Defining the Mexican Other

Insights from Interwar America and Postwar Canada

Naomi Alisa Calnitsky

Abstract

This article considers two periods in American history and one in Canadian history to discern the ways in which Mexican farm labour experiences were uniquely shaped by employer preferences and desires, as well as needs and prejudices. More specifically is considers how definitions of the other were constructed around national idealizations that sought out a reshaping of labour migration or labour's repatriation in accordance with officially-oriented programs of transnational labour management. It begins with the Great Depression (ca. 1929-39), then considers the Bracero Program (1942-64) and concludes with a review of the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (1974-Present). It explores the three selected time periods together with a view towards the ways in which Mexican workforces were maintained, managed, viewed, appreciated and/or derided, as far as is discernable through the archive, a reading of secondary literature, and a selection of media studies.

Keywords

Mexican Transnational Migration; Great Depression; Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program; Bracero Program; Repatriation; Citizenship Studies

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Introduction

How have tropes, stereotypes or views towards Mexican workers played out in different historical contexts on the North American continent? How have the diverse factors of time period, location, and working landscapes impacted the ways in which employers, communities, and other hosts or directors over labour imagined their workers? How have certain continuities or threads across time and space, connected with depictions of the Mexican other, been transposed or transformed from one time and place to another, and how were such consistencies disrupted as new national, legal and social contexts emerged to reshape local contexts involving the mobility of Mexican bodies across borders? In what instances has otherness been transformed into acceptance, and to what extent has otherness in the sphere of cross-cultural labour relations and employment in North American history served as a tool for labour's agency?

The article explores three periods in American and Canadian history with a view towards the ways in which Mexican employment in both host countries was uniquely shaped by employer preferences, desires, needs and prejudices and by the

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parameters of national, officially-oriented programs of transnational labour management. It begins with a window into the Great Depression (ca. 1929-39), then moves into a discussion of the Bracero Program (1942-64) and concludes with a review of the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (1974-Present).

The Depression era is discussed by exploring findings from an archive of field data generated by the influential and pathbreaking political economist Paul Schuster Taylor, described by Linda Gordon as a "humanist-economist" (Gordon 2009, 151), whose early scholarly research into the question of Mexican labour reveals substantial evidence of the opinions and observations of employers and labour directors over Mexican agricultural, industrial and railroad workers in interwar America. Mexican labour's reception and management in the context of the American Great Depression offers a foundation, I suggest, for exploring the ways in which Mexicans and Mexican workers in particular have been 'othered' in American history more broadly, especially since this period played out as a dramatic bridge between the events of the Mexican Revolution on the one hand, which saw the influx of an estimated one million Mexicans into the United States, and the Second World War on the other, which witnessed the initiation of a large-scale program designed to arrange the importation of agricultural contract workers from areas deep within Mexico, rather than merely from the border region, as part of a bilaterally-organized, legalized labour scheme.

The management of labour emerges as a key theme of my inquiry, as it has intersected with the mobilities of workers. Labour contractors in 1920s United States functioned as early managers of labour prior to the arrival of state-led initiatives to invite in Mexican farm labour on a more massive, organized scale in 1942, and in postwar Canada, the managed movement of farm workers from the Caribbean and Mexico allowed for a circumscribed, circular migration program to bring seasonal farm

workers into contact with Canadian host communities and employers, with labour contracts coordinated specifically according to the rhythms of seasonal employment.

What this essay will do is explore these three selected time periods together, with a view towards the ways in which Mexican workforces were maintained, managed, viewed, appreciated or derided, as far as is discernable through the archive, a reading of secondary literature, and a selection of media studies. Beginning with a discussion of labour relations between the wars in the Southern United States, I mobilize the Taylor field archive to offer insight into patterns or examples of racism and discrimination that were documented in this archive, as they played out along the border, in small town settings, in the field, or in employer correspondences. After briefly surveying the period of labour management which followed (1942-64), I examine the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and its employment of migrant Mexican labour to the advantage of Canadian agriculturalists from the mid-1970s on. The Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) began recruitment from Mexico for farm labour contracts in four Canadian provinces in 1974: Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Manitoba. It has since expanded to include other provinces, including British Columbia in 2004.

