

“One People without Borders”:

The Lost Roots of the Immigrants’ Rights Movement, 1954-2006

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Why, this dissertation asks, did the same Mexican American groups who in the 1950s warned about a “wetback invasion,” come, in the span of only two decades, to take up the cause of the undocumented—even to see themselves and undocumented immigrants as “one people without borders”? And why did this shift occur at a time of economic recession and restructuring, when the significance of unsanctioned migration was most pressing for Mexican Americans?

This project argues that the dreaded “invasion” of undocumented immigrants was the very force that ultimately produced a vibrant Mexican American-led immigrants’ rights movement. It shows that from the late 1960s to the mid-2000s, U.S.-born Mexican American activists came to understand immigration policy and debates as central to their own struggle for both civil rights and human rights.

As they did so, these activists came to fight on various fronts and to use numerous strategies. They took direct action. They built antiracist networks. They fostered alliances with (and articulated the importance of) transnational, working-class labor movements. They developed self-help organizations. They waged legal battles locally and nationally. And they engaged human rights discourses learned from other global struggles.

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing over the next several decades, these organizers and advocates were able to convince ethnic leaders, labor unions, and allies on the left that supporting immigrants was, in the long run, in the interest of all marginalized people and all workers. Indeed, the immigrants’ rights movement as it exists today is the product of that half-century of transformation.

As it traces that transformation and the understudied roots of the modern immigrants' rights movement, the dissertation also makes broader contributions to our understanding of the historical significance of immigration in the twentieth-century United States. Blending various methodological approaches—including archival research, oral history, and policy analysis—it shows that debates about immigration have sparked fierce intra-ethnic debates, destabilized traditional political ideologies and coalitions, and revealed fundamental paradoxes of American social and political life.

Namely, this work highlights how tensions between cultural anxieties and capital's insatiable hunger for cheap labor resulted in both mass migration of indispensable but unwanted foreign workers and Draconian restrictionism and a resurgent nativism, and how this problem, in turn, forced Mexican Americans, organized labor, and leftist activists to rethink their positions and strategies on immigration.

Dedication

To those who have imagined, dreamed, fought, and sacrificed for a better world. The fight continues.

*“The word of the oldest of the old of our peoples didn't stop.
It spoke the truth, saying that our feet couldn't walk alone,
that our history of pain and shame was repeated and multiplied
in the flesh and blood of the brothers and sisters of other lands and skies.”
-Subcomandante Marcos*

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Acknowledgements

It was around my junior year in high school that I gave up. Until then, I had been a good student and a dedicated learner. But it was around that time that I realized what being “undocumented” really meant. As one of the people I interviewed for this dissertation told me, “who needs papers when you’re a kid?” But as I came of age, I began to realize that without documents, my dreams may not come true. I would have to settle for working, like my parents, in the fields. There was nothing wrong with that, of course. It’s dignified and necessary work. It’s honorable and beautiful. But it’s hard work, and it’s not what my parents wanted for me or frankly, what I wanted for myself. But it was the life ahead of me, so I gave up on everything else.

I began to fail classes, then to skip them. I stopped caring. When my parents came home from ten- or twelve-hour days of torturous work to notices and phone calls from my teachers, I realized the sadness I was causing them and what a mockery of their sacrifices I was making. I decided that I would at least graduate high school. I managed to scrape together enough Cs and remedial classes to get a diploma, barely making a 2.0 GPA. But in 2004, I became the first person in my family to graduate high school. After graduation, I began to work the night shift at a packaging warehouse for a major retail distributor.

Then, in 2005, I received a letter that changed my life. I was granted permanent residence—a green card. Suddenly, the world opened up to me. But I came from poverty, and my high school academic record was atrocious. So it was then that I joined the United States Navy, where I married a woman who had enlisted around the same time. I began to think once again about my future. Timaree, the woman who became my wife, had attended Weber State University, an open-admissions university in Northern Utah, where, she told

me, I could start over. My past and my high school grades would not matter. I would be a blank slate. Timaree and I began our studies in 2010 and finished our bachelor's degrees together three years later, and in 2012, I applied to graduate school. I chose Duke University because it felt right. I'd be lying if I said it was anything else. It just felt right. And it was right.

As I submit this document, I am bringing to a close six years of graduate work. But I am only here, at this stage, because of the many women and men in my life who supported me, guided me, and inspired me. A few words to each of those who have made this possible seems woefully inadequate. I will spend the rest of my life trying to honor each and every person on this list who made this moment possible. But for now, I humbly offer my gratitude . . .

To my parents, Benjamin and Lucina, who sacrificed so much and loved me so unconditionally; who worked harder than anyone I know, always with dignity and poise, so that I never went without or suffer as they did; who instilled in me compassion, humility, and kindness; who taught me to fight for what's right and to demand a better and more humane world.

To the rest of my family, who have supported me in countless ways, believed in me, and trusted me to make them proud.

To the Smith family, and especially to the memory of Ted and Wana Fae, who treated me as theirs from the beginning.

To the teachers who never gave up on me.

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To the organizations who funded my work and whose generosity allowed me to do the research that became this dissertation: the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University; the Franklin Humanities Institute; the American Historical Association (AHA); the Cushwa Center and the University of Notre Dame; the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library; the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library; the Duke University Women's Studies Department; the Western Historical Association (WHA); the Dolph Briscoe Center at the University of Texas-Austin; the Mellon Foundation and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR); the Immigration and Ethnic History Society (IEHS); the Organization of American Historians (OAH); the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC); the Kenan Institute for Ethics (KIE); and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (GLIAH).

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whose kindness and dedication to her students is inspiring; and Gunther Peck, whose moral clarity and passion is an example to the world.

To my dissertation supervisor, Nancy MacLean, who taught me to think and write with empathy; who has made me a better scholar, writer, historian, and above all, a better person; whose dedication humbled me; who asked me to be the change I hope to see in the world; and whose generosity and compassion lifted me even during the most difficult of times.

And to my wife, Timaree, who, for years, has been my inspiration, my rock and my foundation; who has sacrificed so much so that I could pursue my dream; and who has brought me healing in times of pain and joy even in the face of struggle.

Introduction

This project began many years ago, long before I knew I would pursue academic inquiry. I grew up in Delano, California, the home of the farm workers' movement. I was the son of farm workers, and I attended middle and high school with countless classmates who came from farm worker families. Farm labor and the farm worker struggle were (and still are) part of daily life in Delano. I do not exaggerate when I say that most of the people I knew were in one way or another tied to that line of work. The house I grew up in, a small mobile home in a trailer park community, stood not much farther than two miles, about a five-minute drive, from the famed "Forty Acres" compound where the farm worker movement began and where Cesar Chavez's first public fast first attracted national attention to the struggle of farm workers.¹ And yet, in the historical and spiritual home of the movement, I did not know a single person who was a member of the United Farm Workers (UFW) union.

This posed for me a question that I set about to understand when I began graduate work. When I earned my first research grant in the summer of 2014, I eagerly set course for the UFW archives, held at the Walter P. Reuther Library, housed at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. It did not take long for me to begin putting together a hypothesis to answer my question, and it was not a comfortable conclusion: immigrant farm workers rejected the UFW because the union had rejected *them*, often brutally and violently, decades prior. The union never recovered from this, I came to think.

Growing up, I did not know this story or the complex history of the UFW more generally. Despite my not knowing a single soul who was a member of the union, Cesar

¹ Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 87.

Chavez and the farm worker movement were icons in Delano. In school, we were taught that whatever improvements had been made to the lives of our parents were owed to Chavez and his struggle. This was, of course, not entirely false. Still, the one-dimensional portrait we were given did not capture the complexity of man I had come to regard as a saint or of the movement he had led.

In fact, quickly I came to understand that my own hypothesis was too simplistic. Reading Matt Garcia's *From the Jaws of Victory* showed me that the union's collapse was not the result of one single issue but of a number of missteps, of changing political realities, and of overlapping struggles. It also showed me that a narrow question such as the one I had begun with could quickly turn into polemic. I was too close to the question, too emotionally invested in the subject, and too prone to near-sightedness on the issue. And so, while many scholars at that stage naturally work to narrow their dissertation subjects, I did the opposite: I pulled back the lens to try to understand the bigger picture, to ask bigger questions.

After all, I immediately began to see that Chavez's position on immigration was not illogical or without precedent. And that is the topic that this dissertation tackles: the historical relationship between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, the roots of the immigrants' rights movement that emerged from that relationship, and the causes and consequences of it on immigration policy and public debates about race, ethnicity, and citizenship.

The dissertation builds on the rich foundational work of pioneering Chicano scholars like Jorge Mariscal, George Sanchez, and Mario Garcia, making use of their conceptual frameworks while pushing their analytical boundaries and carrying the story further in time.

Specifically, my work argues, like Mariscal, against “dehistoricized identities,” which in our present moment abound.² What the terms Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano mean, for example, has been in constant flux over the period of my focus. As Mariscal has shown, when scholars and the public talk about “Latinos” or “the Latino electorate,” they use imprecise and ultimately problematic language that prevents us from seeing the fissures that make solidarity a challenge. George Sanchez offered a model of more adequately historicized identities. His classic *Becoming Mexican American* explored the ways in which “the barrio made cultural survival possible” and how residents forged a unique, complex identity.³ Arguing against “bipolar models” of ethnic identity, Sanchez made clear that trying to understand Mexican Americans as either purely Mexican or purely American was fruitless and that doing so obscured much more than it revealed.⁴ Instead, he argued that during the first half of the twentieth century, Mexican Americans gradually “forged an ambivalent Americanism,” a kind of “in-between” identity that recognized their second-class citizenship but actively demanded full inclusion.⁵

Similarly, Mario Garcia, in his groundbreaking study *Mexican Americans*, sought to investigate the formation of a political generation of Mexican Americans struggling to find their place in a society in which they existed but were made to feel that they did not belong. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, he argued, Mexican Americans emerged as a distinct, politicized ethnic group, aware of their social difference and determined to not only react to

² Jorge Mariscal, “Foreword: The Chicano Movement,” in Mario T. García, ed., *The Chicano Movement: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014), xxi.

³ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*

others' hostility but also to make their own history.⁶ But as he explained, Mexican Americans were never monolithic: there were middle class circles, a broad working class, radical thinkers, and professional intellectuals, among others. Nevertheless, all had to confront questions about who they were and how they fit into American society. In his interpretation, this generation of Mexican Americans embraced both their American citizenship and their Mexican ethnic background to varying degrees, resulting in what he called "cultural pluralism": a sort of assimilation "on Mexican American terms."⁷ In other words, Mexican Americans accepted their in-betweenness and celebrated their Mexicanness, even as they sought full citizenship in the United States.

My dissertation acknowledges the vast contributions of these early works, yet also urges further focus on the ways immigration, and especially unauthorized migration, problematized and at times threatened that emergent Mexican American identity. While Sanchez, Garcia, and others hinted at the role of immigration, they did not regard it as a central issue of the early twentieth century, privileging instead questions about education and sociocultural formation.⁸

Even so, their own works hint at how immigration always impinged on these domains. All of these authors note, for example, that immigration has, since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, been a social reality for ethnic Mexicans on both sides of the border, as it "left the toilers on one side of the border, the capital and the best land on

⁶ Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

the other.”⁹ It is true, of course, that for many Mexican Americans, immigration was not part of their experience; instead, many tackled questions of “internal colonialism” because as some have said about their relationship to the border, “We didn’t cross the border; the border crossed us.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, the very fracturing of their communities, the construction of a border that did not exist before, and the political “in-betweenness” that the end of the Mexican American War necessarily created, forced Mexican Americans to grapple with immigration.¹¹

The first Mexican Americans, forged as such by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, for example, had to decide whether to stay in the United States and accept de facto second-class citizenship or to move south of the newly created border in order to reclaim their Mexican nationality.¹² And for many, their dream was initially “a Mexican dream, not an American dream.”¹³ That is, many imagined returning to Mexico and reclaiming their status as unhyphenated Mexicans, where they would at least be full citizens.

As Garcia noted, for the majority who remained in the north, acculturation had become a goal by the 1930s, and as I show, had become a fully matured impulse by the post-war years. The Second World War provided an opportunity for Mexican Americans to prove their worth and their Americanness, as hundreds of thousands took up arms in support of

⁹ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960* (Charlotte, NC: McNally & Loftin, 1964), 14.

¹⁰ Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 3; Mathew C. Gutmann et al., eds., *Perspectives on Las Americas: A Reader in Culture, History, & Representation* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 10.

¹¹ John A. Cutler, “Pochos, Vatos, and Other Types of Assimilation: Masculinities in Chicano Literature, 1940-2004” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008), 47; Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, ed., *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Forum: Critical and Ethnographic Practices* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 156.

¹² Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 63.

¹³ García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*, 15.

the United States.¹⁴ When Mexican American soldiers returned from the war, assimilationist organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the American GI Forum, founded in 1929 and 1948, respectively, spread across the Southwest, with the aim of capitalizing on the wartime contributions of Mexican Americans to erase the vast system of racial discrimination that existed back home and to demand inclusion and equal citizenship.¹⁵ Civic leaders like Dr. Hector Garcia, the decorated Mexico-born U.S. Army physician who founded the GI Forum, focused on assimilation, integration, and acculturation as their strategy to seek fair treatment.

