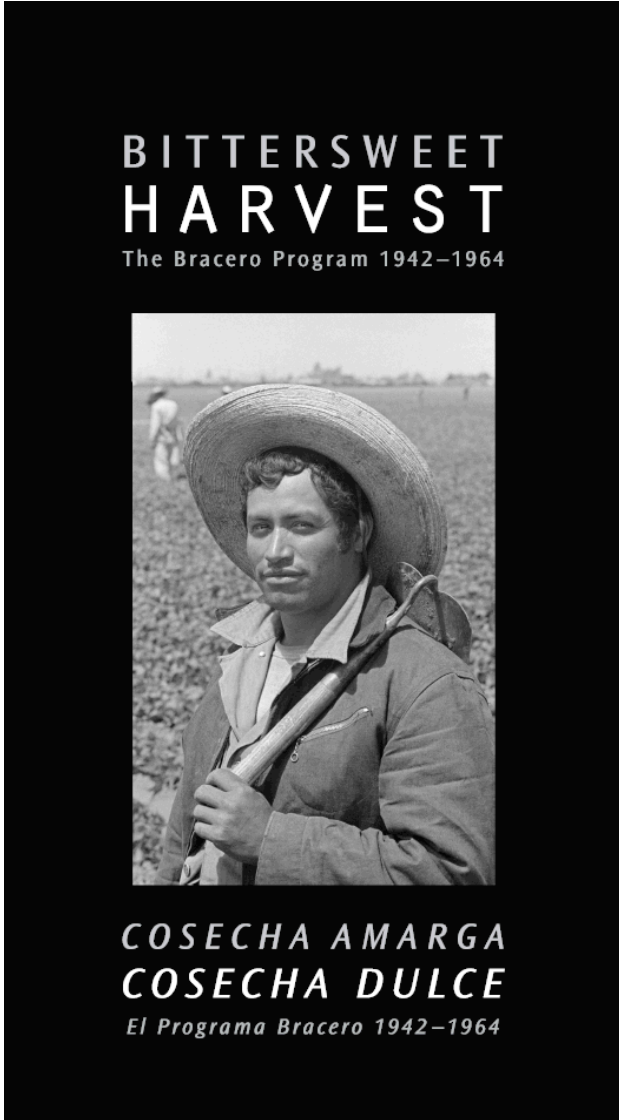


Banner number	Image	Dimensions	Text
Panel 1	 <p data-bbox="478 443 865 548"><b>BITTERSWEET HARVEST</b></p> <p data-bbox="478 557 865 581">The Bracero Program 1942-1964</p> <p data-bbox="478 1222 865 1312"><b>COSECHA AMARGA COSECHA DULCE</b></p> <p data-bbox="478 1320 865 1344"><i>El Programa Bracero 1942-1964</i></p>	47 ¼ in. x 85 13/16	<p data-bbox="1236 280 1633 313"><b>The Bracero History Project</b></p> <p data-bbox="1236 321 1955 516">This exhibit is made possible by The Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. The museum is part of a consortium of museums, universities, and cultural institutions documenting and preserving the history of the bracero program.</p> <p data-bbox="1236 565 1980 751">The Bracero History Project has recorded more than 600 oral histories and has collected many objects. The website <a href="http://www.braceroarchive.org">www.braceroarchive.org</a> provides online access to this collection of oral histories, photos, documents, and objects.</p> <p data-bbox="1236 800 1944 987">Initial funding for the Bracero History Project was provided by the Smithsonian’s Center for Latino Initiatives, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History and the National Endowment for the Humanities.</p> <p data-bbox="1236 1036 1976 1190"><b>This Exhibition is organized by</b> National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Smithsonian Institution, <b>In partnership with</b> Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service</p> <p data-bbox="1236 1239 1965 1344">This exhibition received Federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.</p>

			<p>All photographs were made by Leonard Nadel in 1956, and are from the collections of the National Museum of American History, unless otherwise noted.</p> <p><i>Leonard Nadel a photojournalist, was hired by the Fund for the Republic, an anti-McCarthy liberal spin off of the Ford Foundation, to document the Bracero Program.</i></p> <p><i>In the 1990s, the Smithsonian Institution acquired the Nadel images. The images document life in Mexico, mens' experiences of crossing the border, and work and life in the US. Those image, unless otherwise noted, have been used to tell the photographic story behind the Bracero Program.</i></p> <p><i>We hope you enjoy the exhibit.</i></p>
Panel 2		47 ¼ in. x 85 13/16	<p><b>The Bracero Program, 1942-1964</b></p> <p>Dependence on Mexican labor has been a source of great opportunity as well as great conflict for Mexicans and Americans. In 1942, facing labor shortages caused by World War II, the United States initiated a series of agreements with Mexico to recruit Mexican men to work on U.S. farms and railroads. These agreements became</p>



**BITTERSWEET HARVEST: THE BRACERO PROGRAM, 1942–1964**  
**COSECHA AMARGA, COSECHA DULCE: PROGRAMA BRACERO, 1942–1964**

“LA EXPERIENCIA DE REALIDAD NUNCA SE TE OLVIDA. YOU NEVER FORGET THE BRACERO EXPERIENCE!”  
 Amelia María Luna, ex-bracero



Dependence on Mexican labor has been a source of great opportunity as well as great conflict for Mexicans and Americans. In 1942, facing labor shortages caused by World War II, the United States initiated a series of agreements with Mexico to recruit Mexican men to work on U.S. farms and railroads. These agreements became known as the bracero program. Bracero is a term used in Mexico for a manual laborer. Between 1942 and 1964, an estimated two million Mexican men came to the United States on short-term labor contracts. A little-known chapter of American and Mexican history, the bracero program touched the lives of countless men, women, families, and communities. Both bitter and sweet, the bracero experience tells a story of exploitation but also of opportunity.

Tanto para mexicanos como para estadounidenses, la dependencia de un mano de obra mexicana ha constituido una fuente de grandes oportunidades y, a la vez, de grandes conflictos. En 1942, ante la escasez de trabajadores causada por la Segunda Guerra Mundial, Estados Unidos emitió una serie de acuerdos con México, con el fin de reclutar mano de obra mexicana para los campos y ferrocarriles estadounidenses. Este acuerdo se conocieron con el nombre de programa bracero, término que ahora van el que en México se designa al trabajador manual. Se estima que, entre 1942 y 1964, ingresaron a los Estados Unidos dos millones de mexicanos, pasando contratos, saliendo a cada cinco. El programa bracero, un capítulo de la historia de los Estados Unidos y de México poco conocido, ha afectado la vida de innumerables familias, mujeres, familias y comunidades. La experiencia de los braceros, a un tiempo amarga y dulce, es una historia de explotación, pero también de oportunidades.