Not the first study of Mexican labour to adopt a chronologically wide approach to the topic to distill an informed historical interpretation, I mirror the approach taken in Mize and Swords' *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA*, which adopts a broad timeline (1942–2009) to locate transitions in the consumption of Mexican labour power on the North American continent beyond Mexico (2011). In Mexican agricultural labour history, each period or development that preceded the next always proved transformative or foundational. Just as one cannot properly understand the era of accelerated undocumented migration (early 1970s to the present) without considering the Bracero era that preceded it, one might find it difficult

to understand the historical weight and import of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in isolation. I begin with the Great Depression period, yet the period prior to it, defined by the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17, was formative in creating the conditions for labour relations of the late 1920s throughout the American South, Southwest, and even Midwest. Of equal significance were developments in U.S.-Mexico relations that took place a century earlier, which will remain beyond the scope of this discussion. These, and even earlier events linked to Spanish colonialism and Amerindian collaboration and resistance are equally informative when considering the evolution of Mexican American identity and historical experience broadly defined. The *tejano* or Texan-Mexican community occupies a particularly instrumental place in the story of post-Bellum American labour relations and would become critical in shaping the textures of internal labour migration involving the Midwest and Pacific Northwest regions.[1] "Erased" histories, such as those linked to the lynching of Mexican Americans in the American West alongside the targeting of African Americans, can also be viewed as a key, if unrecognized component of the post-Bellum cross-cultural relations of the American South (Gonzales-Day 2006). As David William Foster writes, "the fact that we no longer hang men of color or acquiesce in their lunching should not obscure the fact that police violence against people of color outstrips the violence directed toward white people..." (2017, 151).

[1] Mario Jimenez Sifuentez' work also points to the broader emergence of a Tejano diaspora in the Pacific Northwest, and more specifically the emergence of a Mexican-Texan or Tejano community in Oregon (2016, 2, 36-58). There also emerged a complementary, cross-cultural collaboration between Mexican Texans and Nisei (second-generation Japanese) farming communities in Eastern Oregon, among whom, Mexican farmworkers found a "strong ally" (Sifuentez, 3, 36-8).

La Frontera and the Borders of Social History: Nineteenth Century Bases of Chicano Identity Formation and Labour History

Tejano culture, as Andrés Tijerina suggests, was born out of conflict and upheaval.[2] The *tejanos* were essentially colonizers of the northern reaches of New Spain who had developed a "distinctive" culture that sprang from their positioning on the *frontera* and, for a short period of time in the early decades of the nineteenth century, along the fringes of the young independent or post-colonial Mexican state (Tijerina 1996, 33). As political maneuverings for the transfer of lands took hold during the era of the Texas Republic, *tejanos* were increasingly compelled to sacrifice land through "bogus lawsuits, fraudulent sheriff's auctions, and other forced transfers of title" (Lack 1996, 95). Despite losses, they retained an "allegiance" to their religion and culture in the face of Anglo-American penetration (Poyo 1996, xv).

As Cosme Zaragoza suggests, contemporary Chicano identities have origins in uniquely nineteenth-century developments, which offer important interpretive windows into the political and cultural struggles faced by the Chicano community in the twentieth century and present time. He cites Juan Gómez-Quiñones (1975, 25), who writes that the Chicano past can be understood as constituting the

> sum of the experiences by the communities of Mexican origin (indigenous, mestizo and mulatto) in the United States" and asserts that "there is a past prior to the US-Mexico War that should be taken into account in order to explain the existing diversity of the community, its geographic location, and its cultural references with regard to American as well as Mexican societies (Zaragoza 1989, 138).

Using Gómez-Quiñones assertion as an entry point for exploring this multilayered past, I underscore the deeply layered history that constitutes Chicano identity formation, inclusive of a history cross-cultural labour relations that sprang from the reordering of land with the Anglo-led Republic of Texas, an event that would radically disrupt

[2] On the Tejano past see Poyo 1996.

patterns of sovereignty and land-based cohesiveness for the *tejano* community.