That strategy, I show, put them on a collision course with incoming waves of immigrants, who by definition, were neither acculturated nor assimilated, with their very difference seeming to undermine the integration the established residents sought. As various historians have shown, the continued racial stratification of the United States would complicate the assimilationist project, as would developments in the political economies of both Mexico and the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

Mexico's economy grew rapidly after World War II thanks to an unprecedented increase in manufacturing, growing urbanization, and a massive increase in exports (especially oil). But high inflation, weak labor leadership, and increased government neglect of the laboring classes resulted in much suffering for the "average Mexican" and "the little

¹⁴ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Richard Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Craig A. Kaplowitz, *LULAC, Mexican Americans, and National Policy* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 87; Michelle H. Kells, *Hector P. Garcia* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 6.

man.”¹⁶ As the “Mexican Miracle” left behind millions of poor Mexicans at the precise moment the United States was experiencing an increased demand for labor, especially in the agricultural sector, out-migration surged. These conditions, as my dissertation will argue, also triggered a long, painful, and ultimately defining conversation among Mexican Americans about immigration and its relationship to their social goals.

My work builds upon a growing literature on the unauthorized migration of Mexican workers to the north, while exploring the political impact of that movement in a way that previous authors have not. The story begins, ironically, with the largest government-sponsored guest worker program in U.S. history, the Bracero Program. Historians have provided the broad outline of the program, noting that employers imported four million Mexican workers from 1942 to 1964 to work in agriculture and railroads.¹⁷ Cindy Hahamovitch has interrogated the constraints imposed on such “guest” or “temporary” workers, arguing that they were neither free nor enslaved, but occupied a position in between.¹⁸ Others have explored the brutality of the program, such as Lori Flores, who has highlighted the dangerous, hostile, and dehumanizing nature of the program.¹⁹ By contrast, Deborah Cohen calls it a modernizing program that most former braceros remember fondly,

¹⁶ Philip Russell, *The History of Mexico: From Pre-Conquest to Present*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 454; Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 10 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 618.

¹⁷ Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*; Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Maria Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience: Elitlore versus Folklore* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1979); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁸ Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁹ Lori A. Flores, “A Town Full of Dead Mexicans: The Salinas Valley Bracero Tragedy of 1963, the End of the Bracero Program, and the Evolution of California’s Chicano Movement,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 44 (2013): 124–43, doi:10.2307/westhistquar.44.2.0124.

pointing to positive memories and largely happy narratives.²⁰ More recently, some have investigated the impact the program had on women and children who were left back home in Mexico, as Ana Rosas has done to tremendous effect.²¹

Incorporating their insights, my project focuses on the disruptive nature of the bracero program to the goals of Mexican American reformers and activists, a feature thus far underemphasized in historical accounts of this period. It is well known that Ernesto Galarza, the most prominent actor fighting against the bracero program, considered it a threat to the living standards and organizational capacity of farm workers, who could not hope to organize while employers could bring in millions of right-less braceros to work for next to nothing, under miserable conditions, often as strikebreakers.²² But while Galarza fought for an end to the program because it was destructive to labor organizing efforts in the U.S. and exploitative of Mexican workers, he also sought to halt “the hiring of illegals” on similar grounds, something which scholars have paid scant attention to.²³

Expanding on the works of immigration historians, I hope to underscore the formative nature of this period for the growing ambivalence, anxiety, and hostility among Mexican Americans toward the undocumented. Key to understanding the tension is a central paradox of U.S. policy, which has always desired Mexican immigrants as cheap labor, while at the same time treating them as unwanted inferiors. Accordingly, immigration policies toward Mexicans oscillated between welcoming and restrictive. What accounts for these

²⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

²¹ Ana Elizabeth Rosas, “Breaking the Silence: Mexican Children and Women’s Confrontation of Bracero Family Separation, 1942–64,” *Gender & History* 23 (2011): 382–400, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2011.01644.x.

²² Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 129.

²³ Mark N. Hoffman, “Rethinking the Politics of Immigration: Colonial Modes of Immigration Management and the Ambivalent Resilience of the Empire State” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2013), 122.

changes, according to most historians, is the nature of the U.S. political economy: a capitalist system highly responsive to the alleged needs of businesses, which seek importation of foreign laborers during times of economic boom and deportation or exclusion when their work is no longer needed.²⁴ In the postwar period, employer practices fueled ambivalence, anxiety, and hostility by importing cheap labor that undercut Chicano wages, made organizing all but impossible, and fueled a racial capitalism that forced co-ethnics to compete against, rather than cooperate with, one another.

While extensive studies exist on the larger contours of immigration history, including many on the restrictive measures of the late 19th century and early 20th century, my dissertation focuses on the peculiar case of Mexican immigrants after 1942. Until the mid-century, the southern border was virtually unregulated, but this began to change with the Great Depression when immigrants became easy scapegoats for the economic downturn.²⁵ The ironies of this immigration policy were many, not least that most immigrants lived and worked “illegally” in places that had a century before had belonged to Mexico. Another was that while one government agency imported Mexicans to work on that nation’s fields and railroads, another worked to deport them.²⁶

Historians of immigration have sought to explain these puzzles in a number of ways. Mae Ngai, for example, has argued that “immigration law and practices were central in shaping the modern political economy of the Southwest, one based on commercial agriculture, migratory farm labor, and the exclusion of Mexican immigrants and Mexican

²⁴ Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 5.

²⁵ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War On “Illegals” and the Remaking of the U.S. - Mexico Boundary*, 2 edition (New York: Routledge, 2010), 34.

²⁶ Gregory Rodriguez, “Undocumented Workers: Essential but Unwanted,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/oct/11/opinion/la-oe-rodriguez-column-illegal-immigr20101011>.

Americans from the mainstream of American society,” but not from the labor force, of which they became an essential part.²⁷ Similarly, Kelly Lyttle Hernández has demonstrated that the clashing impulses of labor demand and nativist anxieties have produced a powerful regime of immigration control that seeks to regulate immigration according to industry needs. She shows, too, how various government agencies and especially Border Patrol agents have shaped the work of border control on the ground. By creating an organizational structure modeled on military values, immigration officers became central ideological players who contributed to the perception of immigrants as a national security threat, thus shaping popular and government views about border enforcement.²⁸

These works have helped us understand the racialization of immigrants, but they have done little to illuminate the corollary impact on Mexican Americans. Not surprisingly, given employers’ use of migrants and the way they were racialized, I will show, established residents of Mexican descent viewed the newcomers as a threat to their own hard-won standing, by creating an enduring image of Mexican-as-“illegal” and by throwing into question whether Mexicans could really ever assimilate, whether they would even learn proper English, and more generally whether they could ever become fully American. My project seeks to hone in on this problem to make sense of the eventual development of a “without borders” ideology and an immigrants rights movement.

The historiography of relations between immigrants and Mexican American remains thin, although a few works have provided a valuable framework. David Gutiérrez, in thus far the only exhaustive study on the topic, has shown that Mexican Americans have had to

²⁷ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 128.

²⁸ Kelly Lyttle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 55.

grapple with immigration since the end of the Mexican American War. He argued that two distinctive camps emerged over time: on the one hand, middle-class assimilationists who saw Mexican immigration—particularly undocumented migration—as a threat to their own ethnic respectability, assimilation, and social integration; and on the other hand, a working-class faction whose members identified with immigrants and their social and economic marginalization by others.²⁹

Whereas Gutiérrez focuses on focuses on institutional actors such as LULAC and the GI Forum and emphasizes continuity in their beliefs and practices, my dissertation complicates his argument by more explicitly exploring the role of nativism and policy in this history and by highlighting the sea of change that occurred within Mexican American intellectual and cultural communities after 1942 as a result. And while I concur that his generalizations seem to be valid for the earlier period, I also demonstrate that at least for a time, roughly from the beginning of the bracero program to the end of the 1960s, many working-class Mexican Americans were extremely anxious about immigration and some actively opposed the undocumented.

No case proves this more strongly, I show, than the farm worker movement and its heralded leader Cesar Chavez. Though quintessentially working-class, the United Farm Workers nevertheless vehemently opposed undocumented immigrants. At times union members victimized them “quite brutally,” in the words of Frank Bardacke.³⁰ Recent historians have begun a critical reassessment of the farm workers’ movement, in a seismic historiographical shift that I hope to build on and expand. Indeed, I elaborate on other

²⁹ David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 40.

³⁰ Frank Bardacke, “The UFW and the Undocumented,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 83 (2013): 166.

researchers' insights that the movement's open hostility to undocumented workers spurred debates to show how the conversations thus engendered helped alter Chicano positions on immigration.

While historians, social scientists, journalists, and former activists have begun to address the farm worker movement's internal failings and to hint at the important role that immigration played in the union's collapse, I focus on the conversations the union's harsh reaction to immigrants ignited and the powerful reactions it elicited from left-wing Chicanos and Anglo union allies, among them religious and social justice activists, a key source of moral support and funding. Having been attracted to the movement in part owing to its diversity and anti-racist ideology, such supporters, I show, found the treatment of the undocumented shocking. Some protested vocally, as in one 1974 demonstration that made clear their displeasure with the union's tactics.³¹

A number of scholars have recently laid the groundwork for the intervention I propose by exploring what went wrong with the farm worker movement. Marshall Ganz, himself a central figure in the UFW and a respected sociologist, began this trend with his 2009 book *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement*. Ganz focused on "strategic capacity" to explain both the union's early success and ultimate failure. Whereas the union's achievements owed to its use of "informed, creative, and responsive" strategy grounded in democratic decision-making, diverse biographical perspectives, and a degree of tolerance for dissent and experimentation, he shows, Chavez's later abandonment of these resources contributed to its demise.³²

³¹ Mariana Hernandez, "3,000 Rally in LA: 'End Deportations!,'" *The Militant*, September 13, 1974.

³² Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

Similarly, historian Matt Garcia brought to bear new sources, including previously ignored audiotapes, listserv discussions, and a number of oral histories with movement leaders. These led him to conclude that Chavez, after finding initial success, became imbued with “false confidence” and “assumed he was infallible, which led to self-destructive behavior that short-circuited the movement.”³³ Chavez also became distant from the rank-and-file —figuratively and literally—in moving operations from Delano to La Paz, as he turned to electoral politics. He began relying on unpaid volunteers and outside support, which ultimately created a bureaucratic, stale, and ineffective union. Garcia even suggested that what remains today is a skeleton of that once improbably strong movement, something that more resembles a lobbying firm or a family business than a civil rights outfit.

Neither Garcia nor Ganz, however, register the immigration issue as significant to the union’s downfall.

Others have provided a better sense of how undocumented immigration figured in the union’s struggles. First in a reassessment of the movement and later in a critical biography of Chavez, journalist Miriam Pawel sought to explicate why the movement failed. Like Garcia, she noted that although sincere in his passion for justice, Chavez often rejected criticism and demanded absolute obedience to his authority. Pawel chronicles, in some detail, the union’s anti-“illegals campaign,” adducing evidence of how it opposed and actively worked to keep immigrants out, especially as conditions in the fields worsened.³⁴

³³ Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 8.

³⁴ Miriam Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez’s Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

In the same vein, Frank Bardacke, in his 2012 book, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers*, pointed to Chavez's missteps to make sense of how a union that "for a time, made everything seem possible," collapsed so spectacularly.³⁵ Like Ganz, Garcia, and Pawel, Frank Bardacke noted that today's farm workers make less in real wages than those of the 1970s did and that few are members of the union or see any reason to be. Bardacke argued that two rival souls marked the movement—Chavez as a charismatic leader versus the rank-and-file, with their on-the-ground knowledge, militant attitudes, and creative organizing. When the two souls worked together, a vibrant movement thrived. But when Chavez "trampled" on the rank-and-file, the movement floundered. Like Pawel, Bardacke hinted that the undocumented question was part of the historical puzzle, and even judged Chavez's refusal to represent or welcome them as "his greatest historical failing."³⁶ He devoted a chapter to the UFW's stance on the "wetback problem" and an article calling attention to the union's treatment of "illegals."³⁷

Unlike these authors, my concern is not with the role that immigration played in the movement's collapse, but more in the reactions the episode provoked, which produced new concern for immigrants' rights. Leftist Chicanos and their allies, my work shows, reacted to the union's anti-immigrant campaign with horror and indignation. "By 1973," as Gutiérrez noted in passing, Chavez's stance on the undocumented "was seriously out of line with the public views expressed by other Chicano and Mexican American groups."³⁸ Those groups, joined by some radical labor leaders and anti-racist activists, wrote letters, took to the streets,

³⁵ Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (London: Verso, 2012), 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 728.

³⁷ Bardacke, "The UFW and the Undocumented."

³⁸ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 197.

and demanded a halt to the union's campaign. Opposition came from diverse groups on the left, among them Centro de Acción Social Autonomo (CASA), Teatros Unidos, the Committee of the Defense of the Bill of Rights, the U.S. Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners, the Young Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Brown Berets, which together sought to make clear that "the United Farm Workers do not speak for the Chicano movement in their recent attacks on undocumented workers."³⁹

That they reacted as they did, I show, was not in any sense "natural," or to be expected. And in fact, the UFW, my research reveals, was shocked at the response that it had, unwittingly, prompted. A number of developments had created new circumstances. One was, as Nancy MacLean has noted, that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had allowed Mexican Americans to seek justice and redress not by claiming whiteness, as the previous generation had done, but instead by seeking corrective policies *as* minorities.⁴⁰

This new political opening, together with the broader Chicano movement that the farm worker struggle had spurred, other scholars have shown, ignited ethnic pride, a growing consciousness of Mexican Americans' oppressed status, and new hope that they could make claims on the state and other institutions for change.⁴¹ More and more, ethnic Mexican Americans took pride in their Mexicanness, a pride that, I believe, made it newly possible for them to see the plight of undocumented people as their own—when circumstances changed in the mid-1970s.