**CREDITS / CRÉDITOS**  
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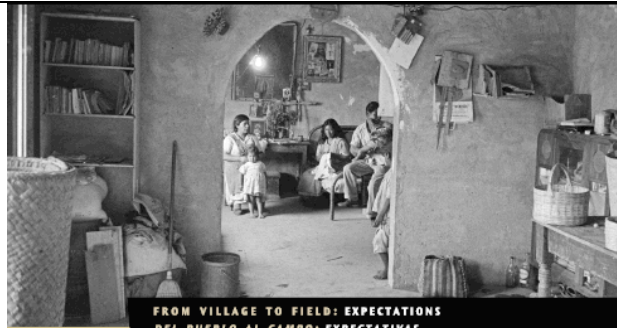


known as the bracero program. (Bracero is a term used in Mexico for a manual laborer.)

The Bracero Program came into existence in 1942. Growers argued that labor shortages in the United States resulting from World War II required the recruitment of Mexican nationals. Mexico saw the program as a contribution to the war effort. Although the program began as a temporary war measure, it became a fixture of agricultural work landscape until it was finally terminated in 1964.

Over the course of its lifetime, the Bracero Program became the largest and most significant U.S. labor guest worker program of the 20th century. In all, over 4.5 million contracts were awarded through the 22 years of the program. Despite the well-intentioned contracts, the program did not escape controversy. Some point out the widespread abuses of many of the contracts protective provisions and the violation of the legal rights and civil liberties of the braceros while others describe the program as an opportunity for Mexican nationals to make a living and improve the conditions of their families. Regardless of one's opinion of the program, it had a profound effect on Mexican American settlement patterns in the U.S. and numerous Latino families have ancestors who were involved in the Bracero Program.

Panel 3



FROM VILLAGE TO FIELD: EXPECTATIONS  
DEL PUEBLO AL CAMPO: EXPECTATIVAS

“MEXICAN FARM WORKERS ... ARE CONTRIBUTING THEIR SKILL AND THEIR TIME TO THE PRODUCTION OF VITALLY NEEDED FOOD.

LOS TRABAJADORES AGRÍCOLAS MEXICANOS ... ESTÁN CONTRIBUYENDO CON SU HABILIDAD Y SU ESFUERZO A LA PRODUCCIÓN DE ALIMENTOS VITALMENTE NECESARIOS.”

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
president of the United States (administrator of the Estados Unidos), Washington, México, 1943

“... TENER QUE GANAR PARA PODER MANTENER A SU FAMILIA.”  
“... YOU HAD TO EARN TO BE ABLE TO SUPPORT YOUR FAMILY.”  
John Aranda Morales, bracero



Men waiting to board a train for the United States at the station in Mexico, 1943

“NO NUNCA EN UN ENTENDEO ... ¿POR QUÉ NO SE QUEDARON AHÍ?”  
“AS A MAN, I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND ... WHY DIDN'T WE STAY THERE?”  
Felix Torres, son of a bracero (son of an Bracero)

“THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN AMERICAN AGRICULTURE ... AND MEXICAN LABORERS PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION FOR PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN THE STATES AND IN AMERICA.”

“BY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THESE GOVERNMENTS ... MEXICAN WORKERS CAN BE CONTRACTED FOR TEMPORARY WORK IN THE UNITED STATES.”

WALTER BRIDGES  
president of the United States (administrator of México), administrator of the Estados Unidos (administrator of Mexico), Washington, D.C., 1943

Braceros and U.S. farmers had many hopes for the program. U.S. farmers wanted temporary labor to harvest crops, and Mexico was willing to supply it. Economic depression in Mexico and the prospect of short-term work in the United States encouraged millions of Mexican men to begin the long process of being selected for the program. Men journeyed north for many reasons — most out of necessity, some to seek adventure, and others to start a new life.

Los braceros y los agricultores estadounidenses tenían grandes esperanzas en el programa. Los agricultores en Estados Unidos necesitaban mano de obra temporal para levantar las cosechas, y México estaba dispuesta a proveerla. La depresión económica en México, sumada a la falta de obtener empleo temporal en los Estados Unidos atrajo a millones de hombres mexicanos a iniciar el largo proceso de selección para el programa. Los hombres expresaron la esperanza de iniciar su vida por varias razones: la mayoría por necesidad, algunos en busca de aventura y otros para comenzar una nueva vida.



Bracero and his wife in their room in San Mateo, 1943

“HAY UN RINCON DE MUNDO DE MUNDOS QUE DIVIDEN ... EN UNOS QUE EN LA MANO DE SU DESTINO Y OTROS QUE EN LA MANO DE SU DESTINO. EN UN PAÍS EN LA MANO DE SU DESTINO MÁS PAÍS.”  
“I CAN'T DECIDE ONE A WAY TO BE IN THE WORLD ... I ALWAYS ENDURE ABOUT MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS.”  
“I NEVER ENDURE ABOUT MOTHER MY LIFE JUST THE WAY.”  
John Aranda Morales, son of a bracero

47 ¼ in. x 85  
13/16

Expectations

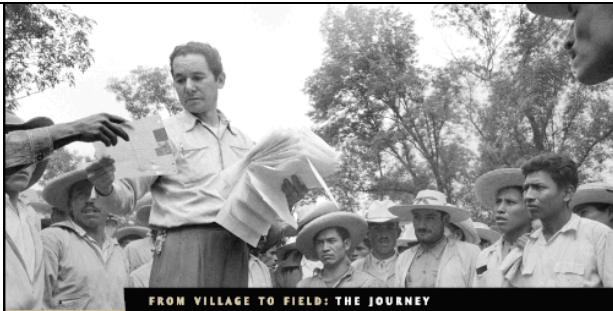
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*The photograph shows the living conditions of a bracero's family in San Mateo, Mexico*

*The photographer, Leonard Nadel, described the photograph with the following caption:*

*"This is one of the two rooms for a family of nine people living in San Mateo-about 20 miles south of Mexico City. The other room serves as a kitchen, work room, and storeroom. When work is available in the village, a Mexican laborer may earn about 10 pesos per day. Because of this, the wage earner of the family here wants to go to the US as a farm laborer where he may earn much more anywhere from 4 weeks to 6 months."*

Panel 4



FROM VILLAGE TO FIELD: THE JOURNEY  
DEL PUEBLO AL CAMPO: LA JORNADA

“HABIDO MUCHA POBREZA EN MÉXICO ... TO ERA  
POBRE DE DINERO, POBRE DE QUÉ COMER PERO  
BIEN EN SALUD.”

THERE WAS A LOT OF POVERTY IN MEXICO ...  
I WAS MONEY-POOR, FOOD-POOR, BUT  
KICK IN HEALTH.”