Paul Taylor's first monograph, published in 1930, documents how a Mexican workforce in Texas served the onion harvest, with Texan agriculture dependent on a "reservoir" of Mexican labour located south of San Antonio (Taylor 1930, 295).[3] The deeper roots of Mexican agricultural labour in the state however have much earlier origins, as Omar Valerio-Jiménez writes: in the years leading to the American Civil War, *tejanos* laboured alongside slaves on plantations (2013, 251). In the twentieth century, Mexican migrants were desired in Texas primarily as onion cutters, spinach harvesters, and in cotton, but also in other forms of farm work and food processing, a trend carefully in Paul S. Taylor's monograph series. The documentary film work of Anne Lewis on the Hispanic female experience of labour militancy and repression in the 1930s pecan processing industry in San Antonio provides an additional window into the story of food processing labour in the state, the hands that worked this industry, and the labour conflicts that arose as a result of its poverty-level wages (Lewis 2018). As Paul Taylor's field archive shows, shrewd thinking often played into the economic calculations of farmers in the South, yet they would often still express how their harvests could not be completed without the aid of the Mexican labouring class. As the nature of cross-border migrations shifted over time, sparked often most prominently by more dramatic historical events and conflicts, but also remaining consistent as a leitmotif of the history of the relationship between the two countries, the history of labour's availability for farmers often went hand in hand with the history of cross-border mobility and agency.

Many Texan counties had long traditions of employing Mexican rural labour that dated to the nineteenth century; from 1860s through the 1880s, the Mexican states

[3] For detailed account of Taylor's social and professional roles during the Great Depression alongside his wife Dorothea Lange see Goggans 2010.

of Coahuila, Matamoros, Cerralvo, and Nuevo León provided labour for Dimmit County, Texas, where African American and Mexican “cowboys” earned food and 10 dollars per month, while Americans earned better pay and bore ostensibly higher responsibilities (Taylor 1930, 300; 320-1). The Anglo-Texan cotton industry offered the earliest opportunities for *tejano* wage earning on plantation-estate settings, yet the social composition of this emergent industry would never prove uniform. The industry was defined by a diverse rural proletariat, which, in addition to its formative dependence on African American labour, was shaped by a Mexican Texan share-cropping and farm hand class. As Neil Foley writes, Texan cotton culture was shaped by "multiple and heterogeneous borders where different languages, experiences, histories, and voices intermingled." (Foley 1997, 7). Cotton was a colonial introduction, displacing cattle in south-central Texas, and as Foley emphasizes, the introduction of American white settlement to Texas with the establishment of the Austin colony in 1821 created the conditions for the Mexican community to be regarded as “alien culturally, linguistically, religiously, and racially” even though they had resided there for generations prior to its establishment (Foley 1997, 630). Divisions between “newcomer immigrants” from Mexico in the 1910s and 20s and the existing Mexican Texan community were shaped by questions of relative belonging and Americanness, and with the onset of increased migration during this period, which sparked a hardening of racist opinions towards the Mexican other in the state, white cotton farmers also found that their need for labour conflicted the prospect of Mexicans settling within the boundaries of their communities (ibid., 61-2).

"Seasons" of Labour: Paul S. Taylor and the *Mexican Labour in the United States* Monograph Series

The Paul Schuster Taylor field archive and multi-volume monograph series, *Mexican Labour in the United States* help record the character of interwar labour formations among migrant communities of workers, and this era was noticeably shaped by an absence of labour management practices taking place at the national level. Taylor, an Anglo-American economist, effectively crossed the color line in his own time to reorient the sociological gaze toward a non-white class of labour that served enterprising American industrialism. This diverse community would form the lever around which his multi-volume study was rooted. Taylor's monograph series on Mexican labour has "lasting value and quality" as Abraham Hoffman has suggested, and Taylor for his part, "in the absence of hard data on the internal migration of Mexican workers, devised his own methods of obtaining needed information" (Hoffman 1976, 258). Taylor commenced research in the Napa grape fields in 1927 only to find he had arrived during the wrong season. He then turned to a study of Mexican labour on the Southern Pacific Railroad, and pursued his first agricultural field study in the Imperial Valley (Ibid., 261-2). His resulting studies help confirm the interwar era as a significant time when Mexican wage labour contributed instrumentally to the workings of the American economy, even as it underwent dramatic flux and change.

Born in 1895 in Sioux City, Iowa, Taylor would become one of the most eminent social scientists in California's history. After completing a PhD at the University of California in 1922, he filled the role of chief investigator in a research project on Mexican labour in the United States funded by the Social Science Research Council in 1927-1929, received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1931 to study in Mexico, and in 1935 served as Field Director for Rural Rehabilitation for the California

Emergency Relief Administration (CERA) (Stephens and Jordan 1998). He later became editor of the journal *Rural Sociology*, and in 1951-2 he was a consultant to the President's Migratory Labour Committee, then serving as chair of Berkeley's Department of Economics between 1952 and 1956 (Ibid.). He served in an array of academic, political and union-affiliated positions and posts until his passing in Berkeley in 1984 (Ibid.).

