, the program prompted a massive rise in illegal immigration to the United States. The purpose of the Bracero Program was to provide rural employers with "an uninterrupted supply of cheap labor," but this would ultimately hold Mexican workers captive and mistreated through manipulative tactics.¹

The Bracero Program was, in theory, a mutually beneficial contract labor system. The governing officials of the United States and Mexico had determined that," Mexican agricultural workers were guaranteed transportation, living expenses, lodging, medical care and repatriation as well as wages the same as those paid for similar work to other agricultural laborers under the same

¹ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 2.

conditions within the same area.”² As many Braceros would find out, these agreed upon terms were not met by American employers.

According to the book, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams* by Camille Guerin-Gonzalez, the early twentieth century was a time in which Mexican migrant workers had a reputation amongst agricultural employers (also known as growers). They were deemed the cheapest and largest, and easiest source of temporary labor throughout the United States.³ Due to the close proximity of Mexico to the southwestern farming states in the United States, most Americans presumed that migrant workers would not permanently reside in the United States and would eventually return home to their families. In fact, according to Guerin-Gonzalez, agricultural employers often referred to Mexican migrants as “birds of passage,” because of their assumed commute between the United States and Mexico. Kitty Calavita seconds this notion in her book, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, claiming that, “The demand for migratory workers was essentially twofold: To be ready to go to work when needed; to be gone when not needed.”⁴ Guerin Gonzalez and Calavita both argue that because of their temporary status, migrant workers were easily exploitable and ultimately the Bracero Program was designed to meet the demands of employers, while neglecting the regulations set in place to create a mutually beneficial situation for both the braceros and employers. This resulted in vast neglect for basic human necessities and acceptable standard of living for the migrants, who feared speaking out due

² American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, Background Information about the Bracero Program.

³ Guerin-Gonzales, Camille. *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

⁴ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 21.

to the threat of deportation. This concept also describes the narrative of social bulimia, two contrasting aspects of the immigration system both inviting and rejecting a group of people.

The official agreement between the United States and Mexican governments had a few notable provisions. Firstly, Mexican laborer's contracted to work in the United States should not be enrolled in military services, subjected to discriminatory acts of any kind, should be provided transportation, and living expenses to and from destinations, and the promise of any additional travel expenses were to be paid by the employer. The agreement also stated that Mexican workers will be provided furnished and clean-living conditions with access to sanitary and medical facilities. However, the reality of Bracero life included, "Extremely substandard housing, poor sanitation and health facilities; a complete lack of social integration into the various communities through which he moves; a failure of educational facilities; low and unstable earnings due in part to between-job unemployment, and an unequal bargaining position vis-a-vis his employer, bordering frequently upon peonage."⁵

Bracero workers were usually unskilled and untrained in agricultural work. Nevertheless, workers were required to complete dangerous tasks with little training or safety regulations in place. They spent long days working with agricultural tools in fields and on railroads to complete their work assignments in unsafe conditions with no formal training. Workers suffered from persistent sunburn and life-threatening dehydration, in addition to physically demanding and back breaking work that often resulted in lifelong injuries for many of them. After completing these long days of grueling work, they returned home to sleep in what can only be considered barracks.

⁵ Long, Erven J. "The President's Commission on Migratory Labor in American Agriculture." *Land Economics* 27, no. 3 (1951): 249–51.

The living conditions were overcrowded and unsanitary, with numerous men sleeping in close quarters, and unreliable and poor plumbing. Employers neglected the agreement to provide safe conditions for migrant workers because they did not want to pay for those necessities. They provided the bare minimum most of the time and migrants did not complain because they could not risk being deported or having wages withheld. This exploitability of the migrant workers allowed employers to prosper at their expense. Exploitability can be understood as the level in which a person or group of people are being used and manipulated purposefully to help another profit. The exploiter, in this case the employers, are able to take advantage of the misfortune and depravity of migrant workers selfishly and unethically, to benefit themselves. The living and working conditions of the initial Bracero agreement were completely neglected and employers were not held accountable, as there was no compliance person or follow up from either governing body ensuring the Mexican migrant workers were being treated with human dignity and respect.

By the time World War II had ended, an estimated 330,000 contracts had been generated and many assumed the program was destined to end soon. Few would have imagined that during the next 18 years an additional 4.3 million Bracero contracts would be created.⁶ According to Manuel García y Griego, the years following the war marked a significant transition and evolution of the Bracero Program from a war-time program to a peace-time program. He says during this period, “key interests and power politics were given a freer hand” and that two broad issues were highlighted. Firstly, was the problem of illegal immigration, which had come to be known as wetback immigration. Secondly, the inevitable tensions building between the United States and

⁶ Garcia Y Griego, Manuel. *The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964: Antecedents, Operation and Legacy*. University of California, San Diego, 1980. <http://lib.ncfh.org/pdfs/3794.pdf>.

Mexico that had resulted from the broken policy terms and heightened money/power relations.⁷ The derogatory term, ‘wetback’ is a slur used within the United States in reference to foreign nationals residing in the country. Usually, it refers to Mexicans and assumes they are illegal immigrants. The use of this word and its negative connotation instilled stereotypical beliefs among the American public, which resulted in increased discrimination for the Mexican people living within the country and regardless of their legal status.

The fears of deportability and wage retention, mentioned above, were ways in which growers and ranchers (employers) maintained control of their contracted laborers and exploited the migrant situation. DeGenova argues that the threat of removal from a country is a means of controlling people and making them subordinate to the government, through infringing on their rights.⁸ A growing fear of deportation was the result of the government led initiative created with the intent of finding people who had skipped out on their contracts. Rounding up ‘skips’ was a service to growers, and a central component in the control structure of the contract labor system. This applied to Bracero workers who did not oblige by the terms of their contract and sought illegal employment and housing elsewhere in the United States. Although this was often a risk worth taking, the rising threat of removal from the country had the potential to make migrant livelihood even more challenging. Many times, these illegal workers would not even risk receiving medical attention out of fear they would be apprehended and deported. Deliberate employer tactics were designed to ensure enough workers were on hand at all times to meet any conceivable need. This

⁷ Garcia Y Griego, Manuel. *The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964: Antecedents, Operation and Legacy.*

⁸ DeGenova and Peutz. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement.*

led to a lack of work for many Braceros, as they were only paid for what they produced. Additionally, some tactics included extending contracts in case the worker were needed in the future, but this provided no pay for the worker until that hypothetical work began. In these instances, the workers, who were now bound by law to their employers, were being used as a way to compensate for the ambiguous and inexact needs of agricultural production.⁹ Employers keeping Braceros at their disposal exploits their position as employers. The contracted agreement to only pay Braceros for what they produced and then not giving them any work is manipulating the system and detrimentally hurting the worker. This is one motivation that led to an increasingly large number of ‘skips’ during the early Bracero years.