Ignacio Gómez, ex-bracero

“ME ENFERMÉ POR UN PÚJULO ... TENÍA UNO  
QUE PAGA DINERO Y NO ERA AÍ.”

“I GOT A ULCER, BUT IT WASN’T BAD ... WE HAD  
TO PAY MONEY FOR THE SURVIVAL, AND IT WASN’T  
SUFFICIENT TO BE LIKE THAT.”

Urbano Márquez, ex-bracero



“AÍ EN TRON EL PATÍN FUERA DE LA CONTRATACIÓN  
HABÍA AQUELLOS ALBERGUE DE OMBE Y ERAN DEL  
COMUNIDAD O ROSTRO.”

“IN THE TRON BUSTLE, THERE WERE ABOUT TWELVE  
OR THIRTEEN THOUSAND KEEPING BRACKETS.”

Urbano Márquez, ex-bracero



“MIRARON A UNA EN FILA Y AÍ LO ENTREVISTARON,  
AND THEN BRACERO I RAN Y COMO LA FOMARON  
EN 1928.”

“HE REMOVED A LINE, AND THEY INTERVIEWED US  
THERE, THEN GAVE OUR NAME, AND LATER THEY  
TOOK US IN A TRAIN.”

Urbano Márquez, ex-bracero

The process of being selected for a work contract placed physical, emotional, and financial burdens on aspiring braceros. The Mexican government recruited men from rural Mexico and negotiated terms in an attempt to protect workers and regulate the contracting process. Applicants often had to travel long distances from their pueblos (villages) to reception centers for processing. The men then had to pass a number of bureaucratic hurdles and medical examinations, waiting weeks, uncertain if they would be selected for a contract.

El proceso de selección para obtener un contrato de trabajo implicaba para los aspirantes a braceros una carga física, emocional y financiera. El gobierno mexicano reclutaba hombres de las zonas rurales de México y negociaba las condiciones de los contratos con el fin de proteger a los trabajadores y regular el proceso de contratación.

Los candidatos al programa tenían que viajar grandes distancias desde sus pueblos hasta los centros de recepción para realizar los trámites. Luego, debían pasar por una serie de obstáculos burocráticos y exámenes médicos, aguardando durante semanas, con la incertidumbre de no saber si serían seleccionados para obtener un contrato.



“FOM WUNDO BUERGA VENIR ACÁ, BIEN O MAL, BIEN  
TRATADO O MAL TRATADO, DE TAMBÚ MENO LA KENT  
BUERGA KOSKIG, MICHITAMBU KENI.”

“THE GOOD OR BAD, THE WORLD WERE WANTED TO COME  
HERE. WILL TRAVEL OR POORLY TRAVEL, THERE WAS  
PEOPLE WANTED TO COME, WE NEED TO COME.”

Pablo del Real Pérez, ex-bracero

47 ¼ in. x 85  
13/16

## The Journey

The process of being selected for a work contract placed physical, emotional, and financial burdens on aspiring braceros. The Mexican government recruited men from rural Mexico and negotiated terms in an attempt to protect workers and regulate the contracting process.

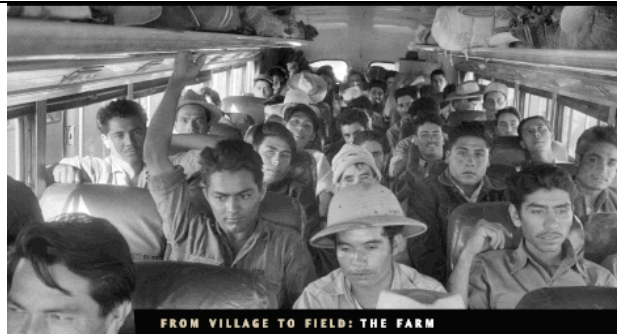
**Participation in the Bracero program was limited to agricultural workers, and not open to urban dwellers. Prospective Braceros often were asked to show their calloused hands to prove that they were experienced farm laborers. Workers were fingerprinted as part of the processing procedure, and were fumigated with DDT before being allowed to enter the United States.**

Applicants often had to travel long distances from their pueblos (villages) to reception centers for processing. The men then had to pass a number of bureaucratic hurdles and medical examinations, waiting weeks, uncertain if they would be selected for a contract.





Panel 6



FROM VILLAGE TO FIELD: THE FARM  
DEL PUEBLO AL CAMPO: LA HACIENDA

“YO CREO QUE VAMOS A VER OTRO MUNDO. PUES  
ERA A VECES HASTA PENA QUE EN MI RANCHO.  
I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO SEE A DIFFERENT  
WORLD. WELL, SOMETIMES IT WAS EVEN WORSE  
THAN MY FARM.”  
Satorino González Díaz, ex-bracero

“NO TRAJER EN NUESTRO DE CAMBIER Y AQUELLO EN  
LOS TERREZ Y UN PUEBLO DE PASADURA, TERREZ DE CARER  
ERAN DIFERENTE, HASTA EL PUEBLO.”  
“THEY BROUGHT THEM IN BELLES AND SOME IN BRANS,  
AND NOT PASSENDER TRAINS BUT CARAS TRAINS ...  
LIKE SHEEP, UP TO EL PAIS.”  
Gustavo Hernández, ex-bracero



El Departamento de Trabajo publicó un manual de inglés para los braceros en 1952.  
El manual incluía vocabulario y gramática básicos.  
Fotografía tomada en un aula de un campamento de braceros en México.

“WE ACCUSED TO BEE FOR EL PRIMER DÍA DEL COMITÉ  
BRACEROS LABORAL.”  
“I REMEMBER IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I ATE A  
BEANSKIN SANDWICH.”  
José Joaquín González Pérez, ex-bracero

“I'M SURE THAT THERE WERE FARMERS THAT DIDN'T  
EAT THEM AS MUCH AS THEY SHOULD HAVE, BUT THAT  
EATED THEM AS MUCH AS ANYBODY ELSE. THAT  
WAS BRACEROS MEANS, LET'S BE HONEST.”  
“I DON'T REMEMBER OF HOW MANY BRACEROS THERE BUT  
NO LETS PARABAN THEM IN BUS (SEA RECORD), A BUS  
DIBI (TRAJERAN VAN FROM FROM IN BUS EL NOMBRE  
DIENTOS BRACEROS): PUE DE BRACER.”  
Orlando Gutiérrez, ex-bracero

Braceros had little control over what would happen once  
signed a contract. They could be sent to farms thousands of  
miles away with unfamiliar climates and cultures. They had to  
rely on the growers to provide housing, food, and medical care if  
occasionally would visiting Mexican consuls be available to  
help with contract or health issues. The new life braceros encountered was  
dramatically different from their home villages.