Furthermore, my work demonstrates that encounters with a growing number of undocumented people in the United States may have begun to humanize undocumented

³⁹ Hernandez, "3,000 Rally in LA: 'End Deportations!'"

⁴⁰ Nancy MacLean, "The Civil Rights Act and the Transformation of Mexican American Identity and Politics," *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal* 18 (2007): 130.

⁴¹ Ibid.

people to established Mexican Americans. It was one thing to decry some abstract “invasion” of strangers. It was quite another to reject co-ethnics who were more and more joining Chicanos in the workplace and neighborhoods and forming what historian Mae Ngai would call “mixed status families,” those made up of combinations of citizens, legal residents, and undocumented people.⁴²

The journalist Ruben Salazar observed in 1970 that as more and more immigrants interacted with the American-born brown population, some Chicanos grew to feel compassion for their undocumented co-ethnics. “Anyone who has seen the fetid shacks in which potential wetbacks live on the Mexican side of the border,” Salazar suggested at the beginning of the decade, “can better understand why these people become wetbacks.”⁴³ Salazar also commented, tellingly, that “wetbacks and Chicanos look alike to the Border Patrol”—in a prescient nod to how the racism directed against the newcomers also affected those who had imagined themselves acculturated.⁴⁴ Among the thousands of deported there were “persons born in the United States who did not have their papers with them,” an injustice that served to kindle solidarity between Chicanos and undocumented immigrants, both of whom now shared a common threat.⁴⁵

Another threat that affected both immigrants and Chicanos, I show, and a key influence thus far largely neglected by scholars, was the vicious racism expressed by Anglo nativists in the 1970s. Individuals like the Ku Klux Klan leader Tom Metzger and lobbying groups like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) railed against

⁴² Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 2.

⁴³ Ruben Salazar, *Ruben Salazar: Border Correspondent*, ed. Mario T. García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 253.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

immigration, as did those who flocked to them. Followers insisted that non-whites were taking American jobs, that “the white race is superior in every way,” and that ethnic Mexicans could “never [be] true Americans.”⁴⁶ Leftist Chicanos, I found, seized on such racist rhetoric to persuade other Mexican Americans to “keep sight of the real enemy”—a system that denied the dignity of all.⁴⁷ As I illustrate, labor-linked leaders like Bert Corona, Mark Day, Baca, Mario Cantú, Miguel Pendás, and Chole Alatorre offered an alternative way of understanding the problem. They pointed out how the nativists lumped together citizens, legal residents, and the undocumented in a racialized manner—and argued that the only way Mexican Americans could protect themselves was to also support the undocumented.

I show that it was this concatenation of circumstances that produced the about-face I seek to explain. Pro-immigrant Mexican American leftists had long argued that “bracero, wetback, or American citizen,” the ethnic Mexican was “still the man with the hoe at the bottom of civilization’s heap.”⁴⁸ But the 1970s nativist backlash, together with the UFW’s contentious “wet line” and the growing connections between Chicanos and Mexican immigrants, allowed these arguments to more easily convince their co-ethnics that attacking the undocumented was misguided and counterproductive because “the mounting hysteria against them impacts . . . us.”⁴⁹

Seeing this for the first time, while taking stock of the outrage its anti-immigrant efforts had provoked, even the UFW gradually altered its position. Cesar Chavez conceded in 1975 that his union, “in the heat of the struggle, [had] committed errors” on

⁴⁶ Various documents, Baca Papers, Box 23, Folder 17.

⁴⁷ “To Farm Workers, Members of the N.F.W.A., All Workers in General, to the American People,” C.A.S.A (Los Angeles and Chicago), October 24, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 30.

⁴⁸ George Groh, “A New Deal for the Wetbacks,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 23, 1951.

⁴⁹ “La Frontera: America’s Dilemma,” *La Prensa*, June 20, 1986, Baca Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

immigration.⁵⁰ In fact, eventually the union invested heavily in “immigration reform” that prioritized amnesty for the undocumented, likely in no small part because Chavez needed the allies who had begun abandoning *la causa* in protest over the union’s stance on and treatment of the undocumented.⁵¹

The shift among Mexican Americans was neither linear nor universal, as I make clear in the final two chapters. In fact, when California’s nativist Proposition 187, which sought to deny public social services to undocumented immigrants and their families, was placed on the ballot in 1994, a third of Latinos voted in favor of it.⁵² Nevertheless, by then, every single Mexican American organization had adopted a pro-immigrant stance. And in the years that followed, in what one political scientist called the “187 Effect,” more and more ordinary Mexican Americans, too, came to interpret attacks on immigrants as attacks on all ethnic Mexicans.⁵³

Thus, this dissertation argues that we cannot fully understand how most Mexican Americans came to see themselves in relation to the immigrant community without putting into conversation the historiographies of immigration, nativism, labor, and the Chicano movement. While historians have usually privileged organizational and institutional actors, I

⁵⁰ An Open Letter to Farm Workers from Cesar Chavez,” *El Malcriado*, July 7, 1975, Corona Papers, Box 17, Folder 24.

⁵¹ Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard García, *César Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 167.

⁵² Lina Y. Newton, “Why Latinos Supported Proposition 187: Testing the Economic Threat and Cultural Identity Hypothesis” (Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine, 1998).

⁵³ Mark Z. Barabak, “The Politics of California’s Proposition 187 in One Chart,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/politicsnow/la-pn-politics-of-proposition-187-in-one-chart-20140617-story.html>; Matt Barreto, “The Prop 187 Effect: How the California GOP Lost Their Way and Implications for 2014 and beyond,” *Latino Decisions*, accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/10/17/prop187effect/>; Linda S. Bosniak, “Opposing Prop. 187: Undocumented Immigrants and the National Imagination,” *Connecticut Law Review* 28 (1996 1995): 555; Robin Dale Jacobson, *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate over Immigration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 187; Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California’s Proposition 187* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002).

also focus on individuals and the intellectual and political networks they formed, as well as the ideas that emerged from intellectual exchanges and political developments. And while my project is primarily concerned with ideas, their relationship to policy, and their evolution and spread, I also assert that understanding the role of immigrants themselves in these debates provides a fuller understanding of the change. Therefore, I enlist oral histories with undocumented immigrants and key surviving prominent figures. Doing so, I believe, offers a more textured and complicated picture of the past that does not simply reflect the views of organizations and their leaders but those most central to this past, too: undocumented immigrants themselves.

Finally, by taking seriously the anxieties of anti-immigrant groups, my project reveals the ways in which immigration has been a cultural and social placeholder for broader questions about the proper scope and role of government, and the nature of capitalism and democracy in the United States. I actively explore the role that varied constructions of identity played in—and mediated—class struggles. Using social, cultural, intellectual, and political methods of interrogation, and employing archival materials, published primary sources, cultural works, government documents, propaganda materials, and oral histories, along with secondary sources, I provide a history of the immigrants’ rights movement that the extant literature has not adequately explained.

This dissertation is organized roughly chronologically, though at times the chronology overlaps significantly to offer contextual and thematic grounding. It begins in the decades leading up to the 1960s when Mexican Americans were deeply troubled by the influx of both bracero labor and “wetbacks” (a common and derogatory term for

undocumented border crossers). In the post-war years, the early chapters show, Mexican Americans generally viewed the issue from a decidedly American—that is to say, Anglo—point of view, as they were deeply invested in the idea of integration at a time when patriotism was at a premium. As other historians have noted, doing so was a fruitful strategy for Mexican Americans, who could (and often successfully did) make claims on the state as white persons. Mexican American also feared economic competition, which they portrayed through a decidedly nationalistic lens.

The first chapter deals with this period and devotes some attention to the ways in which Mexican Americans advanced a racialized rhetoric in their efforts to protect themselves, ironically, from the very stereotypes they were echoing about Mexican immigrants. This chapter focuses particular attention on individuals like Ernesto Galarza, Hector P. Garcia, George Isidore Sánchez and on organizations like the American GI Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), all of which supported restrictionist measures, advanced stereotypes of immigrants, and insisted on distancing themselves from their bracero and undocumented co-ethnics. Their attitudes began to change slightly, I show, as civil rights legislation changed the strategic calculus. But their awkward position as both civil rights leaders and immigration restrictionists prevented them from being central actors in shaping the most groundbreaking immigration legislation in the 20th century, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, often referred to simply as “Hart-Celler” after its principal sponsors, and kept them from seeing the problems that this legislation would ultimately cause.

Two separate but deeply intertwined and mutually-reinforcing developments during the mid-1960s profoundly changed the political and social landscape of Mexican immigration

to the United States. The first was the termination of the bracero program, making once-invisible migratory workers an obvious problem. The other was the passage of Hart-Celler. Though intended as a liberal, anti-discriminatory companion to the Civil Rights Act, as historian Mae Ngai has shown, Hart-Celler actually created the modern problem of “illegal immigration” by placing limits on Western Hemisphere immigrants at precisely the same time the bracero program was ending.

In the second chapter, I show that the United Farm Workers’ campaign against illegal immigration, led by Cesar Chavez himself, produced major disagreements and exposed serious fault lines among Mexican Americans and leftist organizers about how to deal with this complicated new situation. Mexican Americans during this period exhibited anxieties about how illegal immigration would affect their own jobs, yet some also grew to feel compassion for their co-ethnics, whom they recognized as being exploited in the same ways they were. Pro-immigrant activists seized on the anti-immigrant stance of the labor movement to urge anxious Mexican Americans to focus on “the real enemy”: grower exploitation, abetted by state neglect and repression. This chapter argues not that the labor union’s continued anti-immigrant project contributed to the UFW’s defeat, but rather, that it forced uncomfortable conversations that revealed just how central immigration had become to Chicano political identity by the mid-1970s. By bringing to the fore these hitherto little-noticed conversations and debates and by demonstrating the futility and danger of an anti-immigrant stance in a labor force shaped by employers eager—and free—to hire right-less undocumented workers, Chavez and the UFW inadvertently galvanized pro-immigrant supporters. They argued—anticipating the findings decades later of scholars like Ruth

Milkman and Leon Fink—that immigrants, even undocumented immigrants, could be organized and should be seen as part of the U.S. working class.

The third chapter is devoted to explaining the changing attitudes of Mexican American activists on the issue of immigration after 1965. It shows that they began to chart a new approach in the wake of civil rights legislation and the liberalization of immigration policy, one which portrayed immigration as central to their own identity and status. Unlike Cesar Chavez and an earlier generation of assimilationists, they did not believe that distancing themselves from the undocumented was either morally acceptable or politically and strategically prudent. Here, I demonstrate that over the ensuing two decades, leading leftist Mexican Americans and activists outside the ranks of the UFW began a massive, coordinated campaign to convince other Mexican American groups, labor unions, and allies on the left that supporting undocumented rights was essential to winning and safeguarding the rights of all oppressed people and workers. These figures included Bert Corona, Soledad “Chole” Alatorre, Mark Day, Herman Baca, Miguel Pendás, and organizations like the Centro de Acción Social Autonomo (CASA), the National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws, and the Committee on Chicano Rights. While their numbers were initially small and their organizational resources limited, their ideas and their creative, imaginative, and intersectional approach captured the situation aptly, while their appealing diversity and tactics enabled them to gain activist allies and to persuade others beyond the confines of the Chicano movement.

In particular, these activists pointed to the ways in which racism affected all poor people and prevented class unity. Activists were emboldened by developments in civil rights law and human rights discourses, both at home and abroad, and they used a variety of

strategies and languages—from the patriotic to the radical—to win over support. Eventually, even traditionally more conservative organizations like the GI Forum and LULAC came to embrace this worldview, as did most ordinary Mexican Americans, who more and more lived, worked, worshipped, and struggled together with their immigrant co-ethnics. This third chapter will convey a great irony: how escalating Anglo nativism and racism beginning in the mid-1970s actually helped solidify bonds between previously divided co-ethnics.

The fourth chapter turns its focus to Washington, DC and to policy questions. It traces the “odd coalitions” that formed around immigration debates in the two decades after Hart-Celler became law and leading up to the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. The chapter argues that Mexican American leaders became important actors who consistently opposed what they considered racist provisions in the law’s various iterations while they actively lobbied and advocated for other aspects of it, none more important than amnesty for those already in the country without documents. But because IRCA was the result of competing, contradictory impulses and a number of overlapping bargains between business interests, labor unions, ethnic groups, and nativist actors, no one—immigrants’ rights activists included—was satisfied. In fact, over the next few years, just about every vocal stakeholder whose voices were captured by the documentary record had come to see IRCA as a failure.

My analysis and my extensive use of oral histories will demonstrate, however, that in spite of this seemingly-unanimous assessment, IRCA did transform the lives of millions of immigrants who benefitted from the amnesty provision, and who saw this development as anything but a failure. As one said, it was as though “a blindfold had been taken off [their] eyes.” In allowing millions of immigrants to adjust their status, to become citizens, and to

sponsor family members, IRCA encouraged family, rather, than individual migration. This new pattern of migration further changed the strategies of both nativists and the immigrants' rights movement. On the one hand, the former mobilized reactionary groups who feared cultural and economic threats emerging from a new "feminized" wave of migration. On the other hand, movement leaders framed immigration reform as a "family values" proposition, which yielded new allies that nurtured the nascent immigrants' rights movement of the previous two decades.

