

**Bracero History Project
National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution**

Guide for Interviewing Braceros

Family background, childhood, education, early employment

When and where were you born?

Tell me about your family and your hometown.

Where your parents and grandparents born in the same place?

What did your parents do for a living?

Did your grandparent do the same thing?

Did your parent and grandparents own their own home or property?

If so, did they purchase it

Did you come from a large family?

Where do your brothers and sisters live now?

Did any of your brothers or other family members work as braceros?

Tell me about your schooling.

Where did you go to school?

How many years did you go to school?

Did you learn to read and write?

Did you have a paying job while you were in school?

How old were you when you started to work?

Tell me about your first job.

The hiring process

How did you find out about the bracero program?

What did they call the bracero program in Mexico?

Where were you living at that time?

What kind of job did you have then?

How old were you? Were you married?

Had you ever thought about working in the U.S. before that time?

Why did you decide to go to the U.S?

What were your fears? Expectations?

Did your family influence your decision? Explain.

Do you remember what the day you left was like?

Did you travel with anyone else from your town or with family?

Did you take money with you?

What conversations did you have with family as you were thinking about joining the bracero program?

Describe the hiring process.

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What were the qualifications to become a bracero?
What did you have to do to prove you met those requirements?
When and where did you enlist?
What did the authorities, Mexican or American, tell you to expect about your job?
Did they tell you anything about your salary, living conditions, meals, or transportation?
How did you travel from the recruiting place to the reception center in the U.S.?
Describe the trip.
Did anyone from the town (or family) ever talk about the process?
Did you know what to expect during the hiring process?
How long did you have to wait before being called?
What did you do during that time? How did you live?

Where did you cross the border?
What happened at the reception center?
Describe the reception center.
About how many men were going through the process?
How many were new to the process and how many had done it before?
What did you have to do to get a work permit? Medical exam? Immunizations?
Did you have any choice as to type of work, length of employment, salary, location?
Did you have anything to say about where you were sent to work?
Were you allowed to keep some personal belongings?
What happened after you completed the process and received your work permit?

Job experiences

Did you go to a large Mexican community? If so, what was your relationship like to that community?
What were your interactions like with Mexican-Americans?
Did you work alongside of people from your hometown?
How were your interactions with people from other parts of Mexico?
Did you work with indigenous people from Mexico?

Did you know anything about the place where you worked before you got there?
Did you know how to do the work they asked you to do?
How many years did you work in the bracero program in the U.S.? Which years?
In how many different places did you work as a bracero?
Tell me about the place where you worked for the longest time?
How did you get there from the border reception center?
Describe the journey.
What did they produce at that farm/ranch?
Did you learn any new techniques or new farming ideas that you took back to Mexico?

Describe the work you did as a bracero.
How many braceros worked there with you?
Tell me about the other braceros who worked there. Did you make lasting friendships?
Did the work crew include men who were in the U.S. illegally? If yes, what was the attitude toward them?

Did your employer know you by name?
Did you have much contact with your employer or his family?
How were you treated?
How did your employer communicate with you? Did he speak Spanish?
Did you work or get to know Asian or African-American communities while you were in working as a Bracero?

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If so, what were your impressions of these groups?
Did officials from Mexico ever come to the place where you worked?
Did the Border Patrol ever come to check on workers? If so, what happened?

How did you communicate with your family in Mexico? Letters? Telephone? Visits?
How often did you get to see your family during the years you worked as a bracero?

If you were a bracero during the war, 1942-1945, did World War II affect your life?
Did you know about wartime rationing of food, shoes, or gasoline?
How did you hear news about the war?
Did you know any braceros who joined the American armed forces?

Daily routine and living conditions

How many days a week did you work?
How many hours per day?
Describe a typical workday.
Tell me about your meals. What did you eat? Where did you eat?
Did you have to pay for your meals? How did you pay for your meals?
What was your opinion of the food? Did you get enough to eat?
Describe the housing and interior furnishings: beds, chairs, heaters.
What about bathrooms? Indoor plumbing?
How did you wash your clothes?
Did your employer provide personal items? Toothbrush, soap, towel, razor, blanket?