Los braceros apenas tenían control sobre su destino una vez  
firmaban un contrato. Podían enviarse a haciendas ubicadas  
miles de millas de distancia, con climas y culturas desconocidas.  
Debían confiar en que los agricultores les proporcionarían  
alimentos y atención médica. Muy de vez en cuando contaba  
consules mexicanos que los visitaban y los ayudaban con  
problemas de salud. La nueva vida a la que se enfrentaron  
los braceros era radicalmente diferente a la de sus pueblos.



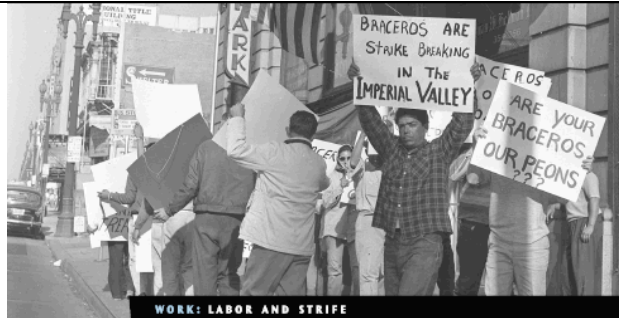
“BUSCAR UNO A LA ASOCIACIÓN. ALLÍ ESTABAN UNO,  
TRABAJEROS BRACEROS Y DE ALLÍ EN RECORDAR, IRAN  
LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS...”  
“YOU WOULD ARRIVE AT THE ASSOCIATION. THERE YOU  
WOULD, WITH ALL THE BRACEROS, AND THAT IS WHERE  
ALL THE BRACEROS WENT...”  
Humberto González Puga, ex-bracero

47 ¼ in. x 85  
13/16

## The Farm

Braceros had little control over what would happen once they signed a contract. They could be sent to farms thousands of miles away with unfamiliar climates and cultures. They had to rely on the growers to provide housing, food, and medical care. Only occasionally would visiting Mexican consuls be available to help with contract or health issues. The new life braceros encountered was dramatically different from their home villages

Panel 7



WORK: LABOR AND STRIFE  
TRABAJO: LABOR Y DISPUTAS

47 1/4 in. x 85  
13/16

“VINIMOS A TRABAJAR, NO VINIMOS A QUITAR  
NADA A NADIE.”

WE CAME TO WORK. WE DIDN'T COME TO  
TAKE ANYTHING FROM ANYONE.”

Isaías Sánchez, ex-bracero

“SI EL PROGRAMA FUE EN SU ORO, LOS HACELOS  
SE DÁN POR LOS LOCAL WORKERS, AND THE GROWERS  
WOULDN'T HIDE LOCAL WORKERS ... THAT WAS THE  
BIG POINT THAT WE WERE FIGHTING FOR.”  
“AUTORREVICIÓN DEL BRACERO TRABAJADOR.”  
“LA MUESTRA QUE CONVENCIONO EL PROBLEMA, LOS  
JASABROS SAJIANAN PARA LOS TRABAJADORES LOCALES,  
Y LOS JERTELEBRES UN PROBLEMA DE LOS  
DOS LUNAS ... EN ESA UNA MANA SAJIAVA QUE  
PILAJABAN CONTRA LA LEY PÚBLICA. SE DEBE  
AUTORREVICIÓN DEL BRACERO TRABAJADOR.”  
Isaías Sánchez, ex-bracero, United Farm Workers  
California, Federación Agrícola Unida



Isaías Sánchez, ex-bracero

“THERE IS A DEFINITE NEED FOR A SOURCE OF IMPORTED  
LABOR DURING THE HARVEST PERIOD.”

“EXISTE UNA CLARA NECESIDAD DE FORTALECER POR UNA  
FUENTE DE MANO DE OBRA IMPORTADA PARA EL PERÍODO  
DE LAS Cosechas.”

R. E. Brown, Executive California Farmers Association  
Asociación de Agricultores del Sur de California, USA

Concerns about labor issues plagued the bracero program from the start. With an eye on reducing costs and improving profits, growers saw the bracero program as a source of cheap labor. American farm workers worried that braceros would compete for their jobs and lower their wages. Many union leaders were alarmed about the use of foreign workers and how that would affect their ability to organize farm labor.

Desde un comienzo, el programa bracero se vio envuelto de inquietudes acerca de cuestiones laborales. Con la mira en la reducción de costos y la mejora de ingresos, los productores vieron al programa bracero como fuente de mano de obra barata. Los trabajadores agrícolas estadounidenses temían que los braceros competirían con su trabajo reduciéndoles los salarios. Muchos líderes sindicales observaban alarmados cómo la contratación de trabajadores extranjeros podía dificultar la organización del trabajo agrícola.



Isaías Sánchez, ex-bracero

“ALL I JUST WANTED WAS TO GET THE  
COUNTRY BACK TO PRODUCE IN THE AGRI-CULTURE, AND  
FOR OTHERS TO SEE, AND THAT WAS MY GOAL.”  
“SOY UNO DE LOS QUE SE ENDEVICIONO EL PAIS, DE  
MÁS QUE LOS OTROS. HAY QUE VER QUE  
FOR SURE, THAT IS WORK I SHOULD DO.”  
Isaías Sánchez, ex-bracero

Labor and Strife

Concerns about labor issues plagued the bracero program from the start. With an eye on reducing costs and improving profits, growers saw the bracero program as a source of cheap labor. American farm workers worried that braceros would compete for their jobs and lower their wages. Many union leaders were alarmed about the use of foreign workers and how that would affect their ability to organize farm labor.



Panel 8

47 ¼ in. x 85  
13/16



**WORK: BROKEN PROMISES**  
**TRABAJO: PROMESAS ROTAS**

**“ EN UNA BARRACA VIVÍAMOS NOVECIENTOS ... YO ESTUVE COMO UNA SEMANA ... (¿QUIÉN VA A DORMIR CON TODO ESE GENTE?)**  
**500 OF US LIVED IN ONE BARRACKS ... I WAS THERE A WEEK ... WHO IS GOING TO SLEEP WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE? ”**  
Guadalupe Horta Arizumi, ex-bracero

**“AS LONG AS I CAN LABOR TRANSPORTATION IS TREATED AS A PUNISHMENT BY PEAK REGULATION AT BARRACK TIME. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LABOR BY DAY AND LEADS OF LABORERS IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE.”**  
**“Mientras uno trabajaba el transporte de la mano de obra agrícola en función de su regulación durante ese periodo de la campaña, la conexión entre el cargo de mano de trabajadores de fincas era frías.”**  
Dionicio Saldaña, Dandy at El Estero, 1937