The lack of satisfactory living conditions and unfair pay was another motivation that led many Braceros to seek other means of compensation and living. Some migrants would use the Bracero program as a legal method of getting into the country, and then “skip” their contracts in order to find better employment or living situations not regulated by any contract. This was a risky decision because the guest worker would officially become an undocumented immigrant (aka, a skip) when they abandoned their contract, and therefore risked deportation, arrest, and blacklisting from the Bracero Program entirely.¹⁰ Depending on where the migrant was located, becoming a ‘skip’ could be difficult because of their race and growing anti-Mexican rhetoric spreading throughout the country.

Some additional tactics of control included by employers included management of living

⁹ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 82.

¹⁰ Cordia, Madelina M. “They Came for the Harvest: The Bracero Program in Jackson County, Oregon, 1951-1955.” Oregon Historical Society - *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (Vol. 120, Issue 2), 2019. <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/ps/retrieve.do.org>

conditions, food and water rations, travel arrangements, permissions for social engagements, supervision both on and off site, etc. Calavita notes that, “It was the predictability of the bracero that made him preferable to the illegal worker. To realize this advantage, the bracero’s captive status had to be rigorously maintained.¹¹” When given the ability to control the everyday lives of another person, power and control is being given only to the employer. The Bracero is being exploited because of their inability to advocate for themselves within a system designed to purposefully stifle them. This method of control and exploitation has historically been essential to the economic success of employers of migrant workers in the United States.

The governing officials and employers intentionally kept Bracero workers isolated from American communities. This led to a growing national attention and public hostility towards Mexican workers thus created a xenophobic perception for these people who were being vilified for simply being in a country, which they were legally invited to work in. Because of this isolation, Braceros who remained in contracts had little interaction with American communities and therefore faced discrimination and lacked social skills needed to assimilate to American culture. Most Mexican migrants kept to themselves and continued to work in spite of the growing discrimination because of their dire need for money.

While the Bracero Program did provide an opportunity for chosen workers to send the money they earned back to their families, it was also designed this way purposefully. Families were intentionally not allowed to enter the United States with the employed Bracero to incentivize their eventual return to Mexico. Additionally, a percentage of their wages were taken out of paychecks and would be returned to the bracero when they left the US, which often never happened for many

¹¹ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 81.

workers. These two examples of exploitation and control are methods of intended submission. By withholding earned wages and holding those payment over their heads made for an incredibly stressful and unfair situation in which Braceros were at times working for very limited funds. The United States and Mexican government's attempt to control migrant workers did not always work as planned with many abandoning their employer and working illegally, but this of course put them in legal jeopardy. According to Nicholas DeGenova, "It is precisely their distinctive legal vulnerability, their putative "illegality" and official exclusion, that inflames the irrepressible desire and demand for undocumented migrants as a highly exploitable workforce—and thus ensures their enthusiastic importation and subordinate incorporation."¹² The fear of deportation and not being able to provide for their families was a driving factor in controlling migrant workers and exploiting their economic utility.

Mexican migrant farmers were regarded as docile and obedient, which facilitated their exploitation at the hands of their American agricultural employers. "Farmers' labeling of *braceros* as "docile" created a separation based on class and race between the American farmers and the Mexican laborers."¹³ In the book, *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, Nicholas De Genova discusses the problems with power of the state, sovereignty, and space that has been minimized due to deportation practices, in relation to freedom of movement as a way of life and of living labor, therefore the two conditions needed for a successful social life among immigrants entering the United States and other countries around the world. De

¹² De Genova, Nicholas. *Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life* (Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 2002), 438-439.

¹³ Butler, Tracy A. *Gender, Labor, and Capitalism in U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1942-2000*, (Ohio University, 2009), 13.

Genova argued that the major characteristics of deportation as a phenomenon is that it is a regime that works to exploit and discipline the laboring classes in the service of capitalism. To formulate this theory, he draws on principles from several prominent theorists. First, he takes the ideas of power from Foucault, determining it is an essential component of human productivity and possibility that is separate from the power derived from sovereign states that abuse it. He stresses the instability of power saying it is related to freedom of movement which the state believes they must control. Next, he draws from Marx, who identified what human beings collectively are capable of and how they can transform a situation to better themselves. Finally, De Genova draws from Agamben's concept of bare life, which can best be understood through the "articulation between [human life as] nature and [human life as] culture,"¹⁴ giving a distinction between inclusion and exclusion and saying bare life, is created by sovereign power and established by political machines. The most basic of lives in human existence is how one sustains oneself through labor. Deportation and immigration laws politicize this process and manipulate the need for sustenance, therefore producing profit or surplus for capitalist elites and fostering the economic goals of the country. The Bracero Program therefore highlights the vulnerability of migrant workers whose freedom of movement and labor are strictly regulated in order for employers and policymakers to achieve their goals.

The Bracero Program led the to a diminished social life of the people involved given this logic. Karl Marx's explanation of the capitalist labor process is frequently used to understand the relationship between American agricultural employers and migrant Mexican workers, and many

¹⁴ DeGenova, Nicholas, and Nathalie Mae Peutz. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010, 37.

would regard the Bracero Program as instrumental in developing and expanding an entirely capitalist labor process. The program created a for-profit system of control. This point is further articulated in the article *Causes of Convergence in Western Immigration Control*, by Eytan Meyers which notes that in relation to the World System's Theory under a Marxist approach, Portes and Walton argue that: "In general, the function of migrant labor has not been as conventional economics suggests to increase the supply of labor, but rather to increase the supply of cheap labor ... the role of immigrants has frequently been to counteract the organizational efforts of domestic workers and to substitute the latter in areas where labor costs have become high... In general, the weaker the legal standing of immigrant workers, the more employers can make use of political threats, including deportation, to obtain compliance."¹⁵ The goal being to yield as much labor as possible from the migrant, but investing as little as possible in their living expenses and well-being by maintaining fear as a means to control migrant behavior. When domestic employees become too expensive, employers will turn to migrants because they will work the same job for less money, as it is likely their best and only option. Forced compliance achieved by playing on the fears and needs of migrants is exploitation.

From 1948 through 1951, the Bracero Program was "tailor-made to the demands of growers."¹⁶ During this time there was minimal enforcement of laws that upheld contracted rules or civil liberties, coupled with the widespread hiring of illegal migrants by employers. The INS and other involved agencies neglected responsibilities and passively allowed employers to do as

¹⁵ Meyers, Eytan. "The Causes of Convergence in Western Immigration Control." *Review of International Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 123–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097782>.

¹⁶ Craig, Richard B. *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups & Foreign Policy*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971, 55.

they pleased. The rampant illegal immigration hirings and evidence of exploitation were ignored for the sake of the capitalist economy and unspoken intention of keeping the upper-class individuals, wealthy at any cost.

The first decade of the Bracero Program served its purpose in maintaining economic stability during and immediately after World War II. Employers found loopholes in the initial agreements which allowed for them to manipulate the economic utility of braceros and ignore their basic human necessities that had been determined in the official agreement. These years were crucial for the establishment of immigration policies in the United States. Policymakers and employers recognized the significance of controlling patterns of migration and understood the value in playing on migrant fears of deportability. These factors encouraged the continuity of the Bracero Program and became a staple for future policies that ultimately determined economic success trumped obvious exploitation.