The final chapter focuses on California's Proposition 187, particularly its roots and consequences. Specifically, it seeks to explain how this anti-immigrant initiative got on the ballot, why a third of Latinos voted for it, and what it has meant for the modern immigrants' rights struggle on a national scale. I will demonstrate direct links between the passage of IRCA, its perceived failure to "solve" the immigration issue, and the resurgence of the nativist impulses that resulted in this law. However, I will also demonstrate that the backlash it set off among many Anglos deepened the process highlighted in Chapter 3, making immigrants' rights, by the early 1990s, a defining political, cultural, and social issue for Mexican Americans and others, too, namely Central Americans, who were then coming in significant numbers. With their left-leaning allies, together they pushed labor unions, civil rights organizations and human rights leaders to recognize and act on the need for comprehensive immigration policy that would get millions of workers and their families out of the shadows.

Together, these chapters aim to explain the roots and growth of the immigrants' rights movement, to historicize the intra-ethnic unity that we take today as natural, and to analyze how the movement for immigrants' rights both advanced the cause of racial justice

in this country and produced a backlash so large and ferocious that it has revived openly racist rhetoric and policy at the national level. In doing so, this dissertation also argues for the centrality of immigration history to the larger history of the modern United States. There is perhaps no more significant development in the last fifty years than the ascendancy of the reactionary right. And its popularity can be attributed in large part to anxieties about immigration and about the browning of America. Fears of “invaders” and alleged foreign welfare abusers have not only given the radical right useful boogeymen but also have enabled it to whittle away at the safety nets for all people in this country, white, black and brown, and to consolidate power in terrifying ways.⁵⁴

Put another way, immigration history cannot be separated from American history. As Vernon Briggs wrote in the 1970s, no aspect of American history has been as important as immigration history, since it touches every part of American life, from resource policy and foreign policy to labor policy and race policy.⁵⁵ Or as Lawrence Fuchs noted around the same time, immigration policy is central to American governance because it raises fundamental questions about who we are—or wish to be—as a nation.⁵⁶ Immigration history, put quite simply, is American history. It is my hope that, in the tradition of John Higham, this dissertation helps us understand not just the contours of the complicated history of ethnic Mexican intra-ethnic relations but also larger questions of how race, class, and gender converged to shape the American experience in the twentieth century and beyond.

⁵⁴ Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ Vernon M. Briggs, “The Problem of Illegal Immigration,” *Texas Business Review* 51, no. 8 (1977): 171–75.

⁵⁶ L.H. Fuchs, “Immigration, Pluralism, and Public Policy: The Challenge of the Pluribus to the Unum.,” in *U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy: Global and Domestic Issues*, ed. Mary M. Kritz (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 289–315.

1. “Forced into Competition”: Mexican Americans Confront Braceros and the “Wetback” Question, 1944-1965

In 1953, a pamphlet titled “What Price Wetbacks?” circulated widely throughout the American Southwest. Its message was direct and unequivocal: the Southwest had a “wetback problem” that demanded action. The pamphlet, some 3,000 copies of which were printed and distributed in the following year, laid out the “many evils” that undocumented Mexican workers, commonly called “wetbacks” then—a reference to the common practice of wading across the Rio Grande—allegedly brought with them north of the border.¹ Among the evils listed: disease, ignorance, and trouble for American workers. The authors of this “report” had grown tired, the document declared, of “hearing defenders of the wetback system.”² The picture “What Price Wetbacks?” painted was not a pretty one: with their hunger, their desperation, and their lawlessness, “wetbacks” threatened American living standards, American institutions, and the “American way of life.”³

To an observer today, the pamphlet appears as little more than a sensationalistic screed, one which reduced migrant Mexican workers to a caricature of the stereotypes that more outwardly racist thinkers propagated, like those who saw them as “torn-down dumb,” ignorant, simple-minded, and feeble beings, almost like animals wandering for food.⁴ Yet, the authors of this report were not hateful white supremacists, but respected labor organizers and Mexican American civic leaders. Specifically, the report had been conceived

¹ Michelle H. Kells, *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 148.

² *What Price Wetbacks?* (Austin: The Texas Federation of Labor and the American G.I. Forum of Texas, 1953), 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ “Government Wage,” *The (McAllen, TX) Monitor*, July 18, 1954, 10.

by the American GI Forum, a Mexican American advocacy group, and sponsored by the Texas Federation of Labor, in response to growing concerns that undocumented immigrants were making the already difficult lives of U.S.-born ethnic Mexicans worse.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Mexican Americans, a category created after the Mexican American War and by centuries of conquest, war, and power struggles, were a fixture in the Southwest, and so were Mexican immigrants.⁵ If the “wetback” numbers had remained negligible, they might have merited little more than pity from Mexican Americans and remained largely invisible to Anglos. But their numbers were anything but negligible. Accurately pinpointing the number of unsanctioned immigrants in the country at any given time has always been a nearly impossible task. Nevertheless, arrest figures offer a general sense of the scale of migration at various points in history. From those records, we can conclude that beginning around 1944, the number of undocumented immigrants coming to the United States began to rise precipitously. That year, the Border Patrol made 33,681 arrests. The following year, the number more than doubled to 70,639. In 1946, the numbers broke 100,000. By 1951, half a million “wetbacks” were apprehended, and in 1954, just three years later, upwards of a million undocumented workers were thought to be working in the United States, most of them in the Southwest.⁶

In mid-century Mexico, a growing national focus on industrialization promised to bring prosperity and modernity to the country but also displaced hundreds of thousands of

⁵ See Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 11; Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 3; Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 108; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000” (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2006), <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0081/twps0081.pdf>.

⁶ Eleanor M. Hadley, “A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 21 (Spring 1956): 334.

unskilled laborers as the government abandoned its commitment to the agrarian reforms enacted after the Mexican Revolution.⁷ All of this, along with a population boom in the making, forced millions of men to consider working in the United States. This was something the Mexican government implicitly encouraged, knowing the dollars they earned in the north would inevitably flow south in the form of remittances and hoping the workers would return with skills to help modernize the nation.⁸

From 1848, when the Mexican-American War ended, to 1924, the border separating the two nations was little more than, as one historian puts it, “a line in the sand:” largely symbolic and imaginary boundary that existed more as a figment in “the minds of politicians and pundits” than as a real barrier.⁹ By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, the United States government had begun to worry about taking control of its borders.¹⁰

Following the establishment of the border patrol, the same year that the Immigration Act of 1924 was signed into law, the border became a more “real” and tangible geopolitical boundary. The Immigration Act (often referred to as “Johnson-Reed” after its principal sponsors, Washington Congressman Albert Johnson and Pennsylvania Senator David Reed, both Republicans) sought to limit immigration from the south and east of Europe while further restricting the entry of Asian nationals. Previous laws enacted at the end of the nineteenth century, notably the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, already restricted Asian immigration, but the ambiguity of the diplomatic negotiations, namely the Gentlemen’s

⁷ Hugo G. Nutini and Barry L. Isaac, *Social Stratification in Central Mexico, 1500-2000* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 92.

⁸ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 6.

⁹ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁰ David Montejano, ed., *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), xvi.

Agreement with Japan, permitted some exceptions.¹¹ To that end, the Act created quotas, based on the 1910 census, specifically barring or limiting certain “racial” groups.¹² Most historians consider this landmark legislation the solidification of a racialized immigration order, the settlement of a century-long contest over the meaning and role of immigration policy in shaping ideas about race, ethnicity, citizenship, and belonging.¹³

Mexicans had remained a minor concern, given their tendency for seasonal, rather than permanent, migration, and for the most part, they moved about freely across the separation “line,” just as Americans did. As Samuel Truett has noted, the borderlands were, until that point, “a shifting mosaic of human spaces—some interwoven, others less so.”¹⁴ But although the primary focus of Johnson-Reed was barring Asian “undesirables” and restricting Southern and Eastern Europeans, the restrictionist mood of the time led to growing suspicion of, and concern about, Mexican immigration, and the Immigration Act both reflected and reinforced the growth of anti-Mexican xenophobia.¹⁵

¹¹ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 246.

¹² Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21.

¹³ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; Kelly L. Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Aviva Chomsky, *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 9.

¹⁵ Patrick W. Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 95; Kornel Chang, “Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880-1910.,” *The Journal of American History* 96 (2009): 678–701; Lee, *At America's Gates*.

The 1924 law also made the process of legal migration more difficult for Mexican citizens.¹⁶ Although previous immigration legislation in 1917 stipulated that immigrants were required to pass a literacy test and pay an \$8 head tax in order to be admitted to the United States, Mexicans had largely been exempt because Western growers needed their labor and had successfully lobbied the government for relaxed enforcement of such provisions.¹⁷ The 1924 immigration law, however, not only led to more strict enforcement of these measures in the case of Mexican citizens but also imposed an additional fee of \$10 for a visa.¹⁸ The cost, combined with the notoriously humiliating process (which often included invasive questioning and body inspections at the border), made legal migration both unattractive and prohibitive, such that the number of visas issued to Mexican citizens dropped to a third of previous levels almost overnight.¹⁹ As has been the case historically, however, the new restrictionist regime did not stop the flow of immigrants; it only drove them underground.

Since the Mexican-American War, a number of American elites had worried about Mexicans contaminating the imagined racial purity of the Anglo nation. In fact, this was one of the principal reasons why, despite the overwhelming military power, nationalistic fervor, and expansionist urges of numerous military and civilian leaders in the United States, the northern neighbor did not take all of Mexico at the conclusion of that conflict.²⁰

¹⁶ Deirdre M. Moloney, *National Insecurities: Immigrants and U.S. Deportation Policy since 1882* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 87.

¹⁷ Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 446.

¹⁸ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 57; Glenn P. Hastedt, *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2014), 222.

¹⁹ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 57.

²⁰ Alan McPherson, *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 23.

It is also why, despite decades of relative tolerance for the free movement of Mexican workers across the border, restrictionists finally succeeded in passing legislation that, along with barring Asian and limiting Eastern and Southern European groups, stressed vigilance of the Mexican border and control over northbound migrants. John C. Box, a Texas Congressman and a well-known restrictionist, was among those most vocal about stopping the infusion of Mexican immigrants into the American Southwest, saying he feared that the two hundred thousand or so unlawful aliens estimated to be in the country at the time “take the place of the American working man in this country” while “adding to the race problem.”²¹ By “adding to the race problem,” Box alluded to, among other things, the ways in which Mexican immigrants upset the white-black binary so essential to Jim Crow.²²

In this heyday of Ku Klux Klan activity, many respected Americans openly wore their white supremacist sympathies as a badge of honor.²³ A “white man’s country,” many like Box argued, ought to remain so.²⁴ In 1928, for example, Jay Stowell, a respected scholar of education, religion, and migration, urged lawmakers to consider the “danger” of unrestricted Mexican immigration.²⁵ A year later, S.J. Holmes, a zoologist-turned-eugenicist who advocated for the sterilization of immigrants (and even citizens whose “genetic quality” he deemed of inferior extraction), warned about the “perils of the Mexican invasion” and

²¹ Manufacturers Association of San Antonio to John Box, January 16, 1924, LULAC Collection, Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

²² Molina, *How Race Is Made in America*, 46; Laura Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 47.

²³ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

²⁴ R. L. Williams to John Box, June 20, 1926, Weeks Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

²⁵ Jay S. Stowell, “The Danger of Unrestricted Mexican Immigration,” *Current History* 28 (August 1928): 763–66. See also: Stowell, *The Near Side of the Mexican Question* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921).

called the immigration flow from the south “a malignant growth.”²⁶ And Glenn Hoover, an economist and sociologist, writing in the respected diplomatic journal *Foreign Affairs*, warned that the “race” south of the border, forged from primitive Indian blood and with only “a veneer of European culture,” could prove “the most unassimilable of all.” And although he thought most Americans would be unwilling to mix their blood with Mexicans, he and others worried that “the eugenisists” who were “afraid” some would, might be correct.²⁷

Still, these reports were hardly representative of most white Americans’ views of the Mexican immigrant. For most, if a larger sample of popular sources like magazines and newspapers of the time are to be seen as typical, the “wetback” was a docile, ignorant and easily exploitable but largely benign character worthy of pity rather than fear.²⁸

Mexican Americans, however, had more immediate concerns by mid-century.

Undocumented immigrants had come to represent an economic problem, unwelcome competitors in an already overcrowded job market. So, too, these immigrants appeared to threaten the social and cultural advancement of assimilated Mexican Americans. But these two concerns were never entirely separate, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, and as David Gutiérrez, the first and still one of the only historians to tackle this relationship at length, has convincingly shown.²⁹ Indeed, for an increasing number of Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants seemed a threat to the image of law-abiding, patriotic (white) Americans they had worked so diligently to build for themselves, at least in part as self-defense from Anglo hostility.

²⁶ S. J. Holmes, “Perils of the Mexican Invasion,” *The North American Review* 227, no. 5 (1929): 615–23.

²⁷ Glenn Hoover, “Our Mexican Immigrants,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1929.

²⁸ Clarence La Roche, “‘Billion Dollar Wetback’ Plays Leading Role in Valley Economy,” *The Brownsville Herald*, July 22, 1945.