**“WHEN ACCEPTABLE STANDARDS FOR RESIDING ARE MAINTAINED IN A CLEAN, SAFE, AND SANITARY CONDITION.”**  
**“CONDICIONES MINIMAS REQUERIDAS PARA HABER A TODA O MÁS TRABAJADORES DE AGRICULTORES MEXICANOS.”**  
**“LA VIVIENDA Y PRECIBOS ALTERNAR DEBE MANTENERSE EN CONDICIONES DE LIMPIEZA, SEGURIDAD Y SALUD.”**  
U.S. Department of Labor (Departamento de Trabajo de los EE.UU.), 1937



**“NO, PUES ASÍ A UNO NO LE DIERON A UN DÓLAR ... UNO NO SABE SI LE DARÁN O NO.”**  
**“WELL, THEY WOULDN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING ... YOU DON'T KNOW IF THEY WERE TAKING MONEY AWAY OR NOT.”**  
Agustín Martínez Elizondo, ex-bracero

**“SI PUERA DISTRIBUYERON, LE DIERON, ASÍ SI SE DIERON Y ASÍ ANDARON, LOS QUERERON.”**  
**“I TELL YOU, IF IT PUERA DISTRIBUYERON, THERE YOU ENTER ONE THOUSAND NO MORE, THE BE DISTRIBUYERON THAT'S WHAT WE WANT.”**  
Guadalupe Horta Arizumi, ex-bracero

### Broken Promises

Bracero contracts promised much but did not always deliver. Poor housing conditions, disputes over pay, discrimination, inadequate health care, and a lack of worker representation were some of the braceros' common grievances. Workers were sometimes housed in converted barns and makeshift tents with limited water, heat, and sanitary facilities. They were often transported in unsafe and poorly operated vehicles. Although the work was grueling and housing substandard, many braceros endured these conditions, hoping to make more money than they would at home.

*The photographer, Leonard Nadel described the photograph of two men comparing paychecks with the following caption: "We are paid with checks at the camp," one man said. "Sometimes the check stubs indicate the deduction and sometimes they don't. Most of the men do not check [the] stubs with explanations in Spanish. If you ask any questions to have them explain to you, they get very mad."*

Panel 9



WORK: FARMS AND RAILROADS  
TRABAJO: CAMPOS Y FERROCARRILES

“NO SE ENDEZARAN HASTA QUE SALÍAN  
AQUÍ LA OTRA CALLE.”

YOU DIDN'T STRAIGHTEN UP UNTIL YOU  
REACHED THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FIELD.

Paulino Martínez, ex-bracero

“NUESTRO VIVIANO FUE A SUAVESIN MUCHO.  
TRAJERON BUN BUN DE PAN DE PASTEL MEXICANO,  
ARROZ EN LA CUBERA...”

“THE CAMP HERE TO DO A LOT OF THE WORK  
THAT THE MEN HERE COULDN'T DO. THEY WERE  
AWAY AT WAR...”

Paulo del Real Pérez, ex-bracero



Unbracero working with another migrant laborer  
in a field. Photo courtesy of the author.

“SI ALGUNA VE ME DIERON EL MEO PEZON...  
NECESSITO KARATE MEXICANO, MIER SI LOS MACHUKOS!”

“THE ME, OTHER WAS THE HARDEST...  
WE HAD TO BE BENT OVER, ALL DAY BENT OVER.”

Paulino Martínez, ex-bracero



Braceros in a field. Photo courtesy of the author.

“YA PARA LAS DIEZ DE LA MAÑANA YA ERA UN UNO  
TERMINAR Y EMPESARON EN LA PUNTA DELA...”

“THE SUN WAS ALREADY BLAZING BY TEN IN THE  
MORNING, AND WE STARTED WITH THE PICK  
AND SHOVEL...”

Benjamin YERBES Cruz, ex-bracero



Unbracero working in a field. Photo courtesy of the author.



Unbracero working in a field. Photo courtesy of the author.

“ERA BARATO, NO HABÍA UNO CASH DÍNDON, ME LEGRABA  
A UN DÓLAR LA JORNADA.”

“IT WAS CHEAP, THE HARDLY HADDE ANY MONEY, IT SEEM'D  
EVEN ABBOND'T TO A DOLLAR AN HOUR.”

Paulo del Real Pérez, ex-bracero

“FAGARON BUN A VEINTE CENTAVOS LA CADA, TENIA QUE  
MATERISE PARA GANAR DIEZ DÓLARES.”

“THEY PAID TWENTY CENTS A BOX, THEY HAD TO KILL  
THOUSANDS OF INSECTS TEN DOLLARS.”

Benjamin YERBES Cruz, ex-bracero

47 ¼ in. x 85  
13/16

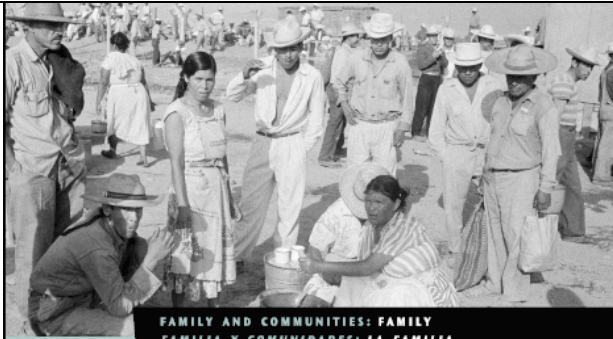
## Farms and Railroads

From sunrise to sunset, on farms, braceros worked cotton, citrus, dates, and such backbreaking stoop-labor, crops as sugar beets, lettuce, and strawberries.

**Thousands of braceros were brought in to perform stoop labor, Medical clinics reported backache as the most common ailment among the braceros. Since no machine has been able to replace stoop labor, it continues today.**

Early in the program, they also maintained railroad tracks. Over time, braceros were sent to California, Texas, Oregon, Washington, Arkansas, and 29 other states. Contracts ranged from a few weeks to 18 months. Camps ranged in size from just a few braceros to a thousand.

Panel 10



**FAMILY AND COMMUNITIES: FAMILY**  
**FAMILIA Y COMUNIDADES: LA FAMILIA**

“PUS ERA BENEFICIO POR UNA PARTE Y POR OTRO  
 TAMBEN POR OTRA SUPERVIVENCIA, TANTO PARA LA  
 FAMILIA COMO PARA UNO.”

WELL, ON THE ONE HAND IT WAS BENEFICIAL,  
 AND ON THE OTHER HAND, THE FAMILY SUFFERED  
 JUST AS MUCH AS YOU DID.”

Federico del Real Pérez, ex-bracero

“DESDE ENQUANTO FUI UNO QUE AYUDABA A MI MADRE  
 A TRABAJAR EN MIEMBRO, SI PODIA TRABAJAR PODIA COMPRAR  
 COMIDA, PERO MI PAPA LE MANDABA, PARA EN QUE  
 LE TRABAJARA.”