Chapter 3: Bracero Program 1951-1964

In 1951 the Bracero Program was set to expire as a war-time labor shortage program after nearly a decade. It was then that the United States Congress established Public Law 78 (PL-78), which built upon the Agricultural Act of 1949 and determined the continuity of the Bracero Program. According to Richard Craig, the new legislation, “enabled an agency of the United States government to recruit Mexican braceros, and to make the United States government guarantor of individual work contracts.”¹ This was a response to the Mexican government’s demand that the United States resolve the irregularity of the Bracero Program and uphold the terms of the arrangement. Additionally, the law gave the Secretary of Labor authority to determine when the United States needed Mexican labor and to oversee the daily operation and legal requirements outlined in the initial Bracero Program. Prior to the creation of a Bracero contract this person needed to certify the existence of a labor shortage, there would be no adverse effect on workers in local communities, and the employer made the effort to pay braceros and citizens reasonably similar wages.² One obvious problem with these statements is the broad language and lack of definitive guidelines. PL-78 also sought to deter employers from hiring illegal migrants by threatening to prohibit their engagement in the Bracero Program yet did not include any determination on fines or penalties for violating these terms. This vague and ambiguous language is a primary reason for the continued exploitation of Bracero workers at the hands of capitalism.

After years of rampant manipulation of the official Bracero agreement between Mexico and the United States, there was now a call for accountability of all parties involved. The required

¹ Craig, Richard B. *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups & Foreign Policy*, 55.

² Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 47.

accommodations outlined in the agreement were only reinforced in 1951 with President Truman's Commission on Migratory Labor that aided in the expansion of the Bracero Program with the justification that the Korean War was escalating, and the United States would, again, need cheap labor to keep the economy stable.³ PL-78 was the article that reestablished the role of the state as a contractor for farm labor. This law now required a minimum 38 cent wage for braceros and called for the improvement of unsanitary living condition and called for an end to mistreatment and labor abuses by employers.⁴ As Calavita notes, "The Bracero Program represented the entry of the state into the regulation and management of cheap labor for agriculture."⁵ Of course many of the grower's allies in Congress encouraged this continuation because of the cheap labor they were receiving. Although the program was considered 'formalized' at this time it still allowed for the Immigration Service vast control and flexibility to shape the Bracero Program and maximize the economic value for agricultural employers.

PL-78 "increased predictability and control into the contract labor system" however it also brought illegal immigration to the forefront of American politics.⁶ It had become clear to the American people that the government had taken a major role in facilitating the regulation and management of a system for cheap labor. Most prominently the short-term advantages of employing illegal workers inexpensively, became problematic in the long run by threatening the stability of the contract labor system. Employers began hiring illegal migrants that were not

³ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 3.

⁴ Cordia, Madelina M. "They Came for the Harvest: The Bracero Program in Jackson County, Oregon, 1951-1955."

⁵ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 49.

⁶ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 49.

controlled by the government, for even cheaper wages than the Bracero hires. This led to an influx of illegal border crossings and skips in the agricultural communities. The President's Commission on Migratory Labor (1951) concluded, "The magnitude of wetback traffic has reached entirely new levels in the past 7 years. In its newly achieved proportions, it is virtually an invasion. The wetback traffic has reached such proportions in volume and in consequent chaos, it should not be neglected any longer."⁷ Inflammatory statements such as these received much attention from the media and outraged the American people. The use of the term wetback to describe a Mexican person living within the United States and presuming their illegality, resulted in widespread stereotyping of the Mexican people. Further statements claimed that Mexican workers had "severely depressed farm wages" and were responsible for "labor competition and displacement" of legal United States residents seeking employment, furthering outrage among citizens who held very little understanding of the elusive contract labor system the United States government had created.⁸ According to Jock Young, "No other group than the immigrant has the power to mobilise prejudice and the magical ability to explain away problems inherent in the host society. For he or she is an alien other, a carrier of problems into the First World rather than a group who are most blatantly exposed to the problems inherent in the First World."⁹ The United States government had invited these migrant workers into the country for their own benefit and placed the economic goals of the country above the needs. They were intentionally paid very little, and their fears of

⁷ President's Commission, 1951, 69. From Calavita, *Inside the State*, 50.

⁸ President's Commission, 1951, 69. From Calavita, *Inside the State*, 50.

⁹ Young, Jock. *The Vertigo of Late Modernity*. United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, 2007, 131. From Brotherton, David C and Laura Naegler. "Jock Young and Social Bulimia: Crime and the Contradictions of Capitalism," *Theoretical Criminology* 2014 18:4, 441-449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480614557194>.

deportability and impoverishment were exploited to keep them quiet and easy to control. Now the government and media started demonizing these same individuals.

Now that PL-78 allowed for the conversion to a peace-time contract labor system, the regulation and control of the Bracero Program and illegal immigration needed to be addressed. The President's Commission on Migratory Labor report presented exaggerated statistics regarding the surge of illegal migration. The report garnered media attention and became national news. The *New York Times* published an article blaming the "illegal aliens" for lower wages and increased crime rates.¹⁰ Sensational and misleading articles like this painted a larger target on the back of Mexican people, legal or not.

In attempt to reduce the influx of illegal immigration, in 1953 a study by the GI Forum of Texas and the Texas State Federation of Labor published an article titled, "What Price Wetbacks?" The following inflammatory excerpt describes the assumed qualities of Mexican migrants commanding the national attention at the time:

The vast majority of wetbacks are plain agricultural workers including women and children, mostly from the peasant class in Mexico. They are humble, amenable, easily dominated and controlled, and accept exploitation with the fatalism characteristic of their class. A common term applied to them is Guanajuato Joe, for the Mexican State of Guanajuato which supplies a large percentage of wetbacks apprehended in farm work. This type of wetback wants only to find work on a farm, mind his own business and be left alone

¹⁰ Hill, Gladwin. "Millions a Year Flee Mexico Only to Find Peonage Here." *New York Times*. March 25, 1951: 41. <https://www.nytimes.com/1951/03/25/archives/million-a-year-flee-mexico-only-to-find-peonage-here-illegal.html>.

by the Border Patrol. He accepts good or bad treatment, starvation wages, diarrhea and other sickness for his children from contaminated drinking water and un-sanitary living conditions-all this he accepts stolidly and philosophically. He does not think in terms of native labor displacement, lowering of economic standards and the socio-economic effects of his presence in the U. S. Ideologies are beyond his comprehension. He understands only his way of life: to work, to suffer, and to pray to the Virgen de Guadalupe for a better life in the hereafter. Another distinct type involves the so-called Pachucos, to be differentiated from residents of the United States who during wartime were given the same descriptive term because of their zoot-suit wearing apparel. The wetback Pachucos subdivide roughly into two classes. In one are found the criminals, the marijuana peddlers and users, the falsifiers of identity documents, the smugglers, the prostitutes and the homosexuals. The other class takes in those of higher intelligence with trade or partial professional backgrounds who are not interested in agricultural work and will not accept parole to such work when apprehended, usually in the act of being smuggled to the northern industrial centers. This class is motivated by the desire to get to the urban and industrial areas of the northern, northcentral, and western areas of the country where the possibility of detection and apprehension by immigration authorities is slim and where earnings are larger.¹¹