Early on, Taylor found he could most easily interview farmworkers in the places where they gathered for social purposes: in cafes, bars, pool halls, and barbershops, rather than the fields (Gordon 2009, 143). Paul Gates wrote of Taylor that he "set an example for scholars to have the courage of their convictions…" (ibid., 261-2). His interviews often "ranged in size from one sentence to lengthy conversations" (Hoffman 1976, 263-4). In addition to direct interviews and note taking in the fields, he collected extensive data sets linked to the movements of workers from the "labour agencies used by railroads, steel companies, packing plants, beet-sugar companies, and other users of Mexican labour," as well as from correspondence with company employers who oftne proved "very cooperative in providing information" and "quite candid in their interviews" (ibid., 265). Taylor's field study helped construct a narration of the social and economic lives of Mexican workers, with attention to specific regions, and the ways in which industrial labour relations operated across ethnic divides. While his work pre-dates the Bracero era, it illuminates themes and continuities that in some cases carried into this period.

Labour mobility in the interwar period tended to flow toward locations where workers were most dramatically needed. During these years, the Mexican presence was most prominent in agricultural zones, including in cotton fields in Texas and Arizona, in sugar beet fields, in lettuce and citrus, in railroad construction, and at mining sites. As a consequence of dislocations of the revolutionary period and newly emerging

patterns of labour sourcing and recruitment at the border, the Mexican migrant would become a primary contributor to commercial agriculture prior to the onset of the Great Depression yet he was by no means the only contributing source.[4] As Filipino-American oral historian Dawn Mabalon aptly charts, the Filipino agricultural worker community based in Stockton, California, experienced dramatic labour repression in the 1930s and 40s yet retained their resiliency though ethnically-based union building and organizing efforts (2013).

As the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution generated a campaign in the United States to promote order and repress labour, efforts to implement revolutionary approaches to better the working conditions across the border surfaced in Southern California, as Ricardo Flores Magón's *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM) expanded into the city of Los Angeles (Bardacke 2011, 98). By the 1920s, able Mexican workers were not only engaging in cross-border mobility but they were already increasingly adopting a migratory nature within United States, often moving further north to the Great Lakes region to work in sugar beets, steel and automobiles. As Taylor's first monograph records,

> Each annual wave has left its residue of Mexicans…who do not recede with the tide, but…winter on the farms or in the towns of the beet country, or in the cities of the North, to await there…the reopening of beet work in the spring; or who pass out of agriculture into the basic industries of the North (Taylor 1930, 97).

Full family units, as well as single migrants were drawn into seasonal labour regimes of Arizona, where agriculture, mining and railroads functioned as magnets (Hoffman 1974, 116-117, 122). Depression-era California would see the Mexican harvest worker enter into competition with hundreds of thousands of displaced white workers forced to pack up their lives and travel west in search of rural employment at a time when

[4] For an account of multiculturalism in California farm labour history see Street 2004.

California was already home to some 200,000 Mexican field workers. The Mexican removal campaigns, which took place between 1929 and 1939, revealed how economic depression and Dust Bowl dislocations impacted the resident Mexican population of the South and Southwest as cross-cultural antagonisms came to a head.

During this period, at least in its early phase (1929-30), narratives of Mexican workers' durability and efficiency still often prevailed, as did popular understandings of Mexicans' industriousness, as is discernable from an examination of evidence from the Taylor field note archive. Thus, the conditions of the Depression did not necessarily deter employers of certain industries from hiring a Mexican workforce, although the competition between white and non-white labour would indeed grow in the agricultural sector and in California in particular. Discourses of low-cost labour would similarly shape the economic paradigms that defined this era. In the South Platte Valley, Colorado, Mexicans often took inferior wages, occasionally did not receive any housing, and were often not aware of the "going rate," rarely insisting on equal pay with fellow workers (Taylor 1930, 144). In Taylor's first monograph, one farmer describes Mexican workers as being closer to nature: "The white men won't do the work on their hands and knees next to Mother Earth" (Taylor 1930, 339). An Arizona Cotton Growers' Association official in 1928 similarly admitted to Taylor that

> Those who have *just come from Mexico* are the best. They are fine. *They don't know anything.* After they have been here two or three years they get Americanized, want better houses, etc. and leave. The Mexicans are good, hard working pickers…they stay. *The white pickers won't stay. They work a day or two and then go on* ("Field Notes Series A Set I" 6-7). (Italics mine)

The relative freshness of the labour force, in terms of when they had departed Mexico and the length of time they had spent in the United States, here helped determine their willingness to perform certain tasks, with this willingness often diminishing with time as increased acculturation took place.