“UNCE I WAS LITTLE WE HAD TO HELP MY MAMA  
 WORKING, HELP MY MOM TO GO TO PAY FOR FOOD,  
 BECAUSE MY DAD WOULD SEND WOMEN, BUT WHAT  
 WAS LEFT OVER.”

Marta Gutierrez, daughter of a bracero/ hija de un bracero



Familia Gutierrez, San Marcos, México

“DE MI MADRE QUE LE MANDABA MUY POCO  
 DINERO A MI MADRE.”

“I SAW THAT HE SENT VERY LITTLE MONEY  
 TO MY MOTHER.”

Marta Gutierrez, daughter of a bracero/ hija de un bracero



Mariana Olvera, ex-bracero/ ex-bracera, Toluca, México

“WHEN THEY WERE BACK, THEY WERE IN PERIL,  
 BECAUSE THEY HAD SOMETHING TO TAKE BACK  
 WITH THEM.”

“CUANDO REGRESABA, ERAN TAN VIGILANTES,  
 PEROSE PUNAN ALGO QUE LEVANTAR CON ELLOS.”

Mariana Olvera, ex-bracero/ ex-bracera, Toluca, México

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## Family

The bracero program brought both economic opportunity and unexpected hardship to Mexican families. Mexico's government hoped that workers would bring much-needed cash into their economy. Some men did earn enough money to build houses, buy land, or start businesses in Mexico. Meanwhile, families left behind while men were away had to find ways to get by without fathers, brothers, and husbands.

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El programa bracero representó para las familias mexicanas oportunidades económicas como primicias (heredades) de México esperen que los trabajadores invirtieran en el dinero que tanto necesitaban. Por cierto, algunos hombres suficiente dinero como para construir viviendas, comprar terrenos en México. Mientras tanto, las familias que quedaban los hombres perdidos, debían hallar la manera de vivir sin padres, hermanos ni maridos.



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“PAYMENT BY DENTAL, DENTAL WORK, BETTER CLOTHING  
 AND IN SOME INSTANCES BETTER HOUSING WERE  
 THE RESULTS IN MEXICO — THE MAX EMERGENCY  
 IS BRIBING A “CHANGING WORLD” TO THE MEXICAN  
 FRENCH TON.”

“TU PAPA DE DENTAL, LA ATENCION DENTAL, LA MUJER  
 DE LA CASA, UN JARDINERIA, MEJORES VIVIENDAS,  
 HAY ALGUNOS DE LOS RESULTADOS BUENOS EN  
 MEXICO ... LA ENTRENAMIENTO DE ALGUNAS ESTE  
 TRAFICANDO UN “MUNDO DE CAMBIOS” TAMBIEN  
 A LOS PERROS MEXICANOS.”

Panel 11



**FAMILY AND COMMUNITIES: IN THE UNITED STATES**  
**FAMILIA Y COMUNIDADES: EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS**

“CUANDO MÁS NECESITO LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS, INDIVIDUOS VENIMOS A PRESTAR EL SERVICIO A LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS. CUANDO MÁS NECESITO LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS AQUÍ ESTUVE YO ...  
WHEN THE U.S. NEEDED IT MOST, WE CAME TO SERVE THE UNITED STATES. WHEN THE U.S. NEEDED IT MOST, I WAS HERE ...”

Jose Ramirez Delgado, ex-bracero

“MÍ GOBIERNO NOS MUEVA A PRISIONES Y A LOS NEGROS ... MÍ GARCERAS DE LOS RECAUDADORES GANASEROS Y DE LAS TIENDAS ... MÍ INTIMIDACION.”  
“THEY DISCRIMINATED AGAINST US AND THE BLACKS ... THEY KNOCKED US FROM OUR RESTAURANTS AND STORES ... THEY INTIMIDATED US.”

Ricardo Baraja Cruz, ex-bracero



Roberto Morales, ex-bracero

“MÍ CANTINERA A LAS TRENES ... AÍ ESTE ...”  
“THEY TOOK US TO STORES ... TO THE HOTELS ...”

Rafael Peña Padua, ex-bracero

“MÍ FUMOS A DAR UNA VUELTA A NUEVA YORK DE PASO ... A VECES AN QUIERE PLATICAR MUYERAS EN LAS ESTAS ... PUESSE CECER QUE LE MENTAR, PERO EN QUE LE PUEDE ...”  
“WE TOOK A TRIP AROUND NEW YORK ... SOMETIMES I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT A LOT OF THING THINGS BECAUSE THEY THINK I'M STUPID, BUT I USED THINK ...”

Rafael Casado Dominguez, ex-bracero

The bracero program affected communities across the United States. Some towns held dances, church services in Spanish, and social and business events for the braceros. Many braceros returned to Mexico. Some of them developed personal relationships with local women, and started new families in the United States. Other towns discriminated against the braceros, barring them from restaurants and movie theaters. Even some local Mexican Americans were wary of the new workers.

El programa bracero afectó a las comunidades en todas partes de los Estados Unidos. Algunos pueblos organizaron bailes, misas y otros eventos sociales y comerciales para los braceros. Muchos braceros nunca regresaron a México. Algunos de ellos establecieron relaciones personales, se casaron con mujeres del lugar e iniciaron una nueva familia en los Estados Unidos.

Otros pueblos discriminaban a los braceros, prohibiéndoles el acceso a restaurantes y cines. Hasta algunos mexicano-americanos del lugar mostraban recelo ante los nuevos trabajadores.



Los braceros fueron muy recibidos en algunas zonas de California, como en Watsonville.

Johnnie Brown, Watsonville, California, 1942

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**In the United States**

The bracero program affected communities across the United States. Some towns held dances, church services in Spanish, and other social and business events for the braceros. Many braceros never returned to Mexico. Some of them developed personal relationships, married local women, and started new families in the United States. Other towns discriminated against the braceros, barring them from restaurants and movie theaters. Even some local Mexican Americans were wary of the new workers.

Panel 12



**FAMILY AND COMMUNITIES: ON THE FARM**  
**FAMILIA Y COMUNIDADES: EN LA HACIENDA**

“SI, ESO SÍ EN LOS CAMPOS AHÍ CANTABAN ...  
 TREINTA, CUARENTA O CINCUENTA ... NO, MUY  
 DURO LA VIDA, MUY DURO Y BONITA.”

YEAR, IN THE FIELDS THEY WOULD SING ...  
 THIRTY, FORTY, OR FIFTY ... NO, LIFE WAS  
 HARD, VERY HARD, AND BEAUTIFUL.”

Imael Díaz de León, ex-bracero

“HABÍA GENTE QUE NO SABÍA COCINAR Y ASÍ BUSCABAN  
 EN LOS CAMPESINOS QUE NO SABIAN MUY  
 BUENA NI SUAVITA COMO HACE UN AMER.”