Salary

How much was your salary?
Were you paid in cash? By check?
How often did you get paid?
What did you do with the money?
How would you send money back home to Mexico?
What did your family in Mexico do with the money?
Did you manage to save any money?
Did all braceros get paid the same amount?
Was there ever any problem getting paid?
Did you always receive the correct pay for hours worked?
Was money ever withheld from your pay? If so, do you know why?

Problems on the job

Did you ever have any problems at work? What kind of problems?
What would happen in case of accident or illness?

What were the most common complaints? Food, lodging, employer, salary?
What could you do if you didn't like your job?
Did you encounter any prejudice? If so, describe what happened.
Did you and your co-workers ever organize a labor protest? If yes, what happened? What were the consequences?

Recreation

What did you do on your day/s off work?
Were you free to come and go as you wished?
What did you and your fellow braceros do together for entertainment? Sports? Movies?
Did you have radios? Was there a Spanish-language station?
Where was the closest town?
How did you get to town? What would you do there?
Was there a Catholic Church nearby? Did you attend mass? Confession?
Did the church, town, or grower ever sponsor any dances or concerts?
Did you go home to Mexico for any holidays?
How did you celebrate Easter and Christmas?
Did you celebrate Mexican national holidays (16th of September) in bracero camps?
Did you ever experience discrimination in any town? What happened?
Did you see or go to other Mexican (Mexican American) stores in town?
Did Mexican (American) owners treat the braceros ok?

Life after bracero work

Did you return to Mexico following each job contract?
Did you bring back any items with you?
Did other families in your town have those kind of items?
Did your employer provide transportation back to Mexico?
After you completed your work contract, how did you get a new one?
What had to be done to receive an authorization to return to the U.S. to work? A mica?
Did you ever just quit your job as a bracero? Where did you go?
Did you know anyone who quit as a bracero?
If you did not go home to Mexico, what did you do in the U.S.?
Did you become a citizen of the U.S.? When? Why?
Did you learn to speak English?
Tell me about your life after working as a bracero.
Why did you decide to go back to stay in Mexico?
Why did you decide to stay in the US?

Final reflections

What does the term bracero mean to you?
How did you feel about being called a bracero?
In general, are your memories of working as a bracero mostly positive or negative?
Did being a bracero change your life in any way?
Do you have one specific memory of your experience?
Is there one thing you miss about your time as a bracero?

Guide for Interviewing Spouses

Family background, childhood, education, early employment

When and where were you born?
Tell me about your family and your hometown.
Where your parents and grandparents born in the same place?
What did your parents do for a living?
Did your grandparent do the same thing?
Did your parent and grandparents own their own home or property?
If so, did they purchase it?
Did you come from a large family?
Where do your brothers and sisters live now?
Did any of your brothers or other family members work as braceros?

Tell me about your schooling.
Where did you go to school?
How many years did you go to school?
Did you learn to read and write?
Did you have a paying job while you were in school?

Marriage and Children

How did you meet your husband?
Why did you decide to marry him?
When did you get married?
Where was he from?
How old were you?
How old was he?
What did he do?
Where did you first live?

Do you have children?
When did you have your children?
Where did you have each?
How many are men and how many are women?
What are their names?
What do they do?
Where do they live now?

Bracero Program

When was the first time you heard about the Bracero Program?
How old were you?
When and where was the first time you met a Bracero?
Was he a relative?

When did your husband first decided to join the Bracero Program?
At the time did you think it was a good or bad ideas to enter the program?

Do you remember the day he left?

Where did he sign up?

Where did he work?

Did you have a lot of contact with him while he was away? i.e. letters, telephone, visits

How often?

Did he send back money?

About how much?

How did you receive it?

Did you have to do any other jobs to make extra money?

When your husband was away, did you live in the same home or move?

Who stayed in your household?

What did you do while he was away?

Did you have any other man, like a father, brother, uncle, godfather help out with money, family or the house?

Did anything change in your household?

Did you talk to other Bracero families? What did you talk about?

What were your expectations about the money?

What were your expectations about the program in general?

Did you fear that he would stay in the US?

Did you ever travel to see him – either in the US or at one of the reception/contracting centers?

Final Reflections

After your husband's contract ended did he return to Mexico?

What happened when he did return?

How did the program affect your life?

Do you have one particular memory about the time he was away or the time he returned?