²⁹ David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 145.

Not all Mexican Americans or labor activists feared or held “wetbacks” in contempt, of course. In the 1930s, amidst the largest economic depression in U.S. history, millions of Mexicans were driven out of the country by American authorities and the citizens who cheered them on, seeing mass deportations as a “patriotic cause.”³⁰ At that time, some Mexican Americans and some radicals like the Guatemalan social and labor activist Luisa Moreno reacted with anger and indignation, judging the round-ups as “a complete system of intimidation and discrimination.”³¹ And many others saw the strategy of inflicting fear on Mexican immigrants as brutal, inhumane, and outright racist.³² Those whose families had lived through the transition from being Mexican to becoming American citizens (legally, at least) were particularly sensitive to the plight of Mexican immigrants, since they recognized that, as historians Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas have illustrated, “Mexican culture was deeply rooted in the Southwest long before it became part of the United States, long before Mexican people became *extranjeros* in their native lands, and long before the grand waves of twentieth-century immigration welled the Mexican-American population into the millions.”³³

Things were different in the decades after 1930, however, when the U.S. Census counted more U.S.-born than Mexican-born ethnic Mexicans.³⁴ By the 1950s, leading Mexican Americans had become convinced that the way forward for them was through

³⁰ Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Divisions and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 240.

³¹ Luisa Moreno, “Caravans of Sorrow: Noncitizen Americans of the Southwest,” March 3, 1940, reprinted in David G. Gutiérrez, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington, DE: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 119.

³² For an example of this strategy, see Robert N. McLean, “Tightening the Mexican Border,” *The Survey*, April 1, 1930, 28.

³³ Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds., *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, SUNY Series in American Labor History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 11.

³⁴ Neil Foley, “Partly Colored or Other White: Mexican Americans and Their Problem with the Color Line,” in Stephanie Cole, Alison Marie Parker, and Laura F. Edwards, eds., *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 125.

assimilation. After all, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had granted citizenship, and hence, the privilege of whiteness, to ethnic Mexicans who chose to remain north of the border and to their descendants. Until the middle of the twentieth century, however, the promise of full citizenship for them had hardly been fulfilled. As the eminent Mexican scholar Manuel Gamio pointed out, the Mexican American subject had lived a miserable existence north of the border, being constantly harassed and “suffering bitterly as a result of racial and social prejudices” and accepted “exclusively for his value as a workman.”³⁵

A new opportunity, however, arose out of sacrifice when the United States entered the Second World War and Mexican Americans, like other Americans, were called to bleed and die for their nation. For Mexican Americans, as for African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, the war proved a collective opportunity, though often at a high personal cost.³⁶ As journalist and historian Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez has written, “For Mexican Americans, World War II would indeed prove the war that led to substantial headway in the fight toward desegregating public institutions, and lessening, if not eliminating, the transient discrimination that [had] existed since the end of the Texas-Mexico war.”³⁷

Mexican Americans served honorably, with 750,000 men engaged in the fight against fascism. As thousands were lost in combat, Mexican Americans earned more Medals of

³⁵ Manuel Gamio, “Migration and Planning,” *The Survey*, May 1, 1931, 1.

³⁶ Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 179.

³⁷ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), xvi.

Honor than any other ethnic group in the war proportional their ranks.³⁸ Such record of service to the nation emboldened Mexican Americans with, as historians have pointed out, “new leadership” and “a new attitude of entitlement,” with which they could seek to make strides in the fight for equality.³⁹ And in fact, it was during the postwar period that many, according to historian Manuel Gonzales, “began to see the advantages of remaining in this country rather than returning to Mexico.”⁴⁰ With the educational opportunities the GI Bill provided, with new access to housing loans, and with the psychological and political capital earned through sacrifice, Mexican Americans hoped that they would finally be allowed to live in the United States as full citizens.⁴¹

But just as there were opportunities, there were challenges, among them the infusion of Mexican labor into the country as a result of the war effort under the Bracero Program, as it came to be known. Facing a severe labor shortage, owing to millions of young American men being deployed abroad, the United States signed a bilateral agreement with its southern neighbor in 1942 to bring Mexican laborers on contract to work primarily in the agricultural sector in the Southwest, but also elsewhere on railroads and other industries.⁴² During the war alone, some 300,000 men were imported to work on the nation’s farms and some 135,000 to work on railroads. The supply of workers was virtually endless, as was the

³⁸ Due to classification methods, the actual number of Mexican Americans lost in the war is unknown, though estimates of 8,000-9,000 likely provide the most accurate figure. See Maria Montoya et al., *Global Americans: A History of the United States* (Boston: Cengage, 2017), 365.

³⁹ Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 179.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Richard Steele, “The Federal Government Discovers Mexican Americans,” in Richard Griswold del Castillo, ed., *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 54.

⁴² See, especially Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999) and Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

demand. As one journalist put it, Mexicans “could have obtained unlimited immigration visas if they wanted to.”⁴³

Initially, Mexican Americans did not object too loudly, in part because aside from the political openings created by military service, the wartime production and the Federal Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) executive order signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1941 had provided new opportunities for those who remained on the home front to take on the comparatively good jobs (such as factory work) the wartime economy had opened up.⁴⁴ Mexican Americans also apparently judged the program as a practical and patriotic necessity and expected that it would end with the wartime emergency. Over time, however, they began to worry about what it meant for their own livelihood and social advancement.

For one thing, close to half of all Mexican Americans lived in the five states that were also among the largest recipients of bracero labor: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, California, and Texas.⁴⁵ The latter two states eventually accounted for some seventy-five percent of all bracero use during the program’s peak.⁴⁶ And although Mexican Americans, who in 1930 made up a third of all agricultural workers, had begun moving away from farm labor and into cities and factories, some of the regions where Mexican Americans remained

⁴³ S. Burton Heath, “Immigration Wave: It’s the Biggest Since 1930,” *The Rhinelander Daily News*, June 19, 1947.

⁴⁴ Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 25.

⁴⁵ Terrence Haverluk, “The Changing Geography of U.S. Hispanics, 1900-1990,” *Journal of Geography* 96, no. 3 (1997): 134; “We the Mexican Americans” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1970), 8; Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans and World War II*, 123.

⁴⁶ Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 365.

concentrated were also still heavily reliant on agricultural work. That meant poor Mexican Americans competed directly with poorly-paid imported labor.⁴⁷

For another, the bracero program, which by its conclusion had led to the hiring of some five million men, did not end when the war did as Mexican Americans had anticipated.⁴⁸ In fact, the initial 1942 agreement was formalized and strengthened as Public Law 78 in 1951 *after* the world war ended and the Korean War had begun.⁴⁹ What did end with the war were FEPC protections, forcing large numbers of Mexican Americans who had moved away from agriculture in the Southwest back into the fields.

Finally, and just as importantly, the bracero program was not a single problem. With bracero labor came the problem of the “wetbacks,” unsanctioned immigrants who entered the country outside the formal system of contract labor.

This was the case for at least two reasons. First, although to many critics of the bracero program it seemed that the number of bracero permits was limitless, the number of workers wishing to work in the United States did, in fact, greatly outnumber the available spots for braceros.⁵⁰ Second, immigrants often preferred to work in the United States as “wetbacks,” and either chose to migrate north illegally on their own, or at times, to desert their bracero assignments once in the U.S. Some wished to skirt the tight social control imposed by the bracero program.

⁴⁷ Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 250.

⁴⁸ Frank P. Barajas, *Curious Unions: Mexican American Workers and Resistance in Oxnard, California, 1898-1961* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 218.

⁴⁹ Public Law 78, Extension of the Bracero Program (An Act to Amend the Agricultural Act of 1949), S. 984; Pub.L. 82-78; 65 Stat. 119.

⁵⁰ Marc S. Rodriguez, ed., *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 228.

Although some historians have characterized braceros as transnational, modernizing agents, as “men who navigated both the physical and ideological terrains in search of a better life,”⁵¹ or even as “defiant” dissidents who consistently and purposefully “deviated from the official representation of the bracero” and “resisted the program’s “[attempts] to control every aspect of their lives,”⁵² these well-intentioned characterizations probably overstate the ability of vulnerable subjects to resist and challenge the powerful actors that sought to dominate them and profit from their labor. As people who occupied a space between freedom and slavery,⁵³ as “perfect immigrants,” in the words of Cindy Hahamovitch, they were “deeply vulnerable to state and private abuse.”⁵⁴ For one thing, braceros often carried significant debt. With the expenses of waiting for formal recruitment in towns far from their homes, with a tenth of their pay withheld (and in most cases, never paid out), and with company-store like conditions prevalent in many bracero camps, by one account, braceros regularly struggled to net more than \$5 a week.⁵⁵ So instead of participating in that “caste system,” many avoided the program altogether and tried their fortunes as *mojados*, “wetbacks.”⁵⁶

Yet migrating without contracts or “papers” had its own set of disadvantages. Outside the formal process of admission and contract between the United States and their

⁵¹ Cohen, *Braceros*, 2.

⁵² Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 5.

⁵³ Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

⁵⁴ Cindy Hahamovitch, “Creating Perfect Immigrants: Guestworkers of the World in Historical Perspective,” *Labor History* 44, no. 1 (February 2003): 69–94.

⁵⁵ Dick Reavis, *Without Documents* (New York: Condor, 1978), 51.

⁵⁶ Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis, *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Repression on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 139.

own government, such workers had no right to protest abuse and exploitation, as braceros did, at least in principle. They could not count on any degree of consistency, either. And they had to finance the trip to the United States (and back home) themselves (though some routinely gamed the system, allowing themselves to be contracted, then leaving their assignments and sometimes even getting themselves caught as “wetbacks” to be sent home at the expense of the U.S. government). Above all, they faced constant danger, though this was also sometimes true for braceros.⁵⁷

Often, what immigrants found was what one man called “a bitch of a life” instead. It began with dangers on the border where gangsters, thieves, and corrupt police (often the same people) were known to rob, assault, and even murder immigrants. “You suffered more as a wetback than as a bracero,” according to Isidro Jaüregui, whose testimony echoes that of countless other men who knew life as both braceros and *mojados*.⁵⁸ But the potential advantages to those who chose to take that route were difficult to resist. As *mojados*, they had the freedom to decide where they went in search of opportunity, often finding their way to family or friends already in the United States. Perhaps more importantly, they could search for work they enjoyed or at least tolerated, an especially important consideration to immigrants who were well aware of the nature of the work braceros were assigned. Some worked tolerable jobs, but many others were assigned backbreaking tasks, like cotton-picking and other “slave” work.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ For one of the most well-known and extreme tragedies of the bracero program, see Lori A. Flores, “A Town Full of Dead Mexicans: The Salinas Valley Bracero Tragedy of 1963, the End of the Bracero Program, and the Evolution of California’s Chicano Movement,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 44 (2013): 124–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.44.2.0124>.

⁵⁸ Isidro Jaüregui, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 8, 2014.

⁵⁹ Ronald L. Mize, *The Invisible Workers of the U.S.—Mexico Bracero Program: Obreros Olvidados* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 64.

It is worth pausing here to remember that there was a third option available to Mexican citizens, at least in theory: legal permanent entry.⁶⁰ Because the Western Hemisphere was not included in the national origins quotas that the 1924 Immigration Act set, Mexican nationals could obtain visas relatively easily, at least in theory. Yet, few took that course of action because, in reality, the process was cumbersome, expensive (at least relative to the poverty of most migrants), and ultimately unnecessary, as American employers actually preferred undocumented and bracero labor to formal, legal (permanent) immigrants, whose status came with rights and protections.⁶¹ Illustrating the point, the number of legal, non-bracero visas issued during the 1950s represented about a tenth of bracero permits.⁶²

Thus, for the vast majority of immigrants, the real choice was between the bracero program and the wetback way. Often, they alternated between the two, in some instances signing on as braceros, then deserting their assignments, or conversely at times, migrating without papers and being deported only to be contracted and returned as braceros on the other end.⁶³

So intertwined was the bracero program with illegal immigration that many in the United States, both Anglo nativists and concerned Mexican Americans, rarely made a distinction between the two. From the beginning, as one news report put it, “the eyes of the

⁶⁰ S. Deborah Kang, *The INS on the Line: Making Immigration Law on the US-Mexico Border, 1917-1954* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 277.

⁶¹ Philip Russell, *The History of Mexico: From Pre-Conquest to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 472.

⁶² María Aysa-Lastra and Lorenzo Cachón, *Immigrant Vulnerability and Resilience: Comparative Perspectives on Latin American Immigrants During the Great Recession* (New York: Springer, 2015), vi; Douglas S. Massey, *International Migration: Prospects and Policies in a Global Market* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.

⁶³ Based on a review of my own oral histories and those available at the Bracero History Archive, a project of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, The Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Brown University, and the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas-El Paso, <http://www.braceroarchive.org>, accessed between August 2013 and June 2018.

American public [were] on this experiment” that relied on a dual system of labor—bracero imports and undocumented workers.