Culturally-based tensions abounded in inter-war California as well, as recorded in another local account:

> *Orange pickers are practically all whites*. The Mexicans are not careful enough…The Filipinos are more of a problem than the Mexicans. They are natty dressers and they attract the white girls. I have never heard of a Mexican who overstepped himself with a white woman ("Field Notes Series A Set I" 8).

Mabalon's study similarly attests to Filipino men crossing racial lines to attain social advancement. Since such activities were often derided by the white community, some were forced to leave California in order render their cross-racial marriages or unions legitimate.

When it came to matters of accommodation, differential standards based upon perceived differences were also applied. One Kleberg County Agricultural Agent in 1928 observed to Taylor:

> Yes, farmers *don't have to put up such good houses* for the Mexicans.
> Often a farmer puts up a shack for the Mexican who clears the land and then tells the tenant since it was good enough for the former it should be good enough for him (Ibid., 25). (Italics mine)

Another account described the utility of a labourer as a function of the length of time he had spent at a particular farm: "We should send a Mexican back to Mexico after three or four years. *We should send back all the Mexicans unless they can prove that they are industrious and desirable*" (Ibid., 39) (Italics mine). Logistical calculations often dictated perceptions about the Mexican worker: "Granted that the Mexicans are socially undesirable and don't assimilate…we have got to have some one to do this class of labour" (Ibid., 40).

The inspector in Charge at Santa Fe Bridge, El Paso, believed that "whipping is the only effective deterrent to the Mexicans – the fear of punishment" while his men, along with the border patrol, busied themselves with catching Mexican prostitutes who often sold their services to white Americans (Ibid., 16). Another account described the

how horse-whipping was used as a method of discipline, a shocking continuity from the era of plantation slavery:

> The Mexicans have replaced Negroes in Central and eastern Texas and even now in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Not ten percent of the mistreated Mexicans complain to the consul…Some farmers have given me the names of other farmers who horse-whip their Mexicans. The Mexicans sometimes are afraid to tell me about it even then (Ibid., 60-61).

Similarly, the verbal abuse and intimidation of workers has been documented in Canada in association with the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, a circular labour scheme that will be considered at the end of this paper.

The Mexican worker offered staying power and a measure of vulnerability. At one silver and lead mine near Santa Rita, New Mexico, the Mexican work force did not perform "so much work" yet were "there when needed" (Ibid., 11; 45). In an interview with A.J. Milliken, the Inspector in Charge U.S.I.S. at Santa Fe Bridge, El Paso, competition between industry and agriculture for able-bodied workers also apparent: "The railroads knowingly lose Mexicans to the Arizona Cotton growers, beet growers, etc." (Ibid., 15-16). This dynamic would foreshadow the more orchestrated management of railroad workers during the Second World War, when the Railroad Bracero Program which employed 6000 workers from Mexico in its inaugural year in 1943, paving the way for more than 100,000 more arrivals between 1943-5 to the Midwest, Southwest and East Coast regions (Fernández 2012, 31).[5]

The push of poverty was also critical, as E.J. Walker of El Paso observed: "We get the most poverty-stricken Mexicans. Nobody but the most poverty-stricken will pick cotton" ("Field Notes Series A Set I", 95). Still, in the cotton industry workers were diverse. Employment agent J.R. Silva noted that this workforce in 1928 included American, American-born Mexican and Mexican-born workers. Employment agents

[5] For a focused chronology of the Railroad Bracero scheme see also Driscoll 1999.

like Silva functioned as middlemen who arranged for labour to be transferred to where it was needed; for example he furnished labour "for construction. I furnished the Rock Island with two thousand Mexicans in 1926" (Ibid., 105). In the 1920s we witness the transfer of workers from the border towards contracts where non-American labour was desired.