Guide for Interviewing Mothers of Braceros

Family background, childhood, education, early employment

When and where were you born?
Tell me about your family and your hometown.
Where your parents and grandparents born in the same place?
What did your parents do for a living?
Did your grandparent do the same thing?
Did your parent and grandparents own their own home or property?
If so, did they purchase it?
Did you come from a large family?
Where do your brothers and sisters live now?
Did any of your brothers or other family members work as braceros?

Tell me about your schooling.
Where did you go to school?
How many years did you go to school?
Did you learn to read and write?
Did you have a paying job while you were in school?

Marriage and Children

When did you get married?
Who did you marry?
Where was he from?
How old were you?
How old was he?
What did he do?
Where did you first live?

How many children do you have?
How many men and how many women?
What are their names?
When and where did you have each?
Where are they now?
What do they do?
Did you marry?
Who did you marry?
What did he do?

Bracero Program

When was the first time you heard about the Bracero Program?
How old were you?
Where did you hear it?
When was the first time you met a Bracero?
Was he a relative?
How many of your sons were Braceros?

Was your husband a Bracero?
Tell me when and why each of them became Braccros?
What year was that?
At the time did you think it was a good or bad ideas to enter the program?
Where did they sign up?
Where did your children work and what did they do?
When your children were away, did you live in the same home or move?
Who stayed in your houschold?
What did you do while they were away?
Did anything change in your household?
Did you talk to other Bracero families? What did you talk about?

Did you have a lot of contact with them while they were away? i.e. letters, telephone, visits
What would they talk/write to you about?

During this period where your sons married?
Who were they he married to?
Did they have children?
How many children did they/hc have?

Did they send you money?
About how much?
How did you receive it?

How long were they Braceros?
When did they stop working as Braceros and why?
Where do they live now and what do they do?

Final Reflections

After your children's contracts ended did they return to Mexico?
What happened when they returned?
How did the program affect your life?

Guide for Interviewing Border Patrol Agents/INS Employees

Background

When and where were you born?
Where did you grow up?
When did you start working in the Border Patrol? Or for the INS?
Tell me about your training to be an agent.
How many years did you work for the Border Patrol? Or for the INS?
Do you speak Spanish? Were you required to learn Spanish for your job?

Experience working with braceros

Describe your role in the bracero program.
What year/s did you work with braceros?
Where was your job assignment? Describe what you did.

At screening stations/recruiting centers in Mexico

Where was the recruiting station/screening center where you worked? Chihuahua, Monterey, Hermosillo?
Was the screening done inside a building? Outside, weather permitting?
Did the center operate year round? When were the busiest times?
How many applicants were there on a given day?
Describe the screening process.
What were the qualifications to become a bracero? How did an applicant prove he met those qualifications?
Did you have to perform any kind of background check on the candidates?
What role did the Mexican government have in the screening process? Were Mexican officials present at the recruiting center?
What happened to the candidates after they passed the screening process? Where were they taken? How did they get there?

Where did you live while working at the recruiting/screening center in Mexico? Hotel?
Describe your typical workday.
What were your normal hours? Weekly schedule?
Besides paperwork, what other tasks did you perform at the recruiting/screening center?
Is there any particular incident that stands out in your mind?

At reception centers in U.S.

Where was the reception center where you worked? Eagle Pass, El Paso, Hidalgo, Nogales, El Centro?
Describe the building/s.
On average, how many days did a bracero stay at the reception center before processing was completed and he received his work permit and a contract?
Describe the process the candidates had to go through at the reception center.

What constituted the medical examination?
Were inoculations administered? Which ones?
Were the braceros required to bathe, shave, get hair cuts?
Was any disinfecting performed? Explain.
Were the braceros allowed to keep their personal belongings?
Describe the mess hall. How many meals per day?
Describe the housing at the reception center.

How were the work contracts arranged?
Did potential employers come personally to the reception centers to obtain workers?
When a bracero completed his work contract and returned to Mexico, was he required to pass back through a center, thereby making his departure from the U. S. official?
When a bracero returned to work in subsequent years, was he required to pass through the U.S. reception center each time?

Where did you live while working at the reception center? Hotel? Housing?
Describe your typical workday while at the reception center.
What were your normal hours? Weekly schedule?
Besides paperwork, what other tasks did you perform at the reception center?
Is there any particular incident that stands out in your mind?