No one was more acutely aware of its potential consequences than Mexican Americans, who, the report predicted, “will be forced eventually into competition with the new immigrants.”⁶⁴ Indeed, Mexican Americans, especially the hundreds of thousands who still formed the backbone of Southwestern agriculture during this period, viewed the “wetback agreement” with much caution and suspicion.⁶⁵ When the war ended and Mexican American veterans returned home from the fighting, emboldened by a sense that they had earned their place as American citizens, the “wetback problem” took center stage. Even as they had proven, in the words of George Isidore Sánchez, a respected Mexican American reformer, intellectual, and activist,⁶⁶ “spectacularly loyal,” they now had to contend with the problems of Mexicans who were “swarm[ing] across our southern border to earn as little as 15 cents an hour, to live in the most profound misery, and to create misery” for Mexican Americans.⁶⁷

The task of confronting that challenge would be left to the Mexican American organizations that gained prominence after the war. One such group was the American GI Forum, founded and led by the deeply charismatic and equally pragmatic Dr. Héctor García, a decorated Army surgeon who served in the European Theater of Operations with

⁶⁴ “Mexican Labor,” *The (San Bernardino) Daily Sun*, August 12, 1942, sec. Editorial.

⁶⁵ “Mexico: Discussions of the Problem of Lend-Lease Obligations of Mexico to the United States” (Department of State, 1947), Foreign Relations Archive, <http://images.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/EFacs2/1947v08/reference/frus.frus1947v08.i0020.pdf>, accessed June 4, 2018.

⁶⁶ For an in-depth intellectual biography, see Carlos Kevin Blanton, *George I. Sánchez: The Long Fight for Mexican American Integration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁶⁷ George I. Sánchez, “The American of Mexican Descent,” *The Chicago Jewish Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 2, n.d., Gonzalez Papers, Box 2004-127/64, Folder: Hispanic Caucus, 1961-1979.

distinction and who rose to the rank of Major in the Army Medical Corps during the war.⁶⁸ Another was the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC),⁶⁹ formed by middle-class activists much earlier, in Texas in 1929, to “emphasize their European rather than their Indian heritage.”⁷⁰ Though the GI Forum was generally considered to be “more aggressive” and “service-oriented,” both “sought a more socially just existence” for Mexican Americans.⁷¹ As scholars of the “Mexican American generation” have pointed out, the goal of these advocates and organizations was the attainment of full citizenship through assimilation and sociocultural realignment. “They did not remain Mexicans simply living in the United States,” historian George Sanchez famously has written about them. “They became Mexican Americans.”⁷² This did not mean they would abandon their roots. But consciously and unconsciously, ethnic Mexicans in the United States came to understand that given the Jim Crow context in which they lived, to make strong claims for fair treatment, they needed the standing that only the claim to whiteness could provide them. And the sacrifices Mexican Americans had made during the war made this a plausible and reasonable strategy.⁷³

Indeed, at least some prominent, middle-class Mexican Americans had made significant progress using the strategy of framing themselves as white citizens, though their

⁶⁸ Ignacio M. García, *Hector P. García: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2002), 183.

⁶⁹ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89.

⁷⁰ Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York: Pantheon, 2007), 175.

⁷¹ Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 62.

⁷² Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 12.

⁷³ Ariela Gross, “The Caucasian Cloak?: Mexican Americans and the Politics of Whiteness in the 20th Century Southwest,” *The Georgetown Law Journal* 95 (2006-2007): 337–92.

struggle had hardly ended. Having gained a voice in the war and having made significant strides in gaining access to education and decent housing, leading Mexican Americans felt that the next logical step in the fight for justice and equality was to organize labor unions to fight for economic advancement. But the surging numbers of Mexican immigrants made that practically impossible, as employers used rightless, itinerant, and ultimately disposable workers to drive wages down, to undermine organizing efforts, and to give themselves massive power to determine the terms of the labor market.

Furthermore, Mexican immigrants, aside from posing a practical challenge to labor organizing, threatened to upend the Mexican American whiteness strategy. If the war had proved that Mexican Americans were indeed American, the influx of hundreds of thousands of poor, largely uneducated—even illiterate—Spanish speakers living in ghetto conditions threatened to destroy the carefully crafted image of Mexican Americans as simply another shade of white. Recognizing the challenge, those active in public life worked diligently to distance themselves from the Mexicans pouring across the border, those in the country under contract, and especially the “wetbacks” who had become commonplace in the Southwest and beyond. By mid-century, they numbered close to a million, and at any given time represented two to three times the number of braceros in the country.⁷⁴

On the labor front, Ernesto Galarza emerged as the most vocal and well-known leader of the campaign to kill the bracero program. Born in Jalcoctán, in the western state of Nayarit, Mexico, Galarza migrated to the United States at an early age and readily proved a talented scholar; he went on to graduate from Occidental College, earn a master’s degree from Harvard, and finish a doctorate at Columbia University. Galarza was also a natural

⁷⁴ “Termination of the Bracero Program: Some Effects on Farm Labor and Migrant Housing Needs,” Agricultural Economic Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 17, 1965), 5.

labor organizer, earning his stripes in the massive National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) campaign against the DiGiorgio Fruit Company beginning in 1947. Although ultimately unsuccessful, it prepared the scholar and labor activist for a long fight against the bracero program. Galarza alleged, with much in support of his case, that U.S. growers and industrialists actively worked to import bracero labor to undermine workers' organizing efforts and breaking strikes.⁷⁵

Galarza fought against the bracero system with a two-pronged strategy of both targeting employers on the ground through strikes and boycotts and publicizing the horrors of the bracero program through academic and popular publications. He produced several exposés of the system's inner workings, which would become classic works on the subject, including *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Fields* and *Merchants of Labor: The Bracero Story*.⁷⁶ Although initially energized by the positive developments in the fields, as when some one hundred braceros joined the NFLU strike in the 1947-1948 campaign against the DiGiorgio corporation, Galarza toward the 1970s and '80s had become deeply frustrated, hopelessly disillusioned, and visibly tired of fighting what seemed like a war that could never be won.⁷⁷ By the time he reached his seventies, he had withdrawn from public life. As Dick Meister later wrote:

He had decided there would be no more organizing. No more slashing speeches against those who opposed what he thought was right for farm workers and his other fellow Mexican-Americans. No more demanding phone calls to reporters. No more scholarly writing painstakingly documenting his bitter charges and angrily demanding reforms. No more

⁷⁵ Ernesto Galarza to Glen S. Brockway, September 13, 1950, Galarza Papers, Box 46, Folder 8.

⁷⁶ Ernesto Galarza, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970); Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960* (Charlotte: McNally & Loftin, 1964).

⁷⁷ Lilia Fernández, *50 Events That Shaped Latino History: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic [2 Volumes]* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 409.

teaching. No more controversy. It would now be up to others to carry on the cause he had helped pioneer and had championed for so many years.⁷⁸

Through the 1950s and '60s however, Galarza remained hopeful and focused, although his attack on the bracero program represented only one front of the fight against imported labor. In contrast, as early as 1948, other Mexican American leaders were calling for an end to all Mexican migration. That year, LULAC leaders, for whom, as Richard Delgado has written, “the racial identity of Mexican Americans had long been a troubling question,” urged the immediate and swift deportation of illegal aliens.⁷⁹

The voices of Mexican Americans calling for an end to bracero and illegal labor only became louder thereafter. By 1950, in Texas, which was prevented from importing braceros for the first five years of the program due to Mexico’s concerns that the state was a hotbed of racism and discrimination, there were “almost daily” demonstrations “against wetbacks.”⁸⁰ “Latin American citizens,” like S.T. Chapo and Raul Hernandez, two leading labor organizers in the lower Rio Grande Valley, for example, insisted that “wetbacks are taking jobs from us” and demanded that federal and border authorities rectify the situation.⁸¹ Their calls for action mounted when Texas began importing braceros after 1947, with the state soon becoming the largest user of bracero labor, even as it continued to serve as a favored destination for undocumented workers as well.⁸²

⁷⁸ Dick Meister, “Ernesto Galarza: Man on Fire,” *Labor—and a Whole Lot More*, 2010, <http://dickmeister.com/id348.html>, accessed May 25, 2018.

⁷⁹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader, Second Edition*, 2nd ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 377.

⁸⁰ Otey M. Scruggs, “Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947,” *Pacific Historical Review* 32, no. 3 (August 1963): 254.

⁸¹ Associated Press, “Group Protests Wetback Labor,” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, February 5, 1950.

⁸² Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land*, 120.

With frustration growing over the unprecedented numbers of immigrants arriving in the country—21,000 “wetbacks” in just one month in California and estimates as high as a million in the country—Mexican Americans joined with labor unions to help them diffuse the message of crisis.⁸³ The American Federation of Labor began publicizing the struggle of American workers to find jobs because of illegal labor. In a letter to Imperial Valley businessmen and merchants, the local labor council complained that “thousands of farm workers who have reared their families in the Valley—who have been trying for years to settle down and become responsible citizens . . . are being pushed out of this healthy stream of trade and business.” “Illegals” made as little as \$3 a week, money—the union leadership was careful to stress—that immigrants did not even spend in the country.⁸⁴ In appealing to their patriotism just years after the Second World War, labor leaders hoped business leaders would unilaterally begin phasing out illegal and bracero labor in favor of American-born workers. But these activists soon found that national loyalty had its limits, and those limits were set by dollar signs.

In the view of Mexican Americans, employers’ ongoing use of bracero and especially “wetback” labor was doubly troubling. It not only deprived them of jobs and pulled down wages and living standards, but it also set back the integrationist project that had defined postwar Mexican American social strategy. “The ‘wetback’ migration,” explained one observer, “tends to nullify the processes of social integration [of Mexican Americans] going back 300 or 350 years.” In reality, economic and social concerns were never entirely separate,

⁸³ Associated Press, “Thousands of Mexicans Pass Across Border to California,” *The Brownsville Herald*, May 2, 1950, 9.

⁸⁴ Imperial Valley Farm Labor Union Council to Imperial Valley Business Men and Merchants, March 22, 1951, Galarza Papers, Box 44, Folder 3.

and by the early 1950s, both had coalesced into full-blown panic.⁸⁵ With a sense of crisis brewing, the response was unequivocal. On June 25, 1951, at the close of the organization's twenty-second annual conclave in Laredo, Texas, LULAC leaders forcibly denounced the dual system of bracero and "wetback" labor, explaining that both were hurting "certain sections of the Southwest [and especially] Americans of Mexican descent."⁸⁶

Irate at employers and government officials, Mexican Americans rarely attacked immigrants and braceros themselves. In fact, they were quick to point out the inhumane and exploitative conditions the incoming Mexican workers were forced to toil under. One report that looked at the "economic monster" even suggested some braceros were being paid in food only, and that in at least one case, a grower had "instructed his foreman to make certain [the workers] didn't eat too much."⁸⁷ Instead of attacking the workers, Mexican Americans chose to portray the Mexican laborer as a desperate victim of circumstance who had little choice but to take "mucho trabajo, poco dinero" (lots of work, little money). But although they did not directly malign immigrants themselves, the strategic language Mexican American activists used widely portrayed the workers as a threat to American society. The language of "invasion" was common. One news report declared, in the common parlance of the time, that "the wetback invasion began shortly after 1944."⁸⁸ In the Depression decade, the report also noted, fewer than 10,000 Mexican nationals a year were deported or sent back

⁸⁵ Gladwin Hill, "'Peonage' of Wetbacks Hits Living Standards for All," *Valley Morning Star*, May 2, 1951.

⁸⁶ United Press, "Oppose Both Wetback and Bracero Labor," *El Paso Herald-Post*, June 25, 1951, 17.

⁸⁷ Art Leibson, "The Wetback Invasion," part of "Wetback: A Preliminary Report," ed. George I. Sánchez and Lyle Saunders, June 12, 1949, GNC Records, 1949-1950, Box 3W106, Folder "AR 80-112."

⁸⁸ William Korcik, "The Wetback Story," *Commonweal*, July 1951, 327-328.

voluntarily. By 1950, almost half a million had been apprehended, and the numbers were expected to continue to rise.⁸⁹

By 1952, the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas had earned the unflattering moniker of “wetbackland.” There, 100,000 Mexican workers were competing with hard-pressed Mexican Americans, who struggled to find jobs or who could only work for severely depressed wages. Increasingly troubled by the situation, Jacob I. Rodriguez, district governor of LULAC’s San Antonio region, complained of “hordes of wetbacks” taking over the local job market.⁹⁰

Mexican Americans reasonably saw U.S. government actions as collusion with employers to enable them to break labor power in the pursuit of profit. The Immigration and Naturalization Service district director for the San Antonio region, John W. Holland, deflected criticism of his agency by saying the reported “overwhelming hordes” were nowhere to be found and were, in fact, largely imaginary.⁹¹

The agency’s own numbers, however, suggested that there was a significant number of illegal laborers in the Southwest. Herman R. London, Holland’s counterpart in Central California, was much more forthcoming about the situation in the area he supervised. London revealed that in one month alone, 56,000 immigrants, representing what he termed “a tremendous tide,” had been given “free bus rides,” a euphemism for deportation.⁹² Officials in the region reported finding “wetbacks” every single day, often “lost, scattered, and trying to find their way out to the farm areas.” The Border Patrol was reported to be so

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “Valley Fears Wetback Invasion If Border Patrol Withdrawn,” *The Abilene Reporter News*, July 2, 1952, 36.

⁹¹ “Valley Finds No Wetback Swarm,” *Valley Morning Star*, July 13, 1952, 1.