Widespread reports such as this created further polarization of Mexican immigrants. Articles like these perfectly exemplify Robinson's determination that a state can exploit and control certain populations. There is a direct intention to sew division between migrant workers and American

¹¹ Hadley, Eleanor M. "A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem - JSTOR." Duke University School of Law, n.d. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1190507>.

citizens. The contents of this except further racializes and isolates Mexican workers living in the United States and directly contributes to a fear of downward social mobility. Misconceptions and complete lack of understanding the stories of Mexican migrants led to further exploitation by painting them out as the problem. The reality of the situation was being overlooked. Most American citizens did not recognize that these people had been actively encouraged to work in the United States for decades, legally and illegally. The inconsistent messaging created a constant state of confusion and fear for Mexican workers simply trying to improve their livelihood. Some policymakers even consistently claimed that illegal immigration was one of the nation's gravest problems and stoked fears of Mexican migrants straying from agricultural jobs to take the jobs of highly skilled workers in urban areas, spreading disease, and frequently equating Mexican migrants to contributing to any conceivable problem in American society.

The Bracero Program ultimately triggered Mexico's indefinite financial reliance on the United States, as well as the influx of illegal Mexican immigrants. The sheer number of illegal migrants fostered an immense economic dependence upon the United States. When the Bracero Program began, the number of Mexicans seeking employment in the United States was astounding. Labor contracts were given to some of those people, who were then able to travel to the border and cross legally with support of the United States government. However, those who did not receive contracts found themselves desperate for work and therefore forced to cross the border illegally. According to Deborah Cohen, nearly 1.5 million Mexican migrants had illegally entered the United States and begun working in the Bracero Program by 1952.¹² The number of visas rose from 6,372

¹² Cohen, Deborah. "Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State's Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942-1954," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20 (Spring 2001), 115.

in 1951 to 50,772 in 1955; 42% of those visas were given to agricultural laborers.¹³

In 1954, Immigration Commissioner General, Joseph Swing told the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization, “The problem now is so much larger. They [illegal immigrants] are doing great harm to our economic situation and industry. In the interior of the country there are thousands who came over here as itinerant farmhands. They very soon learn our ways and our customs, and they infiltrate.”¹⁴ Xenophobic ideals and fears of “the other” were exacerbated during this time, especially because the United States was now engaged in the Cold War and the media and government leaders were villainizing non-Americans, including Mexican people. General Swing led the Eisenhower Administration in militarizing the US-Mexican border in response to growing disdain for the INS and continuant media and public criticism. At this time, the American public was becoming aware of the exploitative and corrupt practices used by employers in the American Southwest. This, coupled with the perceived inability of INS officials to curb illegal entries and hirings in the United States led to the conception and implementation of Operation Wetback.

On June 9, 1954, Attorney General Brownell initiated Operation Wetback, calling for police across the nation to detain any suspected illegal Mexicans and bring them to Border Patrol agents for deportation. The main purpose of the operation was curtailing the flow of illegal migration from Mexico into the United States. Ultimately, this was the biggest mass deportation of undocumented workers in United States. The operation was designed to find as many

¹³ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 81.

¹⁴ Quoted in U.S. Congress. Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Committee on the Judiciary, 1954, 4. From Calavita, *Inside the State*, 52.

undocumented Mexicans as possible and remove them from the United States. Operation Wetback utilized militant strategies to remove perceived Mexican illegal immigrants. Even those who had legally entered the United States through joint immigration programs, namely the Bracero Program, or actually had legal citizenship but looked Mexican were to be removed from the country as a result of the obvious racial profiling. This is a direct violation of civil liberties and shows the exploitation Mexican migrants endured at the hands of discriminatory immigration policies, which had invited them to work in the United States in the first place. The apprehended individuals were bussed to the interior of Mexico, to purposefully deter their return to the United States. This was confusing and incredibly traumatizing for these individuals, many of whom had never been to these drop off locations and had little money or any additional resources to easily return home. In total nearly 1.3 million people were forcefully deported to Mexico, whether they were contracted workers, legal, or illegal.

The Mexican government was facing a labor shortage within their own country at the time and aided United States border patrol agents and immigration officials in an organized effort to remove the migrants. This was done with military tactical operations and by manufacturing widespread racial stereotypes to justify the brutal treatment those being deported were experiencing. Hundreds of thousands of migrants were forced onto planes, boats, or buses and shipped off to random parts of Mexico that most people were unfamiliar with. From this point these deported people struggled to find families, attain employment, and ultimately rebuild their lives or attempt to re-enter the United States again. Whereas the United States had once portrayed Mexican laborers as the most useful and efficient workers, there was a huge rise in anti-Mexican sentiment which unfairly portrayed these hard-working people as disease ridden, irresponsible, and dirty. The change in tone on immigration policies dictated the way in which these people were

being treated. People who had legally been welcomed and encouraged to enter, reside, and work in the United States for years were now being hit with contradictory information and dispositions, exemplifying how they were being manipulated and abused by employers and governing agencies the way immigration policies allowed after being exploited for their labor for years.

Prior to commencing Operation Wetback, General Swing met with employers to assure them their illegal workers would be replaced with legal Mexican or domestic workers, attempting to create a cooperative dynamic between employers and the Department of Labor. One purpose of this operation was to discourage employers from hiring and harboring illegal workers. Employers were truly benefitting from hiring illegal workers which was in turn beneficial to the overall American economy, yet on paper the United States could not state that illegal workers were permitted to remain in the country. The commencement of Operation Wetback was not well received by employers and many lawmakers rejected it because of the invasion-like and militaristic procedures to forcefully remove illegal workers. With members of congress now sympathizing with employers, Operation Wetback could not continue. Congress failed to pass any legislation that would hold employers accountable or allow punishment for hiring illegal workers. Once again, immigration policymakers allowed the needs of employers to remain their top priority and the Mexican people were the target of an unclear policy that kept them in a constant state of fear and confusion.

According to INS reports, approximately 1.1 million Mexican workers wound up leaving the country voluntarily during the Operation Wetback invasion.¹⁵ The operation was received

¹⁵ Lytle Hernandez, Kelly. "Operation Wetback (1953-1954)." Immigration History. The University of Texas at Austin College of Liberal Arts - History Department, September 9, 2019. <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/operation-wetback/>.

positively by the uneducated and misinformed American public. Following Operation Wetback, the Bracero Program remained a primary contract labor source in the United States, despite the growing criticism on all sides of the political aisle and within activist communities. In the end, illegal immigration was momentarily discouraged, but did not mitigate the demand for a cheap labor force among the agricultural and railroad employers. Therefore, the Bracero Program remained in place for another 10 years and illegal immigration continued as well. The hotly contested debate regarding illegal immigration and undocumented workers has remained a quintessential topic in American politics through the 21st century. Abuse of the Bracero workers also continued unchecked and was more or less brushed under the rug when brought to the attention of employers and law makers.