In the decades leading up to this period, the railroad industry contributed greatly to Mexican migrant mobilities: "The Santa Fe shipped Mexicans in 1902, and in 1916 the Southern Pacific shipped north of Bakersfield. The Rock Island shipped Mexicans from about 1907." (Ibid., 108) While Taylor's record gave evidence that American railroads were in the habit of employing Mexican contract labour as early as 1896, Jeffrey Garcilaso's 1995 dissertation, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870-1930,* pointed to an even earlier presence of Mexican workers in this industry. As Pablo Garcia Loaeza has noted, Mexican *traqueros* (or track layers) served as an inexpensive and docile labour force in the Southwest, Central Plains and Midwest between 1880 and 1930, and the railroad officials who employed them often viewed the Mexican as an "inferior species." (Loaeza 233). Foremen in this industry also often exercised violence against their workforce, particular in the state of Texas, as was the case in other sectors like agriculture (ibid.).

Intersecting with the railroads as an early employer of Mexican labour, the steel mills of Chicago would begin hiring on Mexican workers during the early interwar period, beginning in 1919. As Michael Innis-Jiménez writes, South Chicago "stood for economic opportunity and hope. Mexicanos came through the encouragement of friends, after being recruited in Mexico or along the border, or after years of working in other parts of the Midwest and West," and "much like new immigrant populations in the United States today, Mexicans in South Chicago dealt with economic hardship, ethnic prejudice, nativism, and intra-ethnic divisions," factors that "reinforced their

sense of differences and their propensity to see themselves as sojourners desiring eventually to return to Mexico" (Innis-Jimenez 2017, 72). This new urban environment equally generated internal and external understandings of belonging that were new to *Mexicanos* in the United States, but certain continuities from this era, including the steel industry's reliance upon *enganchistas* or employment agents who acted as key figures in the management of Mexican labour during this early phase, would instrumentally tie this industry in with developments taking place elsewhere.

As Omar Valerio-Jiménez has observed, in the nineteenth century the U.S.-Mexico border served as a "weapon of the weak;" it functioned as a both an obstacle as well as an opportunity and was often crossed in order to escape unfavorable circumstances (2013, 182). While the reasons for mobility shifted as the twentieth century created new conditions for mobility (most especially, the warfare associated with the Mexican Revolution), migrant workers in the first three decades of the twentieth century continued to face labouring opportunities that were often substantially different from those made available to American workers, and these opportunities were often defined by difficult, dangerous work that was often of a seasonal or contract nature. Moreover, in agriculture, where a diversity of groups were still employed, rural immorality and cold economic calculations on the part of farmers often merged potently with conniving labour practices towards Mexicans, as William Pullian in Crystal City confessed to Taylor: "The less you pay them the more work they will do" ("Field Notes Series A Set I" 143).

Many American employers in the 1920s continued to adhere to a strictly white workforce, and this dynamic would also be reflected in the context of postwar Canada discussed further on, where many growers have still opted *not* to hire offshore. In Taylor's record, some lumber companies he corresponded with, such as McKay and Co., revealed that they were not in the habit of employing Mexican workers, while

other companies underwent a transition to a white work force after a period of employing a Mexican workforce. This was the case for the Los Angeles United Concrete Pipe and Construction Co., which initially employed forty workers from Mexico in cement handling and quarry labour then transitioned toward a solely American workforce: "As soon as white American labour became available we discontinued the Mexicans. At present we have but one Mexican employed in gang of eighty men" (Paul Taylor Papers n.d. n.p.,). For employers like United Concrete, the Mexican worker viewed as practical yet imperfect solution to their labour needs. In other cases, questions linked to efficiency ruled employer attitudes. Pacific Lumber of Scotia, California employed Mexican workers in 1927 but reported to Taylor that they were a "rather undesirable and inefficient class of labour" (ibid.) Dolbeer and Carson, another lumber company, described having hired a single worker from Mexico for ten years, who was paid at a rate of 40 cents per hour, and his performance at work considered very satisfactory.

In addition to the Taylor archive, newspaper depictions of social conflict, nativism and indignation towards the Mexican other as the Depression years are evident in Melita Garza's study, *They Came to Toil*, which illuminates how patterns of othering took shape at the local level and were recorded in local news media. In April 1930, the *San Antonio Light* followed a parade of jobless Mexican men marching through downtown San Antonio, documenting the disparaging comments of the parade's onlookers: "much comment could be heard concerning the nationality of the marchers," with non-Mexican onlookers highlighting the foreign constitution of its participants (Garza 2018, 64-5). Indeed, the longer any given workforce stayed in the United States, the more likely they were to begin claiming rights. Moreover, for the Mexican labourer of the interwar period, time spend outside of Mexico also enabled many to pursue occupations beyond original ones obtained, as social mobility through

internal migration or the securing of new forms of employment could also signified advancement and acculturation and create initial pathways toward permanent settlement despite the economic pressures of the time. Despite policy changes at the border, which early on saw migration levels from Mexico fall from 87,000 in 1924 to 32,000 in 1925 after head taxes and visa fees were introduced, these fees were often waived for agricultural workers crossing the border when this class of labour was needed, giving them a sort of preference for transnational mobility, foreshadowing the period of managed migration that would become the norm as the Second World War arrived (Texas-El Paso; Hoffman 1973, 206)