Law Enforcement

What effect did the bracero program have on illegal crossings?
How did the bracero program affect employment of illegals?
As part of your job, did you check documentation of workers on farms and ranches? If so, describe your experiences.
Did you encounter mixed crews of braceros and undocumented workers?
Were there incidents when farmers or ranchers attempted to "dry out" some of their "wetbacks"? How did that work?

Did braceros cause problems while working in the U.S.?
If so, what kinds of problems? Labor unrest? Criminal behavior?
Describe any incidents in which you were involved.

Final Reflections

What were the effects of the bracero program on the work of the Border Patrol/INS?
What is your personal opinion of the bracero program?
What were the advantages and disadvantages of the program?
Should the bracero program be revived?

Guide for Interviewing Farmers/Ranchers

Personal background

When and where were you born?
Where did you grow up and go to school?
Were your parents farmers/ranchers? If so, where?
Have you always been a farmer/rancher?
When did you start farming/ranching?

Farm/ranch history

Where was your farm/ranch located when you employed braceros?
Was it a family owned farm/ranch? How long had it been in your family?
How many acres did you have at the time you hired braceros?
What did you grow/raise in the 1940s? 1950s 1960s?

The hiring/transportation process

How did you first hear about the bracero program?
Explain why you decided to employ braceros.
What did you have to do to hire braceros? What were the regulations? Paperwork?
Which government agency administered the program?
How many years did you employ braceros? Which years?
How many braceros do you think you employed over the years?
What was the usual length of a work contract?
How were braceros assigned?
How were the braceros transported to your farm/ranch?
Did you ever go to a bracero processing center, reception center? If so, describe what was happening there.

Government regulations

What were you required to provide the bracero workers you hired?
What were the minimum requirements as to salary, living quarters, food, medical care?
Did any government officials, INS, or Border Patrol agents check to see if you met the requirements? If so, how was that done?
Did the braceros who worked for you live at your farm/ranch? Always? Usually?
Where did the braceros sleep and eat?
Tell me about the meals. Who prepared the food? Who paid for the meals?
Did you have any responsibility if one of the braceros became ill or had an accident?
Explain.
What was the minimum hourly wage?
How were wages determined?
Did you keep track of what you paid each worker? How did you do that?
Were you required to withhold any taxes or any other amounts from their pay?
Were you or your hiring agent members of a local agricultural organization?

Did these organizations have any influence on the operation of the bracero program?

Farm/ranch work

Describe the work performed by braceros on your farm/ranch?

Walk me through their typical work day during the growing and harvesting seasons.

What tools did they use? Did you provide tools, gloves, hats, clothes of any kind?

Did braceros perform field work only?

What other work did you have them do? Did they drive tractors, trucks? Were they allowed to operate agricultural machines?

Relationship with braceros

How much contact did you have with the braceros? Explain?

Did you know any of the braceros by name?

Does any one particular bracero stand out in your memory? If so, explain.

Did any one bracero become an especially valued employee?

Did you have a foreman? What was his relationship to braceros?

What did braceros do on their day/s off?

What did they do for fun?

Did you give them any special privileges? Paid vacation days?

What did they do on holidays?

At the end of the contract

When the contract ended, what did the braceros usually do? Did they leave? Go back to Mexico? Go work for somebody else in the area?

What were your obligations at the end of the work contract?

What was the procedure to extend or renew a contract?

Did you have any braceros work for you every year? For many years?

Problems

Did you have any problems with braceros? If so, explain.

What were the major problems?

Were there any incidents of fighting? Criminal behavior?

Did they complain to you about living conditions, wages, food?

What were the major complaints?

Did braceros ever stage a strike or labor protest in your area? If so, describe what happened.

Final Reflections

How did the bracero program affect your employment of undocumented workers?

Did you ever have a mixed crew of braceros and the undocumented? If yes, what was the relationship of these two groups.

What is your opinion of bracero work performance?

How did their work compare to the work of American or Mexican-American farmhands?

Did you notice any animosity between braceros and other farm/ranch employees?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of the bracero program?

What factors contributed to the program's demise?

Should the bracero program be reinstated? If so, what changes should be initiated?