In 1956, Ernesto Galarza published *Strangers in Our Fields*, which exposed the abuses occurring in the early years of the Bracero Program. During this time the number of Mexican workers legally entering the United States for employment in the agricultural fields had increased annually, as well as the number of illegal workers that had also entered the country.¹⁶ Galarza discusses that the provisions agreed upon in PL-78 in accordance with the international agreement between the United States and Republic of Mexico were being ignored, pointing to the purposeful oversight of employing a compliance officer or representative for the Bracero's to voice their complaints and report employers for neglecting their responsibility to provide the agreed upon basics needed for survival. He writes that many of the abuses of Bracero workers occurs because

¹⁶ Galarza, Ernesto. *Strangers in Our Fields: Based on a Report Regarding Compliance with the Contractual, Legal, and Civil Rights of Mexican Agricultural Contract Labor in the United States, Made Possible through a Grant-in-Aid from the Fund for the Republic*. Washington, D.C.: United States Section, Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, 1956.

of the cracks in the Bracero Program itself. Employers were able to profit from the “confusion, shortcomings, and often the congenital blindness” in which the program was designed. As previously noted, there are many loopholes and blind spots purposefully added to American immigration policies that contradict the intended purpose of many agreements. The initial agreed upon terms included exemption of braceros engaging in the military service, they would not face any discriminatory practices, and that Mexican labor laws, which provide basic standards of living and working conditions, would be adhered to. On paper, the international agreements and amendments required employers to recognize the civil rights of their workers, yet in reality this was far from what was actually being practiced. In this book, Galarza details some of the firsthand conversations he had with braceros in which they detailed their experiences. Many recalled being stripped of their identity and being called by a number, instead of their name. Many felt stuck within the bounds of their contract and experienced a major lack of autonomy. This is the reason many bracero workers felt it better to risk deportation and ‘skip’ out on contracts. Galarza says that ultimately, “The Wetback is more free. Legal contract workers, cheated and exploited, find that they cannot change jobs freely, or seek better conditions or pay, while even the illegal wetback reserves that privilege.”¹⁷ Employers caused this issue, and simultaneously hired illegal workers because they could do so for cheaper and with no legal obligation to provide basic human necessities for them. This exploitative system allowed employers to avoid the almost non-existent threat of penalties from the government and continue employing undocumented workers who would work for less and be even more controllable.

¹⁷ Galarza, Ernesto. *Strangers in Our Fields*, 20.

The provisions of Article 2 of PL-78 determined, "The employer is to provide, free of charge, "hygienic lodgings adequate to the climactic conditions of the area of employment." Lodgings are to include blankets, beds, and mattresses "when necessary." Overcrowding of camps is prohibited. The contract briefly states that the employer shall furnish sanitary facilities. "The Employer also agrees to comply with such housing standards as may be prescribed jointly by the United States and Mexico."¹⁸ This language does not clarify and define 'necessary' which is essentially a loophole for employers to determine what they should or shouldn't provide their workers. They can argue that basic standards of living are not necessary should they ever be asked, which in turn means they will not be punished for these actions. The law is clearly allowing for the neglect of basic human rights.

Galarza's work is important because he spoke to the people experiencing the mistreatment and abuse perpetrated by the United States immigration policies and documented their stories. Some notable quotes from Bracero workers detailed in this book truly show the depravity of the situation in which these human beings were living. "There are no stoves in our camp, and I have to sleep in my work clothes."¹⁹ Workers describe how the lack of running water meant they could not clean their clothing or even shower for days at a time. This led to incredibly unsanitary living condition and increase chance for the spread of disease. One man spoke of an inspector from the government coming to check on the living conditions and demanding the employer fix the problems. He said this was the only way things for fixed but even then, there was no punishment on the employer, and he claimed the "contractor is not afraid of the inspector."²⁰ The idea that

¹⁸ Galarza, Ernesto. *Strangers in Our Fields*, 25.

¹⁹ Galarza, Ernesto. *Strangers in Our Fields*, 22.

²⁰ Galarza, Ernesto. *Strangers in Our Fields*, 23.

there was not truly a person looking out for their wellbeing and enforcing the Programs requirements led allowed for the continued exploitation of these men. The Mexican consuls were not even inspecting labor camps prior to sending their citizens and there was no follow up either. Some described the cramped bunkhouses with hundreds of men and the possibility of sleeping in tents outside when the bunks were full. Another man said, "We have been in the cotton picking since the cold weather began. We have only one blanket. We march up and down to keep warm. The camp prohibits fires in the street." Galarza notes that the cabins were not provided with heaters and often Braceros would attempt to board up broken windows with paper to keep out the cold drafts. These workers seldom complained to higher authorities for fear of retribution. Many endured the horrid conditions because they needed the money to help family members back in Mexico and feared deportation or wage retention.

In the book *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, Calavita describes how the Bracero Program reveals the inconsistencies and ambiguities of state action. She claims the Immigration Naturalization Service's policy was the product of institutional needs, in addition to the demands from the capitalist class. She finds that at this time, United States' governing bodies were plagued with internal division and held competing policy agendas. The Bracero program treats immigration enforcement as a strategy for regulating legal flows of temporary migrant labor and the flows of undocumented migration that grew alongside those flows. Calavita explains how "border enforcement operations of the Bracero era were adapted to fluctuations in the labor market supply of migrant workers, with removals increasing when there was a perceived surplus of laborers, and removals decreasing during periods of employer demand

for this labor.”²¹

By the time the Bracero Program ended in 1964, it had brought millions of Mexican workers to agricultural growers and ranchers throughout the southwestern United States. The influx of illegal border crossings and agricultural workers was monumental. This had many negative impacts on farm wages, working conditions, and labor relations. However, as Calavita notes, “For the growers the program had been a dream: a seemingly endless supply of cheap, unorganized workers brought to their doorstep by the government.”²² When the program ended, many problems arose. There was now an excess of “illegal” agriculture workers. Some braceros returned to their native countries, however others, unable to survive financially in Mexican communities, would continue to cross the border illegally and find work on farms and ranches in the United States. The Bracero’s were, and remain, one of the most exploited labor groups in United States history. As part of the original contract, “For such time as they are unemployed under a period equal to 75% of the period for which the workers have been contracted, they shall receive a subsistence allowance at the rate of \$3.00 per day. The respective agencies of the Government of the U.S. shall be responsible of the safekeeping of the sums contributed by the Mexican workers toward the formation of their Rural Savings Fund. The Mexican government will take care of the security of the savings of the workers.”²³ This savings amount was agreed to be 10% of all wages and would be withheld and given to the Mexican government to hold and eventually return to the

²¹ Brotherton, David, and Philip Kretsedemas. *Immigration Policy in the Age of Punishment Detention, Deportation, and Border Control*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018, 13.

²² Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 3.

²³ OAC (Online Archive of California). “Farm Security Administration Reports and Miscellaneous Documents, 1942-1943.” UC Libraries, powered by the California Digital Library, n.d. <https://oac.cdlib.org/>.

worker when they returned to Mexico. However, most workers never received any form of compensation and lived in poverty, having fallen victim to the corruption, abandonment, and exploitation from both the Mexican and American governments.