⁹² Associated Press, “Illegal Alien Record Is Set,” *The Fresno Bee*, May 10, 1953, 9.

overwhelmed at times that it was simply unable to track down and deport even a fraction of the immigrants in the area. But Mexican Americans and their labor allies routinely pointed out it was often unwilling to act, too, in no small part because of a longstanding, if unspoken, understanding between immigration officials and employers. Only when they became a repeat problem were undocumented workers dealt with, according to reports from the time.⁹³

Growers, contractors, and other business interests continued to insist that the importation of braceros and the employment of unsanctioned workers were both a necessity and a right of industry. Americans, they argued, could not be found or expected to do the work that immigrants were doing. They maintained that the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 permitted them to seek out foreign workers when Americans could not be found to do particular work.⁹⁴ In truth, most understood that worker scarcity was, if not an outright lie, certainly a gross misrepresentation of the actual situation, a condition they themselves had helped to manufacture.

Certainly, Mexican Americans had been willing to do the work previously, yet they now found themselves competing for employment with Mexicans, who labored under horrendous conditions and in some cases even found themselves living on the streets.⁹⁵ Two key provisions of the bracero agreement ostensibly protected both domestic and imported workers; neither did in practice. The first was the stipulation that workers would only be imported when domestic labor could not be found to do certain work. The second was that braceros were to earn the “prevailing wage” of the region where they were contracted.

⁹³ “Bus Traffic Gives Free Rides to Kern Wetbacks,” *The Bakersfield Californian*, June 27, 1953, 10.

⁹⁴ Gerald Siegel to George Reedy, October 5, 1953, LBJ Papers, Office Files of George Reedy, Box 412, Folder “Bracero-Immigration.”

⁹⁵ Joe Brown, “Deported Wetbacks Sleep in Streets,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 10, 1953.

Employers, however, flipped the script. As Don Mitchell has noted, “prevailing wages were not determined; they were announced.”⁹⁶ And by setting wages as low as 50 cents an hour, often considerably less when contracted at piecemeal rates, employers all but ensured that American citizens would not take such jobs. That, in turn, allowed them to make the case that they needed foreign workers. The novelist Joseph Heller himself could not have written a better example of a catch-22.⁹⁷

At the same time, Mexicans hoping to earn money in the United States continued to migrate in large numbers outside the formal channels. Some “officials [could not] even guess,” how many immigrants were in the country, though many tried anyway. One official estimated that “wetbacks” were arriving in the United States “by the tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands” each year by the mid-1950s.⁹⁸ This massive wave of migration, the so-called “decade of the wetback,” roughly from 1944 to 1954, caused immense frustration and suffering for Mexican Americans. Forced into competition with poorly paid and even more poorly treated immigrants and braceros, they rallied to stop the flow, often by urging immigration authorities to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing the border or to deport them once found north of it.⁹⁹

To the extent that Washington shared a concern about border control, it was less related to Mexican labor’s impact on the wages and working conditions of American-born workers than it was Cold War paranoia about preventing “fugitive and Red agents.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops*, 88.

⁹⁷ Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 153.

⁹⁸ “Wetbacks’ Prove a Vexing Problem,” *State Journal*, January 1, 1954, 14.

⁹⁹ Dan Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 221.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Communists who might pose “a threat to national security,” officials in Washington said, had to be stopped from sneaking across the border.¹⁰¹ While authorities believed some caution was in order when dealing with Mexicans, since “a hungry man is a dangerous man,” most officials in Washington and on the border saw the “wetbacks” as a mere “nuisance” and allowed local authorities to deal with them as they saw fit.¹⁰²

The government’s inaction incensed Mexican Americans and labor leaders. They were fed up with excuses from both border and police agencies, as growers, in Ernesto Galarza’s words, “were running the show” by making extensive use of “semi-slaves.”¹⁰³ While the Mexican government lobbied the United States for concessions on working conditions and wages for its citizens—in 1954 requesting that the U.S. raise bracero wages from 70 cents to 80 cents an hour¹⁰⁴—union leaders north of the border continued to demand that American officials take “adequate steps” to protect American-born citizens from unfair competition.¹⁰⁵ Specifically, labor heads urged tighter controls over bracero labor and attention to the “wetback” problem. George Meany of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Walter Reuther of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in a historic 1954 joint statement, warned president Dwight D. Eisenhower that immigration from Mexico posed a “grave danger” to American workers.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ “‘Wetbacks’ Pose Problem Along Mexico-U.S. Border,” *The Newark Advocate and American Tribune*, August 9, 1951, 3.

¹⁰² Frank Johnson, “Nevada’s Mexican Aliens, the ‘Wetbacks,’ Bounce Back and Forth Across the Border,” *Nevada State Journal*, March 21, 1954, 8.

¹⁰³ UPI, “Union Official Says Braceros Are Captives,” *Valley Morning Star*, February 6, 1959, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Associated Press, “American Labor Union Chiefs Urge Ike to Bar ‘Braceros,’” *Lubbock Evening Journal*, January 13, 1954, 3.

¹⁰⁵ UP, “Top Labor Unions Demand Action on Wetback Problem,” *The Baytown Sun*, January 14, 1954, 3.

¹⁰⁶ “Labor Heads Hit Entry of ‘Wetbacks,’” *The Baytown Sun*, January 13, 1954, 2.

Galarza, too, continued to publicize the relationship between bracero and undocumented labor and the predicament it posed for organized labor. In 1954, again connecting the “wetback” problem to the bracero problem, he noted that the wetback issue had begun twelve years prior with the dreaded guest worker program he had fought so hard to end.¹⁰⁷

One news report, largely representative of their collective mood, highlighted the extent to which Mexican Americans “bitterly resent[ed] the intrusion of the illegals,” explaining that “during the recent National Farm Labor Union strike ... [the strikers] even pulled wetbacks off farms and turned them over to the Immigration men.”¹⁰⁸ Their fears were hardly unfounded. Looking back at this era three decades later, historian Jorge Bustamante explained that “it was during this period ... that the prejudices and the discrimination towards this labor was in a sense institutionalized. That is to say that the attitudes, the values, and the norms related to that source of cheap labor were legitimized.”¹⁰⁹ Put another way, it was during the 1940s and ‘50s that farm labor came to be marked as undignified work not fit for American citizens, in no small part as the result of an abundance of cheap immigrant labor and employers’ impunity in using and abusing Mexican workers, thanks largely to such arrangements as the “Texas Proviso,” a clause in the McCarran-Walter Act that made aiding, abetting, or harboring unsanctioned workers a crime but which exempted employment from that definition (and thus shielded employers from prosecution).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ “Witnesses Differ on Labor Recruiting,” *The Bakersfield Californian*, February 11, 1954, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Korcik, “The Wetback Story.”

¹⁰⁹ Jorge A. Bustamante, “The Historical Context of Undocumented Mexican Immigration to the United States,” *Aztlan* 3, no. 2 (1972): 274.

¹¹⁰ Michael C. LeMay, *U.S. Immigration: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 12.

Even the most ardent critics of Mexican immigration, however, could not help but admire the migrants' grit and hard work. A feature in the progressive Catholic magazine *Commonweal* about undocumented workers, while critical of the troubles they were causing for American workers and especially Mexican Americans, suggested their stories "parallel in determination the sagas of our heroic '49'ers. It is not unusual to meet a man who has walked a thousand miles, often over treacherous terrain."¹¹¹ Mexican American observers understood that the economic harm caused by Mexican braceros and undocumented immigrants was the result of greedy employers and a non-responsive state, both of whom were happy to employ immigrants who found themselves with "one foot in each economy" but protected by neither.¹¹²

In fact, while most of the conversations about braceros and undocumented immigrants were about how they were harming Mexican Americans' job prospects, some believed more had to be said about the conditions and struggles of those workers themselves. The increased visibility of their situation led some in the United States to protest the way those workers were being treated, as did the Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born in June 1954, condemning what it called "concentration camp" conditions in bracero camps across the Southwest.¹¹³

Still, for Mexican Americans like journalist Ignacio L. "Nacho" López, it seemed imperative that Mexican Americans fight for their own needs, however much sympathy they may have felt for their bracero and undocumented co-ethnics. Mexican Americans should, he argued, make themselves heard "to the highest officials and have them understand that

¹¹¹ Korcik, "The Wetback Story," 328.

¹¹² Robert Eckels, "Hungry Workers, Ripe Crops, and the Nonexistent Mexican Border," *The Reporter*, April 1954, 28.

¹¹³ "Concentration Camps USA," ACPFB, Box 1, Folder "ACPFB, 1969-1974."

this problem is one of the gravest facing labor.” The problem of Mexican immigration was, he said, “*the* [emphasis added] problem for thousands of Mexican Americans” in the Southwest “who live exclusively by doing farm labor.”¹¹⁴

Similarly, George I. Sánchez, who had become one of the most prominent voices in Mexican American civil rights circles, warned that along with continued educational roadblocks, “frightening disease and mortality rates,” and discrimination, “the wetback issue” was one of the most pressing and immediate challenges facing Mexican Americans.¹¹⁵ Heeding the voices of their most visible and vocal leaders, Mexican American citizens put pressure on border and immigration authorities to apprehend and deport Mexican immigrants.¹¹⁶

It was not, however, Mexican American pressure alone that led to the largest deportation campaign in U.S. history, surpassing even that of the 1930s, when Mexicans had proved easy scapegoats for the Great Depression that was sweeping the country.¹¹⁷ It was, instead, the recession of 1953-1954 that finally prompted the U.S. government to catch and deport Mexican immigrants, who were once again blamed for the economic troubles sweeping the country.¹¹⁸ In 1953, the unemployment rate in the United States hovered around 2.9 percent, affecting 1.8 million people. A year later, the rate had nearly doubled to 5.5 percent of the population, or some 3.5 million people. As happens during times of crisis,

¹¹⁴ Qtd. in Mario T. Garcia, “La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican-American Thought,” in Ilan Stavans, ed., *Border Culture* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 12.

¹¹⁵ George I. Sánchez to John J. Herrera, November 8, 1954, University of North Texas Libraries, PTH, crediting Houston Metropolitan Research Center at Houston Public Library, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph248854/m1/1/, accessed October 4, 2017.

¹¹⁶ “U.S. Border Patrol Expansion Approved,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, July 16, 1954, 2.

¹¹⁷ Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 2.

¹¹⁸ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Lippincott, 1948), 324.

people searched for simple answers and easy scapegoats, leading a growing number of Americans, including many Mexican Americans, to portray the “illegal” Mexican immigrants as the culprits.¹¹⁹

It was in this context of recession-induced panic that “What Price Wetbacks?” appeared and that the efforts of the most vocal Mexican Americans to drive out their undocumented co-ethnics finally fell on receptive ears.¹²⁰ The economic panic helped convince authorities that the price of “wetbacks” was “poverty, disease, slums, ignorance, dependency, low wages, and social and personal disorder.”¹²¹

In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower instructed Joseph Swing, a retired Army general like himself, to carry out a massive deportation campaign called, with heavy military overtones, “Operation Wetback.” With the blessing of Attorney General Herbert J. Brownell, the operation began on Flag Day, June 14. As in the 1930s, Mexican immigrants again “found themselves unwelcome.”¹²² The round-up campaign could be as brutal and inhumane as it was swift and decisive. The sheer efficiency of the program horrified many critics. In the lower Rio Grande Valley, some 10,000 immigrants were captured in just three days.¹²³ Another troubling aspect of the operation, for some, was that an undetermined but significant number of Mexican American citizens were caught up in the raids, occasionally

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ “Texas GI Forum Booklet Outlines Wetback Danger,” *Albuquerque (NM) Journal*, December 17, 1953, 8.

¹²¹ Herrera, John J. “LULAC and the Latin-American in Texas,” text, 1940/1959; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth250592/m1/7/: accessed October 4, 2017), University of North Texas Libraries, PTH, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Houston Metropolitan Research Center at Houston Public Library.

¹²² Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 45.

¹²³ Tom MacCabe, “10,000 Mexicans Are Reported Nabbed in ‘Wetback’ Campaign,” *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, July 19, 1954, 8.

the same people who had called for the removal of “wetbacks,” just as had happened in the 1930s.¹²⁴

Still, LULAC and the GI Forum, as well as labor unions, heartily supported the operation.¹²⁵ So, too, did some in the Mexican government, who were “pleased that the United States at least appeared to be doing something to address the matter of illegal immigration.”¹²⁶ The operation was essentially a military campaign without bullets. Swing made no effort to conceal that; in fact, he was quite proud of it. He was, after all, a four-star General accustomed to playing by his own rules, a man known to use government planes, Jeeps, and air-conditioned trailers for hunting trips to Mexico and Canada. Critics pointed out that Swing only seemed to recognize the legitimacy of the border when others were crossing it.¹²⁷

Some concerned observers condemned Eisenhower and Swing, even characterizing Operation Wetback as essentially fascist. Rev. Joseph Lamb, the Director of the Providence, Rhode Island, Diocesan Bureau of Social Services said he was “quite shocked and surprised in seeing Hitler’s principles retained in our immigration legislation, particularly after we have fought a war to eradicate his ideas.” Lamb also assailed “the U.S. trade union rank and file, union leaders and the public generally,” who, “looking for the ‘villains’ will find them not among the exploited Mexican laborers, contract or noncontract, but among their exploiters

¹²⁴ Robert J. Shafer and Donald Mabry, *Neighbors--Mexico and the United States: Wetbacks and Oil* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 61.

¹²⁵ Alfredo Gutierrez, *To Sin Against Hope: Life and Politics on the Borderland* (Verso: London, 2013), 30.

¹²⁶ Timothy J. Henderson, *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 84.