“THERE WERE PEOPLE THAT DIDN'T KNOW HOW  
 TO COOK, AND THEY FIGURED - 'HOW COOKERS  
 WHO DON'T KNOW HOW TO COOK NOTHING,  
 WE CAN SHOW TO 'EM AN UG.'”

Pablo del Real Pineda, ex-bracero



“YO SECHA EL PELO ... LOS SÁBENDOS NO ME DEJABAN  
 DORMIR, QUE TENDRÍAN QUE IR AL PELO PARA SE  
 AL CORTO ... EN EL PUEBLO YA HABÍAN UN PELO  
 Y YA HABÍAN CINCUENTA CENTAVOS.”

“I CUT HAIR ... ON SATURDAYS NO ONE LET ME SLEEP,  
 EVERYONE WANTED THEIR HAIR CUT AN THEY WOULD  
 GO TO THE WHITES ... IN TOWN THEY CHARGED  
 A DOLLAR, AND I CHARGED FIFTY CENTES.”

Juanito Pineda Rodríguez, ex-bracero



“ERA UNA ALICADA ... MUCHA PRA AHÍ, MUCHA PRA AHÍ,  
 BARBEROS AHÍ Y ASÍ, PUEBLO, PRA UN BOSTON ... CONTAR  
 AMERICANOS, UNOS SE METIAN AHÍ TAMBIÉN, ESTABA BIEN.”

“IT WAS A HARD TIME ... MUCHA GENTE TRABAJANDO MUCHO PRA  
 HERE, BARBEROS AND THE LIKE, WELL, IT WAS GREAT ...  
 AMERICAN BARS, SOME WENT IN THERE, TOO, IT WAS GOOD.”

Walter Martínez, ex-bracero

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### On The Farm

Braceros' experiences differed depending on where they lived and worked. On isolated farms far from towns, the men were often forced to be self-sufficient — cooking, cutting hair, doing laundry, and sharing domestic chores. Larger camps often provided food and some sort of entertainment. No matter where they were, braceros created an informal network that helped each other deal with camp life.

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Las experiencias de los braceros diferían dependiendo de dónde fueran a vivir y a trabajar. En las haciendas aisladas de los campos los hombres estaban forzados a autoabastecerse — cocinar, cortar el pelo, lavar la ropa y compartir las tareas domésticas. Los campamentos más grandes a menudo les proveían con cierto tipo de entretenimiento. Más allá de dónde estuvieran los braceros contaban con una red informal de asistencia que permitía ayudarse entre ellos mientras vivían en el campo.



“YO ESTABA EN UN LUGAR COMO DEL PUEBLO QUE NO  
 ESTABA NI A OCHO NI A DIEZ ... SE CONVENCÍAN  
 UN BARBERO Y A MÁS, A OCHO O EL BARBERO, EN  
 UNA TROPA, NO HABÍA MÁS QUE BARBER.”

“I WAS IN A PLACE THE TOWN TOWN WITH NOTHING  
 TO DO AND NO PLACE TO GO ... YOU WOULD  
 A BARBER TO LISTEN TO MUSIC, THAT WAS IT,  
 THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE TO DO.”

Pablo del Real Pineda, ex-bracero



Panel 13



**FAMILY AND COMMUNITIES: BEYOND BORDERS**  
**FAMILIA Y COMUNIDADES: MÁS ALLÁ DE LAS FRONTERAS**

“YA ACÁ CAMBIÓ LA VIDA PORQUE SE GANABA UNO MÁS DINERO, YA PODÍA UNO COMPRAR MÁS DE LO QUE QUERÍA UNO, COMPRAR ROPA, COMER MEJOR. PARA MÍ SI FUE POSITIVO, TAL VEZ ALGUNOS DIRÁN QUE NO.”

Audimar G. Zapata, ex-bracero

“IN AMERICA THERE WAS ONE CIVILIZATION, LA MEXICANA Y LA AMERICANA, JUNTAS FORMARON LA MEXICANA.”

“THERE WAS I HAD BOTH CITIZENSHIP, MEXICAN AND AMERICAN, I ALWAYS RETURNED TO LIVE IN MY MEXICAN ONE.”

Audimar G. Zapata, ex-bracero



Mexico City, Mexico (Columbus) Plaza, August 16, 1951  
 Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of State  
 Photo credit: Roger M. Kamenetzky

“YO NECESITO VIVIR EN UN PAÍS ... YO QUIERO ESTE PAÍS, A ME HE ASERADO Y FROM, PERO YO ME PAÍS, PRIMERO MEXICO.”

“I RETURNED SEVERAL TIMES TO MEXICO ... I LOVE THIS COUNTRY, I LOVE IT AND EVERYTHING, BUT FOR ME, MY COUNTRY, MEXICO FIRST.”

Celso Palomares Nieto, ex-bracero



U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., 1951  
 Photo credit: Roger M. Kamenetzky

“MUCHO DE MI OBRAS ANTICULTURAS AL ARRIBAR DE AMÉRICA “MAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY HAS MADE MUCH TO FARMERS LIKE ME, WE LEARN NEW TECHNIQUES IN IRRIGATION, LEARN HOW TO PLANT AND HARVEST MANY NEW CROPS.”

“HABER TRABAJO EN EL ESTADOS UNIDOS ME AYUDÓ PARA LOS CONOCIMIENTOS TÉCNICOS COMO EN IRRIGACIÓN, APRENDER COMO SIEMBRAR Y COSECHAR DIFERENTES CULTIVOS NUEVOS.”

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## Beyond Borders

As popular culture, business, and labor have brought U.S. influence to every corner of Mexico, so have Mexican labor, culture, and religious practices influenced the U.S. Although bracero workers were supposed to return to Mexico at the end of their contracts, not all did. Many who returned to Mexico later emigrated to the U.S., aided by the experience and knowledge they had gained as braceros. Today, numerous families and communities can trace their histories to the bracero program.

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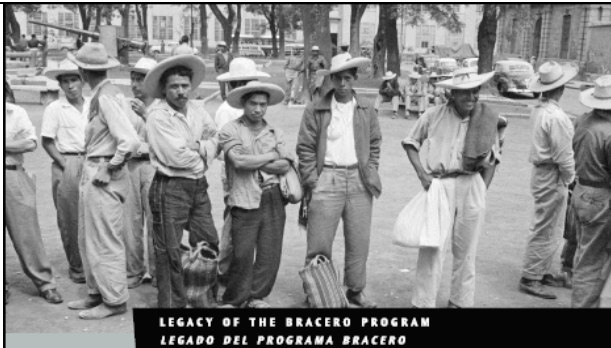
Así como la cultura popular, el comercio y el trabajo llevan la influencia de los Estados Unidos a cada rincón de México, mismo modo la mano de obra mexicana, su cultura y sus prácticas religiosas tuvieron un impacto en los Estados Unidos. Si bien se suponía que los braceros debían regresar al término de sus contratos, no todos lo hicieron. Muchos de aquellos que no a México, emigraron más tarde a los Estados Unidos, ayudados por la experiencia y el conocimiento que habían ganado cuando hoy en día, numerosas familias y comunidades pueden rastrear sus historias en el programa bracero.