From the beginning, the Bracero Program was riddled with controversy. While the American agricultural community championed the cheap surplus of migrant labor, there were numerous groups who deeply opposed the entry of migrant workers. Those opposed included, “domestic workers and anti-immigrant forces. Anti-immigrant groups in the U.S. sometimes point to the Bracero program as leading to a wave of mass undocumented immigration. The migrant labor movement, including Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers, opposed the program because of its exploitation of workers. Mexican agri-businesses and agricultural unions were also opposed the program, on the grounds that it not only drained the Mexican economy of agricultural workers but allowed the U.S. to develop a surplus of crops such as cotton, which then hurt the price of Mexican cotton on the market.”²⁴ Although the Bracero Program came with a litany of opposition, it lasted 22 years in spite of the controversy and exploitation occurring during that time. During this time, policymakers continued to cast a blind eye solely because American business prospered.

In *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Mae Ngai details the origins of the “illegal alien” within America to better understand how and why illegal migrations have become a problem at the forefront of immigration policy in the United States and has aided in the social exclusion of these people living within American society. Ngai demonstrates

²⁴ American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, “Background Information about the Bracero Program,” *SHEC: Resources for Teachers*, <https://shcp.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/532>.

that quotas and national origin are two prime examples of the restrictive nature of American immigration policies that were exacerbated by the creation of categorizing racial differences and stressing the country's borders and border patrol mechanisms. This was used by the United States government when the Bracero Program began and led to the massive influx of Mexican laborers entering the United States illegally. Ngai determines that the terms used to describe immigrants are not used to further racial divides and misconceptions, but instead to determine the origin of one's nationality. For example, she states that 'illegal alien' by immigration law is called an 'impossible subject.'²⁵ This essentially insinuates that they are subjects who do not have rights and are excluded from attaining citizenship. The United States government purposefully used the phrase Operation Wetback for their immigration/deportation policy for this removal. Once again, it is important to note the term wetback is an offensive phrase intentionally utilized to provoke discriminatory treatment of Mexican people. This is both a social reality and a legal impossibility and is yet another contradictory immigration and deportation tactic that impacts the lives of immigrants in the United States while they are continuously exploited for cheap labor and economic profitability.

Ngai argues that one cannot be understood without simultaneously understanding the possibility and threat of deportation always lurking in the back of their mind. "The possibility derives from the actual existence of state machinery to apprehend and deport illegal aliens. The threat remains in the temporal and spatial "lag" that exists between the act of unlawful entry and apprehension or deportation. The many effects of the lag include the psychological and cultural

²⁵ Ngai Mae. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton University 2004, 5.

problems associated with “passing” or “living a lie,” community vulnerability and isolation, and the use of undocumented workers as a highly exploited or reserve labor force.²⁶ Examining the policy and practice of deportation provides an understanding of how illegal immigration is controlled by the state machinery (the United States government) and allows for it to be used a means of control to ensure exploitation of migrant labor can continue. This became a psychological tool of fear of deportation which created terror amongst immigrants in the United States.

Nicholas DeGenova argues that the major characteristic of deportation as a phenomenon is that it is a regime that works to discipline the laboring classes in service of capitalism. In relation to the Bracero Program, the United States government can be seen as the regime that was exploiting the migrant workers in service of economic advancement of the employer and the country’s larger capitalist agendas. This is a form of worker exploitation. In *Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life*, DeGenova writes, “Subjection to quotidian forms of intimidation and harassment reinforces undocumented migrants’ vulnerability as a highly exploitable workforce. Yet the disciplinary operation of an apparatus for the everyday production of migrant “illegality” is never simply intended to achieve the putative goal of deportation. It is deportability, and not deportation per se, that has historically rendered undocumented migrant labor a distinctly disposable commodity.”²⁷ The presence of undocumented migrant workers in

²⁶ Ngai, Mae M. “The Strange Career of the Illegal Alien: Immigration Restriction and Deportation Policy in the United States, 1921-1965.” *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3595069>.

²⁷ De Genova, Nicholas. *Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life*. Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, 2002, 438-439.

the United States has long been equated as a group of people seen as temporary and disposable, who's cheap labor can be exploited. The exploitation borne during the Bracero Program is evidence that this theory is present in United States immigration practices. The rampant abuses and conflicting policy stances created a factor of deportability among Bracero workers and proved to be an effective method of control and terror over a group of people. The Bracero Program has had a lasting impact on the American immigration system. The economic advantage of controlling immigration patterns became evident during the Bracero years and remains an effective method of exploitation in modern day immigration policies.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Immigration policies in the United States enable systems of control by focusing on the exploitability and deportability of human-beings. In the twenty-two years of the Bracero Program, millions of people were involved in elaborate contracts which included a wide range of contingencies for wages, housing, working conditions, etc.¹ Bracero workers bound by these contracts had earnings withheld and were told they would receive the wages upon return to Mexico. This very rarely happened, and many workers had to participate in lawsuits demanding repayment of these wages, which took years to settle. The complete exploitation of these individuals, coupled with the inability to reconcile clear civil rights violations led to the eventual demise of the program. However, even though the Bracero Program ended in 1964, it left a lasting legacy on the United States' immigration policies.

According to Doris Meissner, the Bracero Program, “Spawned and institutionalized networks and labor market relationships between Mexico and The United States. These ties continued and became the foundation for today’s illegal migration from Mexico.”² The influx of illegal migration seen during the Bracero years, has continued long after the program ended as well. Although the program ended legally, migratory patterns continued. Many Mexican people still needed jobs and American employers still needed a source of cheap labor. This migration pattern is unlikely to stop anytime soon. The continued flow of illegal immigration to the United States from Mexico remains prevalent today.

¹ Meissner, Doris. “U.S. Temporary Worker Programs: Lessons Learned.” Migration Policy Institute, March 4, 2004. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/us-temporary-worker-programs-Lessons-learned>.

² Meissner, Doris. “U.S. Temporary Worker Programs: Lessons Learned.”

The abuses and exploitation of migrant workers that occurred during the Bracero Program years exemplifies how the United States government prioritizes economic profitability over the livelihood of human-beings. Control was, and remains, an appealing prospect for employers who have utilized cheap labor. Employers benefitted significantly, resulting in strong backing of the American economy which is why many politicians pushed for the continuity of the program and turned a blind eye to the numerous cries of abuse occurring across the country.