The Bracero Program (1942-64): Securing a Backbone for the Harvest in Wartime

When the Bracero Program began in 1942 it took Mexican farm labourers from areas deep within Mexico into contact with American farmers. While it introduced non-citizen agricultural workers from Mexico via a legal scheme, the program would pave the way for many of direct Mexican origin to eventually attain green cards and remain permanently in the United States. In the Midwest, the impact of the program was profound, as the Railroad Bracero Program generated a lasting transformation in helping to define Chicago as a site of substantial Mexican community formation and settlement. The Bracero Program marked a departure from earlier decades in terms of the nature (and scale) of the recruitment process as well as the scale of international mobility that took place. It was accompanied by a precondition that the scheme should not affect the American labour market adversely, in the form of Public Law 78 whose terms included the condition that *braceros* should not be recruited if sufficient domestic labour could be secured (Bardacke 2011, 91). A similar condition evolved in concert with the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, which typically requires

employers applying to participate to first demonstrate that they are unable to procure sufficient workers initially from within Canada.

Indeed, despite its controversial status, given the fact that *bracero* workers did enter into competition with already existing farm workers, generating new conditions for wage competition vis-a-vis pre-existing communities like the Filipino-American farm working community of central California, which had been engaging in labour agitation from the 1930s onwards, the *bracero* years would nonetheless transform the face of the U.S.-Mexico labour relationship with lasting consequences. The scale of Bracero migrations were indeed unprecedented. The onset of the program coincided with the U.S. entry into the war, and approximately 4.6 million bracero contracts took place between 1942 and 1964, with some estimates recording 5 million contracts.

A diversity of experiences further took place within the boundaries of the scheme. Indigenous braceros often exercised agency upon return to Mexico where community networks were mobilized to recruit needed *braceros* for certain industries, allowing recruitment to effectively take place from the ground up. The inclusion of indigenous workers within the boundaries of the program also saw the introduction workers speaking new language beyond Spanish; in some cases, Náhuatl-speaking braceros used their native language as way to covertly coordinate strikes for fair wages, the language allowing workers to communicate horizontally in a native language (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004, 2).

Bracero competition with local labour in the end created mounting opposition to the scheme. Increasingly in the early 1960s lettuce worker strikes, staged by *braceros,* signaled the beginning of the end of the program (Bardacke 2011b). Braceros were also viewed by Mexican American labour leadership as problematic, and they were treated differently, set apart from the inclusion association with the labour agitation linked to the early manifestations of Chicano nationalism and the United Farm

Worker movement, which emerged as a fundamentally Mexican-American, rather than Mexican-in-America movement. Braceros as a result faced the brunt of pace and workload-related exploitation: Pacific Northwest farmers were often convinced that braceros' performance would improve if they were threatened (Gamboa, 1990, 59), and the long workdays typical for the *bracero* still typify modern-day farm work in many places in Canada and the United States: in 2007 seasonal workers in Canada reportedly worked 12-15 hour days (Montpetit 2007, n.p.). In Milton-Freewater, Oregon, *braceros* worked back-to-back day and night shifts: after a night shift they would often consume breakfast then "wander out where growers…would take them to pick cherries"; they also braved environmental hazards of extreme cold, lead poisoning, and pesticide exposure, not dissimilar to the chemical exposure faced by SAWP workers (Gamboa 1990, 67, 70). Toward its demise, the Bracero Program fomented debates at the national level over its utility, practicality and logic. It had functioned as a "labour loan" as *braceros'* flexibility imbued their bodies with a value that might be reaped *only* through migration (Camacho 2008, 62-3).