“EL GOBIERNO DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA PRESENTA ESTA MENCIÓN ORNAMENTAL EN APOYO DE LA PRODUCCIÓN PRECISADA AL AUMENTO DE LA PRODUCCIÓN DE ALIMENTOS Y PARA ASEGURAR PARA EL BIENESTAR DE LA NACIÓN.”

“THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA PRESENTS THIS CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION IN APPRECIATION OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS MADE AND THE PRODUCTION OF FOOD AND FUEL NECESSARY TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL DEFENSE.”

Panel 14



**LEGACY OF THE BRACERO PROGRAM  
LEGADO DEL PROGRAMA BRACERO**

“PUES EL TERMINO BRACERO ... ES UNA PALABRA DE DISTINCION, PARA MI ES UNA PALABRA DE MUCHO RESPEITO. ES UNA PALABRA QUE YO QUISIERA QUE SE QUEDARA PARA LA HISTORIA.

WELL, THE TERM BRACERO ... IT IS A WORD OF DISTINCION, FOR ME IT IS A WORD OF GREAT PRIDE. I WOULD LIKE THAT WORD TO GO DOWN IN HISTORY.”

Juan Lopez, ex-bracero

“VIMOS LA EXPERIENCIA DE MANDAR UN DINERO A NUESTROS FAMILIARES EN MEXICO PARA QUE SEAN ... COMO MAMA, SEÑOR MAMA, Y VIVIR VIVIR EL TIEMPO QUE ESTUBIERAMOS AHI EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS.”

“WE SENT MONEY TO OUR FAMILIES IN MEXICO SO THEY COULD ... LIVE BETTER, BERRY BETTER, AND LIVE BETTER WHILE WE WERE IN THE U.S.”

Rafael Gomez, ex-bracero



Photo by Jeffrey M. Smith for the Smithsonian Institution. Photo by Jeffrey M. Smith for the Smithsonian Institution. Photo by Jeffrey M. Smith for the Smithsonian Institution.

**THE BRACERO HISTORY PROJECT  
PROYECTO DE HISTORIA DE LOS BRACEROS**

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History is part of a consortium of museums, universities, and cultural institutions documenting and preserving the history of the bracero program.

The Bracero History Project has recorded more than 600 oral histories and has collected many objects. The website [www.braceros.org](http://www.braceros.org) provides online access to this collection of oral histories, photo documents, and objects.

El Museo Nacional de Historia Americana del Smithsonian forma parte de un consorcio de museos, universidades e instituciones encargadas de documentar y preservar la historia del programa.

El Proyecto de Historia de los Braceros ha registrado más de 600 orales y ha reunido muchos objetos. El sitio web [www.braceros.org](http://www.braceros.org) provee acceso en línea a esta colección de historias orales, fotos, documentos y objetos.

The Bracero History Project partners include:  
Entre las asociadas al Proyecto de Historia de los Braceros se cuentan las siguientes entidades:

- Arkansas State University, Jonesboro
- Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
- California State University, Channel Islands
- George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia
- La Plaza de Cultura y Artes, Los Angeles
- National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago
- National Steinbeck Center and Museum, Salinas, California
- Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Mexican Heritage Corporation, San Jose, California
- University of Northern Colorado, Greeley
- University of Texas, El Paso
- University of Southern California, Los Angeles
- Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

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### Legacy

The bracero experience was one of exploitation but also of opportunity. The program had a direct impact on immigration and labor policy and, more importantly, on the formation of thriving Mexican American communities here in the U.S. With its legacy of struggle and success, the story of the bracero program was truly bittersweet.

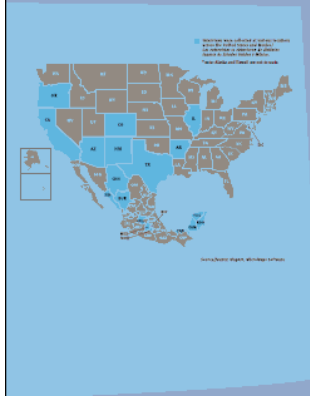
Panel 15



**BRACERO ORAL HISTORY LISTENING STATION**  
**HISTORIA ORAL DE LOS BRACEROS, ESTACIÓN DE AUDIO**

THE PICTURE WITHIN THIS FRAME OF LAWS, AGREEMENTS, AND CONTRACTS WAS, ON THE WHOLE, A MURKY ONE ... AND IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL, IMPORTANT YET INSIGNIFICANT, CENTRAL YET MARGINAL, THE BRACERO HIMSELF. EL CUADRO DENTRO DE ESTE MARCO DE LEYES, CONVENCIONES Y CONTRATOS ERA, EN GENERAL, TURBIO ... Y EN MEDIO DE TODO ESTO, A SU MISMO TIEMPO IMPARTANTE Y INSIGNIFICANTE, CENTRAL Y MARGINAL, SE HALLABA EL BRACERO MISMO.

Excerpt: Galicia, Mercedes M. Labor.  
The Mexican Braceros Story (1984)



Between 1942 and 1964 an estimated 2 million Mexicans came to the United States through the bracero program, making it the largest influx of guest workers in U.S. history. Embedded in the bracero program are narratives of millions of migrants who have been virtually invisible in the traditional accounts of American history. At the listening station, we provide stories told by 12 people involved in the bracero program. Listen to their voices and learn from former braceros, a clerk typist, a grower, and wives and children of braceros.

Entre 1942 y 1964 ingresaron a los Estados Unidos aproximadamente unos dos millones de mexicanos, a través del programa bracero, convirtiéndose en la mayor afluencia de inmigrantes temporarios en la historia de este país. En el seno del programa bracero se hallan innumerables historias de millones de inmigrantes que han permanecido virtualmente invisibles en las versiones tradicionales de la historia estadounidense.

Los invitamos a visitar la estación de audio. Allí le ofreceremos las historias de 12 personas involucradas con el programa bracero. Aprenda escuchando las propias voces de los ex braceros, de sus esposas e hijos, de una dentista administrativa y de un productor.



Photo: The Bracero Project, www.braceros.org, 2012. Photo by: Robert M. O'Connell. Photo of the listening station by: Robert M. O'Connell. Photo of the listening station by: Robert M. O'Connell.

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