Bracero workers were put into situations where they were purposefully exploited. They were made to feel vulnerable by employers who created a fear of deportation and peonage through means of coercion and manipulation. They endured poor living and working conditions, negligible compensation, and endured frequent racist experiences, when they'd been legally promised a safe space to live and fair compensation for their hard work. This combination was the exact formula Robinson and Young determined necessary for control and maintenance of cheap labor. Bracero workers were purposely kept segregated from the rest of American society, with few opportunities to interact in local communities. This was incredibly polarizing and drastically effected their livelihood. Simultaneously, this polarization led to the racialization of the immigrants and allowed for the American government and media to paint these people in a negative light. The fear of downward social mobility and racial hegemonic dominance is evident in the Bracero aftermath. The continuation of the United States as a social bulimic society prevailed in the post Bracero years as well. The “pushes and pulls of the political economy with its restructuring of work, redistribution of wealth, an unmeritocratic reward system and heightening of class divisions,” remained a primary outcome of immigration exploitation within the United States.³ The themes

³ Brotherton, David C and Laura Naegler. “Jock Young and Social Bulimia: Crime and the

which became notable during the Bracero Program, continued long after its formal end. While the Bracero Program's end led to an end in the contracted labor system, policymakers learned that illegal immigration could be utilized to profit financially, so long as the illegal migrants could be controlled in the same exploitative manner.

In *The Deportation Regime*, De Genova determines that, "Migration programs represent regularizations of formerly irregular migration, which they intend to channel and govern."⁴ This logic can be utilized examining the Bracero Program. Mexican migrants working in the Southwestern United States was far from a new concept, as previously illustrated. In fact, growers had determined that these specific workers were malleable and plentiful prior to 1942, and long after the program had ended that remains true. De Genova argues that in order to truly control and govern, patterns of migration require the creation of a "social consensus and a specific rationality allowing individual and collective subjects in a society to articulate the specific conflict around migration."⁵ The ability for the United States to thrive economically during World War II was foremost the greatest concern for policymakers and this urgency could be felt by average American citizens. The United States intended to stay dominant on the world stage and needed a strong and growing economy to do so. This allowed for capitalistic employers to take advantage of that goal and influence immigration policy to fit their needs and for governing officials to look the other way when it came to the injustices and exploitation of migrant workers. This idea translated to the post Bracero era, by controlling the patterns of migration.

Contradictions of Capitalism," *Theoretical Criminology* 2014 18:4, 442.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480614557194>.

⁴ DeGenova and Peutz, *The Deportation Regime*, 128-129.

⁵ DeGenova and Peutz, *The Deportation Regime*, 128-129.

Twenty years after the dismantlement of the Bracero Program, there was once again a cry for immigration reform. By the 1980s, the contract labor system had strengthened the historical dependence of western growers on Mexican labor, leading to their use of illegal migrants instead. Once again, the balance between employing cheap labor and deterring illegal border crossings into the United States continued in its usual contradictory manner. According to Calavita, “The lack of funding to the INS, and attitude of benign neglect both in Congress and in the agency itself, the economic advantages of illegal immigration encourage a hands-off stance.”⁶ It was easier for policymakers to look the other way when the economic utility provided by illegal workers was so evident... evidently a common theme throughout the history of American immigration policy.

The United States government ultimately maintained control of the illegal migrant workers through fear during the Bracero Program and for years after. The 1981 study discussed in the book, *The Labor Market Impact of Hispanic Undocumented Workers: An Exploratory Case Study of the Garment Industry in Los Angeles County*, by Sheldon L. Maram and Stewart Long, provides evidence of employers exploiting the vulnerability of illegal immigrant’s uncertain belonging within the United States.⁷ In the case study of undocumented Hispanic women working in the Los Angeles garment industry, it was found that the employer of one garment sweatshop withheld pay for eight months without any complaints from the employees.⁸ This indicates the depth of fear and vulnerability of these people. Playing on this fear and vulnerability was how employers were

⁶ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 181.

⁷ Long, Stewart., Maram, Sheldon L. *The Labor Market Impact of Hispanic Undocumented Workers: An Exploratory Case Study of the Garment Industry in Los Angeles County*. United States: California State University, Fullerton, 1981.

⁸ San Francisco Human Rights Commission. From Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 66.

able to exploit these migrant people and maintain a cheap (nearly free) source of labor. “Responses of the 50 garment employers surveyed suggest that each employer prefers to hire Hispanic people over Black people as sewing machine operators.”⁹ Maram and Stewart determine that this is most likely a reflection of their preference for hiring undocumented workers, who they can exploit for cheap labor without fear of retribution. The likelihood of an illegal immigrant going to authorities is extremely low, due to fear of deportation. The deportability of the migrant is once again illustrated in this survey. The United States Chamber of Commerce, intending to bolster the economy and market profits, even advertised jobs in border cities knowing they were drawing in people in need of work and ultimately taking advantage of their fears of deportation by paying them very little, if at all. This case study is yet another example of capitalist priorities trumping migrant livelihood, showing that the cycle of migrant exploitation continues in American immigration policies.

In the article, *Jock Young and Social Bulimia: Crime and the Contradictions of Capitalism*, Brotherton and Naegler further discuss Young’s concept of social bulimia in relation to immigration, determining that “this society is increasingly based on a set of beliefs about the pathological nature of individuals who are cast as socially constructed human pollutants, a view of social/political control tied ideologically and institutionally to a free market myth that rationalizes the irrational ownership and distribution of wealth and resources.”¹⁰ The United States is evidently a bulimic society, as both the inclusion and exclusion of groups of people happen

⁹ Long, Stewart., Maram, Sheldon L. *The Labor Market Impact of Hispanic Undocumented Workers: An Exploratory Case Study of the Garment Industry in Los Angeles County*, v.

¹⁰ Brotherton, David C and Laura Naegler. “Jock Young and Social Bulimia: Crime and the Contradictions of Capitalism,” *Theoretical Criminology* 2014 18:4, 442.

concurrently. The Bracero Program and the immigration policies that followed it, prioritized a wealthier and whiter economic and social class of people, while simultaneously encouraging the American Dream to exploitable outsiders who could/can be manipulated to work for less money and lower working and living conditions. The capitalistic fantasy of a free market is one used to entice American's and non-citizens into thinking they have the ability to reasonably attain a higher standard of living. Because many migrant persons experience dire financial situations, they enter the United States (illegally or through contracts) in search of that better life yet fall into the exploitability trap that keeps them at the mercy of corrupt employers and policymakers.

For the United States, there were numerous drawbacks of their utilization of an illegal labor source. In theory, the Bracero Program should have brought people into the labor market and dismiss them as needed, therefore “reducing the political and fiscal costs associated with a more permanent immigrant work force.”¹¹ Ultimately, the United States government found that the supply of labor cannot simply be turned off and the influx of illegal workers continued to grow, as did the exaggerated propaganda and discrimination surrounding Mexican people. Additionally, employers were benefitting greatly from their work and these migrants are human beings. They are people who do not care about the strength and economic success of the United States profits. They care about putting food on the table for their families and giving their children a safe home to grow up. It is inhumane to take advantage of them for the sake of keeping the rich, rich. For years the United States had manipulated these people by making contradictory laws that gravely impacted their livelihoods.