Migrant Work in Postwar Canada: "Not Good Enough to Stay"

Not dissimilar to the Bracero Program in structure and scope, the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program of SAWP is a postwar agricultural bilateral labour management scheme that was introduced in 1974 between Mexico and Canada. It had origins in an earlier program arranged in 1966 between Canada and Commonwealth Caribbean countries that was dubbed the Offshore Program.[6] Despite its successes, the SAWP has offered fodder for debate. Sometimes depicted as a model program, offering a legal framework for migration, the program has yet to enable its worker participants

[6] For a chronology of this program and its beginnings see Satzewich1991.

from Mexico to circulate freely on the Canadian labour market. As a result they have suffered exclusions from certain definable human rights, including in some cases rights to engage in collective bargaining (depending on the province, with this problem proving acute in Ontario), and other interrelated rights linked to housing, sanitation and personal mobility.

Legal cases intersecting with the SAWP that have proven most controversial have also been telling regarding discrepancies between the scheme as it *should* operate under ideal terms and the inconsistencies have perforated its operation. Such cases have included those linked to labour bargaining rights, migrant deaths and accidents, employer intimidation and the rerouting of workers to new employers in consecutive seasons, and some instances of direct sexual abuse (Montpetit 2007; O'Toole 2013; Bajer 2013; Veneza 2013a, 2013b; Russo 2012, 2011). At its worst, seasonal workers were treated as less than human; in Windsor, Ontario, SAWP migrants were found to be working and living in dismal conditions at a farm where some 300 harvest workers were "referred to by numbers, and banned from speaking any language but English" (Makin 2001, 2). With the more recent increased participation of women in the program, the potential for worker mistreatment has included the double risk of race-based and gender-based discrimination. The Canadian Labour Congress documented the case of Teresa from Mexico who, while working on an Ontario apple orchard, "fell off a tractor, which then ran over her legs;" she underwent surgery twice, faced reprimands from a Mexican Consular official who "blamed her for being clumsy" and "demanded…she sign a document confirming his version of the accident, and said she would be returned to her family in Mexico" while the farm owner "paced the hallway… angry and anxious to have Teresa sign the document" (Flecker 2001, 1-2). In this case, the female migrant's vulnerability was clear yet the employer was concerned for his own wellbeing. Two police officers later found her belongings "carelessly stuffed into

a plastic bag and tossed near the ditch" (ibid.) Mexican women who took SAWP contracts also risked their own wellbeing by travelling to Canada, operating as breadwinners for themselves and loves ones. In the workplace they were often "stigmatized as sexually available by their own countrymen," and in one shocking case, differential treatment of women occurred when one farmer "forbade his female workers to leave the farm, while the men were free to come and go" (ibid.)

Scholarship on the SAWP has focused on housing conditions, health and workplace dangers, the prevalence of racism on farms, legal conflicts and the potential for worker exploitation. While fewer studies have emphasized positive experiences, my own research suggests the utility of oral history to offer a complex picture of migrant experiences as a means to potentially contest official narratives, media reports, and critical academic accounts. In addition to field harvesting and greenhouse labour, the SAWP has also encompassed the tobacco sector, a sector that has for a long period of time relied upon transient workers to serve its labour needs. Its current seasonal workforce is still very much relegated to the shadows (Dunsworth 2017).[7] Filmmaker Min Sook Lee observed how the rise in temporary foreign workers and their willingness to fill less than desirable jobs has created a "two-tiered" labour system in Canada where the rights of guest workers sit upon a lower rung in the Canadian legal system (Dharssi 2016 n.p.). On account of their perceived incompatibility as citizens, migrant workers are often deemed "non-citizenship material – not good enough to stay, good enough to work but not good enough to stay" (ibid.)

What insights can be drawn, then, in comparing the Depression era, postwar and present-day contexts? If citizenship was not of primary importance in Taylor's America but rather, questions connected with labour opportunity and conversely,

[7] On the tobacco sector see also Pietropaolo 2009.

employer perceptions of labour's efficiency in less desirable working sectors, some fruitful comparisons may yet be drawn. In Taylor's America, social divisions in small town settings often defined cross-cultural relationships, just as this occured in postwar Canada, where social relationships in small town settings were at times defined by a lack of cohesiveness between local residents and the migrant worker community. The management of labour is another consistent theme, and one that evolved according to the neccessities of time and place. Today, it is worth reconsidering the history of Mexican labour migration and its nativist responses as a window into the entangled and often inconsistent relationship between capital and labour, and as a broader indication of a deeply rooted labour history worth exploring.

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