Nearly a century later, the United States had to once again revisit the issue of

¹¹ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 181.

undocumented and illegal immigration as a result of immigrant work expanding within the “agricultural field, garment industry, janitorial services, constructions clean-ups, hotels, restaurants, and other seasonal minimum wage jobs, etc.”¹² In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, with provisions that once again expanded on past debates and experiences, and furthermore according to Calavita, recognized the internal inconsistencies which had reflected the contradictions permeating immigration.¹³ This law recognized the economic utility of immigrant workers. Additionally, this act made it unlawful to knowingly employ any one person unauthorized to work in the United States, employ a person without verifying their working status, or continuing to employ such an individual.¹⁴ This was an attempt to reverse the historical lack of intervention in illegal migrant labor policies and regain control of illegal migration flows into the country. On paper the law intended to curb illegal labor and hold employers accountable, yet in actuality there were many loopholes making this unlikely, another common theme in United States immigration policies. The article, “Employer Sanctions Violations: Toward a Dialectical Model of White-Collar Crime,” by Kitty Calavita, discusses a study conducted at the Center for US-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego following the implementation of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. The employers interviewed for this study were all heavily dependent on illegal migrant labor for economic success. The study highlighted those employers who violated the newest provisions of this American immigration law, and felt relatively immune from punishment, saying that the law was more symbolic. Employers noted that it was improbable that the numerous and widespread

¹² Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 7.

¹³ Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 182.

¹⁴ The University of Texas at Austin, *Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) (1986)*, 2020.

lawbreakers would see punishment. Calavita determines that “this pattern suggests that the symbolic nature of the law and subsequent violations are dialectically linked and that both stem from contradictions inherent in immigration lawmaking.”¹⁵ One employer stated, “Employers will find some way of finding cheap labor, that’s what capitalism is all about.”¹⁶ This notion has rung true throughout the history of American immigration policies and has contributed to the exploitative experiences of immigrant workers, and unfortunately equates the end of exploitation to ending capitalism.

By the 1990’s the American economic stability depended even more heavily on migrant labor as the period of “Latinization” of blue-collar jobs in America began. Robinson states that immigrants, “provided almost all of the farm labor and much of the labor for hotels, restaurants, construction, janitorial and house cleaning, childcare, domestic service, gardening and landscaping, hairdressing, delivery, meat and poultry packing, food processing, light manufacturing, retail and so on.”¹⁷ The pattern of increased dependence has continued thus into the 21st century, once again creating a contradictory position for the United States government. This contradiction is understood as the state’s need to keep the national borders open as to encourage the flow of migrant labor into the United States to maintain the cheap labor source, while simultaneously catering to immigration policies supported by the masses of uneducated

¹⁵ Calavita, Kitty. “Employer Sanctions Violations: Toward a Dialectical Model of White Collar Crime.” Wiley on behalf of the Law and Society Association, 1990, 2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3053618.pdf>.

¹⁶ Calavita, *Inside the State*, 183. From Calavita *Employer Sanctions Violations: Toward a Dialectical Model of White-Collar Crime*.

¹⁷ Robinson, William I. “The New Global Capitalism and the War on Immigrants.” Truthout, PM Press, September 13, 2013. <https://truthout.org/articles/the-new-global-capitalism-and-the-war-on-immigrants/>.

American citizens who buy into the nationalistic propaganda asserting hysterical claims of “out of control borders” and “invasions of illegal immigrants.”¹⁸ This highlights the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants, thus reasserting the United States as a bulimic society, looking to prosper off migrant labor and demonize them to gain political favor after welcoming these people into the country. On one hand, the United States economy relies on the exploitability of migrant labor forces which requires allowing undocumented persons into the country. Yet on the other, the government must manage and assure these migrants are ‘super-controlled’. Once again, policymakers find themselves in search of the perfectly balanced formula that will meet the needs of the American political, economic, and social climates. “The evolution of a social control industry with gulags, surveillance systems and constraints on civil and democratic liberties; and the porous and fluid nature of physical, social, and cultural borders,” combined with the technological advancements and growing consumer culture, have resulted in a deeply engrained form of social bulimia within the United States.¹⁹ Because of this, migrant exploitability will remain a persistent problem and has been demonstrated in all presidential administrations since the formal ending of the Bracero Program.

The debate to reform immigration policy in the United States has been hotly contested in the 21st century. In a 2013 article entitled, *The New Global Capitalism and the War on Immigrants*, William Robinson recommends a new focus on the role immigrants play in the system of global capitalism today. Robinson explains that a rise in transnational migration has occurred, as our

¹⁸ Robinson, William I. “The New Global Capitalism and the War on Immigrants.”

¹⁹ Brotherton, David C and Laura Naegler. “Jock Young and Social Bulimia: Crime and the Contradictions of Capitalism,” *Theoretical Criminology* 2014 18:4, 442.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480614557194>.

world becomes increasingly interconnected, thus resulting in the need to supply cheap labor in support of the global economy. The pool of exploitable labor is intentionally managed by controlling the flow of migration patterns and ensuring continued vulnerability of the migrant. Migrant labor is, “highly vulnerable, forced to exist semi-underground, and deportable, and therefore super-exploitable.”²⁰ Once again, a theme which has dictated immigration policies and procedures throughout American history. The United States has continued to control migrants by threatening deportation, fines, jail time and furthermore instilling a fear of speaking against injustices, while American citizens remain unaware of this problem and policymakers sidestep the issue whenever possible.

The Bracero Program has of course ended, but its legacy continues. United States immigration policies continue to take advantage of and allow for the exploitation of specific groups of people for the sole purpose of enhancing the capitalist agenda. 158 years have passed since the first immigration law was created. In this time, the United States has unrelentingly supported inexpensive labor in favor of capitalism and chose to neglect the litany of human rights violations and vast discrimination that has ensued. In the Bracero Program’s 22 years, these violations were brought to the attention of lawmakers, who had multiple opportunities to resolve issues and put an end to discriminatory practices. The legal and human rights violations were repeatedly and intentionally ignored so that the American people and economy could prosper off migrant labor.

The exploitability of the migrant has become a standard practice in the United States and the governing bodies and law-enforcement agencies have the ability to control and manipulate this

²⁰ Robinson, William I. “The New Global Capitalism and the War on Immigrants.”

labor force as needed. This long-term practice has resulted in a perpetual dependence of migrant labor in support of the American economic industrial machine. After years of continued exploitation, immigrants from Mexico continue to seek employment and a better life in the United States. These people still believe in the American Dream and have hope that they can create a more prosperous and safe life. Unfortunately, the pattern of intentional exploitation continues because of the rise of global capitalism and continued migrant support of the American economy.

The economic utility of the immigrant in the American capitalistic nation was significant in 1864, became further engrained in its economic and political agenda from 1942-1964, and remains deeply embedded in the fabric of American life today. The road to ending exploitability and empowering the immigrants who symbolize the American Dream will not be easy or happen quickly. The American populace is drastically uneducated and uninformed about the abuses triggered by capitalism, and as a result the exploitation will continue at the hands of this economic power structure. Understanding the history, patterns, and motives of United States' immigration policies can reveal the injustices of the capitalist infrastructure which is deeply entrenched in American society. In order to promulgate lasting change for migrant workers and immigrants within the United States, continued and persistent awareness and meaningful legislation is imperative and only then will the economic utility of the migrant, cease to be the basis of any person's value.

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