¹²⁷ “Swing Sees Hunt Trips as Incidental to Job,” *Baltimore Sun*, July 7, 1956, 1.

or abettors of exploitation.”¹²⁸ Comparing Operation Wetback to Nazi policies, was, without a doubt, overblown (though as scholars have recently noted, many of Hitler’s policies were indeed shaped by American laws and notions about race).¹²⁹ But as with the Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born’s earlier denunciation of “Nazi-like” mistreatment of immigrants, it did signal a bold new way of speaking about immigration policy and immigrants’ rights, the foundation of a new vocabulary that future activists would borrow and expand.

Still, Rev. Lamb was in the minority in his angry condemnation of the raids. The most visible and vocal Mexican Americans, along with labor leaders and other American citizens, supported Operation Wetback and were happy to give Swing free reign in rounding up and deporting “illegal” Mexicans. One year after Operation Wetback began, Swing boasted that it had been a complete success, and observers generally agreed.¹³⁰ In 1955, the *Los Angeles Times* celebrated the operation as an overwhelmingly successful campaign to defend against “history’s greatest peacetime invasion of the country” and claimed that “the Mexican wetback has been virtually erased.”¹³¹

The reality was more complicated. Operation Wetback was in fact, officially the largest deportation campaign in American history. On paper, it produced something close to one million arrests in fiscal year 1954. In reality, only about 250,000 apprehensions happened between the beginning of Operation Wetback and June 1955, when Swing claimed victory over the “invasion” of undocumented immigrants. In other words, mass deportation efforts

¹²⁸ Patricia Morgan, “Shame of a Nation: A Documented Story of Police State Terror Against Mexican Americans in the U.S.A,” n.d. (ca. 1954), MWCLR Papers, Box 12, Folder 61.

¹²⁹ James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹³⁰ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 54.

¹³¹ “U.S. Patrol Halts Border ‘Invasion,’” *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 1955.

had begun much earlier and actually peaked in late 1953, a year in which the Border Patrol was especially aggressive against “wetbacks,” regularly deporting them deep into Mexico in an effort to deter them from crossing again and experimenting with more sadistic tactics.¹³²

One such tactic was the “hot-foot lift,” which entailed border agents deporting immigrants to the middle of the desert, where they faced “a long way in 130-degree temperature.” *The Laredo Times*, which broke the story, described it as “an operation which will shock any decent American or Mexican citizen; a revolting operation which attempts to strip the last shred of human dignity from oppressed peoples and treats them worse than animals; deliberately hauling them to one place where there is no food, water or shelter.” “The setting,” the *Times* reported, was that of “a death march.” Left in a “waterless, foodless, rattle-snake infested” desert, immigrants found themselves having to walk thirty-five, sometimes forty-five miles, in hopes of finding water, food or shelter.¹³³ There were no deaths reported, a fact some attributed to the “wetbacks” being “a strong, elastic breed, toughened by adversity.” But horrified reporters warned that “if the ‘hot-foot lift’ continues it is a safe bet that the bones of some kid will be bleaching by the scorched trail before long.”¹³⁴ The cruelty of the “hot-foot lift” reminded some sympathetic dissenters of the long,

¹³² Larisa L. Veloz, “‘Even the Women Are Leaving,’ Gendered Migrations between Mexico and the United States: Revolutionary Diasporas, Depression-Era Depatriations, and Wartime Bracero Controls, 1900-1950” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2015); Kelly Lytle Hernández, “Largest Deportation Campaign in U.S. History Is No Match for Trump’s Plan,” *The Conversation*, March 8, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/largest-deportation-campaign-in-us-history-is-no-match-for-trumps-plan-73651>, accessed February 2, 2019; Dara Lind, “Operation Wetback, the 1950s Immigration Policy Donald Trump Loves, Explained,” *Vox*, November 11, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/11/11/9714842/operation-wetback>, accessed November 13, 2015.

¹³³ “Charge ‘Wetbacks’ Forced to Walk Across Desert,” *The Shreveport Times* (syndicated from the *Laredo Times*), June 7, 1953.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Also see “Wetback Mistreatment by U.S. Govt. Charged,” *Brownwood (TX) Bulletin*, June 7, 1953, 28; “Border Officials Accused of ‘Shaking Down’ Wetbacks,” *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, June 30, 1953, 31.

though often forgotten, history of racial violence against Mexicans in the Southwest and beyond.¹³⁵

Despite the 1954 operation, the “wetback” had no more been “erased” than the country’s hunger for cheap labor. In reality, as historians like Kelly Lytle Hernández, Mae Ngai, and Ramon García have shown, Operation Wetback was as much a paroling and legalizing effort to shape the terms of immigration as it was a deportation campaign. Interpreting the Truman administration’s plan and immigration law in creative ways, employers urged the border patrol and the immigration service to parole workers captured during Operation Wetback to them, as they had been doing for years. That, they claimed, would be a benevolent way for employers to help erase the problem of illegality, while technically avoiding the “harboring” of aliens prohibited by law (again illustrating how much employers made use of, and benefitted from, the “Texas Proviso”).¹³⁶

Indeed, even at the height of Operation Wetback, when hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants were caught up in the terror of mass deportation and faced horrific conditions as they were loaded into trains more apt for cattle and packed onto ships reminiscent of slave cargo,¹³⁷ thousands left voluntarily and thousands more were deported near the border, only to be re-processed and returned as braceros, yet again demonstrating the extent to which both labor systems actually functioned in tandem.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Nicholas Villanueva Jr., *The Lynching of Mexicans in the Texas Borderlands* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017); William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928*, Reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹³⁶ President’s Commission on Migratory Labor, 1954, Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

¹³⁷ “Recalls Slave Ship,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, December 4, 1957, 1.

¹³⁸ Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Hernández, *Migra!*; Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943-1954,” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 37, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 421-444.

Operation Wetback was the paradoxical culmination of a long process by which one government agency deported Mexicans while another recruited them. This process, known as the “drying of the wetbacks” had been popular since the beginning of the bracero program. It enabled the United States government to claim to uphold law and order while pacifying growers, who in truth, generally preferred undocumented labor. But this preference for “illegals” created a problem for national leaders wishing to appear tough on lawbreakers. Thus, Operation Wetback was less about punishing immigrants than about strong-arming growers into compliance with the government’s preferred system of foreign labor.

The “drying of the wetbacks” and the “parole” process lent credibility to the complaints of Mexican Americans like Galarza, Sánchez, López, and others. For years, they had charged American officials with allying with employers to keep wages low by providing a steady stream of cheap, deportable, and easily replaceable labor, which made unionizing and organizing virtually impossible. Lee G. Williams, who ran day-to-day operations during the bracero program, admitted as much some two decades later as he reflected on the meaning and consequences of his work, racked by guilt and regret, both because of the way braceros were treated and because of what the system did to native-born workers. “The employment service here was notoriously in league with the farmers,” he said, explaining that their strategy was to use bracero labor to keep wages of Americans down while claiming that no one would do the work. “They could get someone to do the work if they would pay a fair wage.” Instead, employers were happy to use Mexicans who could be treated “like cattle” and “like prisoners.”¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Howard Swindle, “Ex-Chief Recalls Bracero ‘Slavery,’” *The Dallas Morning News*, April 30, 1980.

Operation Wetback, then, was a curious and ingenious solution to a seemingly unsolvable problem for the U.S. government. While seemingly erasing the “wetback” problem, officials could ramp up bracero importation, and in fact, the number of braceros in the United States peaked in the late 1950s, with close to half a million arriving each year between 1956 and 1959.¹⁴⁰

A second but no less important goal of the parole-to-bracero process was to maintain positive relations with the Mexican government. While labor flow was one important component, broader trade and diplomatic considerations were never far from the minds of policymakers. Trade organizations urged the two nations to see international commerce as “desirable and urgent.”¹⁴¹ Perhaps even more important was pacifying Latin American neighbors, particularly in the context of Cold War anxieties that Communism would creep into Latin America.¹⁴² Nothing could have made this more likely, especially in the case of Mexico, than the sudden re-introduction to the country of millions of poor, desperate, and hopeless workers with no job prospects. As much as it helped U.S. growers’ profit margins, the bracero program also represented an escape valve for Mexico.

For a brief moment, the perception that the “wetback” issue was solved did offer Mexican Americans some reassurance, even as they continued to focus on preventing new waves of undocumented laborers from materializing.¹⁴³ And while just about everyone

¹⁴⁰ David M. Reimers, *Other Immigrants: The Global Origins of the American People* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 104; “Termination of the Bracero Program: Some Effects on Farm Labor and Migrant Housing Needs,” 5.

¹⁴¹ “Migrants,” Joint United States-Mexican Trade Union Committee, Sánchez Papers, Box 25, Folder 16

¹⁴² Memorandum of Discussion at the 369th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, June 19, 1958, Foreign Relations Archive, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v05/d4>, accessed May 22, 2018.

¹⁴³ League of United Latin American Citizens, *LULAC News*, Volume 25, Number 4, March 1958, periodical, March 1958; Laredo, Texas. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph221897/m1/13/; accessed October 4, 2017), University of North Texas Libraries, PTH, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting Houston Metropolitan Research Center at Houston Public Library.

understood, even accepted, that “the wetbacks [will] still come,” they hoped that a new era was upon the nation, one in which the experience of Operation Wetback, at least as it was implanted in the public imagination, would discourage further “hordes” from crossing the Rio Grande.

In the meantime, leading Mexican Americans focused on ending the bracero program and continuing the advancement efforts they had made after the war. For two decades, activists had tried to end the system they viewed as both destructive to U.S. workers and exploitative to Mexicans. Galarza believed that while Americans could “undoubtedly carry the burden of production, they were also discovering the possibilities of community life, experimenting with economic organization and talking of collective bargaining.”¹⁴⁴ He and others began to gain traction on their goal of terminating the bracero program in the 1960s, with the wetback problem ostensibly solved. Although still facing a difficult task, anti-bracero crusaders began to have some success, especially as American citizens became more aware of the program and of migrant farm workers’ struggles, thanks to, among other things, the investigative work of sympathetic journalists like Edward Murrow, who produced the powerful CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame*, released in 1960.¹⁴⁵

As pressure built, President John F. Kennedy, who had received overwhelming support from Mexican Americans during his 1960 presidential campaign,¹⁴⁶ was forced to admit in 1961 that, in fact, bracero labor was “adversely affecting the wages, working

¹⁴⁴ Galarza, *Merchant of Labor*, 253.

¹⁴⁵ Fred W. Friendly, *Harvest of Shame* (CBS, 1960).

¹⁴⁶ Ignacio M. García, *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans In Search of Camelot* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

conditions, and employment opportunities of our own agricultural workers.”¹⁴⁷ After Kennedy’s assassination, Lyndon Johnson continued to give hope to Mexican Americans, especially on the labor front.

Earlier overtures and connections to the Mexican American community convinced the influential Héctor García in particular that Johnson took seriously the plight of Mexican Americans, especially after the “Longoria Affair.” Felix A. Longoria, Jr. was a Mexican American soldier killed in the Second World War who was denied funeral services in his home of Three Rivers, Texas, on account of his ethnicity. When the GI Forum became involved in the affair, then-Senator Johnson offered to have him buried at Arlington National Cemetery, where Longoria’s body was ultimately laid to rest with full military honors. García, having worked with Johnson to make this possible, felt the man that was now president had exhibited, on this and other matters of importance to their community, “great leadership, moral encouragement, and personal assistance in achieving first class-citizenship for Americans of Mexican origin.”¹⁴⁸

With Johnson in office, Mexican American leaders felt they could finally bring down the bracero system. And indeed, President Johnson, pressured by the labor lobby and the Mexican Americans who had helped him keep the White House in 1964, asked Congress to end the program that very year. It did so over the objection of Mexican officials who had

¹⁴⁷ John F. Kennedy, “Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill Governing Recruitment of Mexican Agricultural Workers,” October 4, 1961, American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8368>, accessed May 22, 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Héctor García to Lyndon B. Johnson, July 7, 1965, LBJ Papers, Human Rights, Box 2, Folder "Citizenship"

become accustomed to pushing out their poor and to receiving the fruits of their labor. The program was terminated officially on December 31.¹⁴⁹

Growers and industry leaders could have put up a bigger fight, and their seeming acquiescence to the end of the bracero system may appear puzzling at first. In reality, they had made a carefully weighed calculation that mechanization, especially for crops like cotton, had made the need for human labor much less pressing. Already by 1963, demand for cotton pickers was down to one of its lowest levels since the beginning of the bracero program.¹⁵⁰ Employers also understood that even if the bracero program ended and they again needed workers, they could always hire undocumented immigrants. Nevertheless, Mexican Americans celebrated. With the end of the bracero program, they felt they could finally begin to organize for recognition as full citizens in public life and for better wages, more dignified conditions, and more humane treatment on the job.

As Mexican American and labor leaders heralded the demise of the bracero program, much more was changing around them. The Cold War was heating up. A language of international human rights was being developed. Above all, the black civil rights movement was making significant progress. The Civil Rights Act passed—not coincidentally—the same year the bracero program ended.

The immigration issue was never separate from these other developments. In fact, as African Americans won desegregation battles across the South and made inroads for equal rights across the nation, President Lyndon B. Johnson felt that a piece of the puzzle was

¹⁴⁹ Julie L. Pycior, *LBJ and Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 146; James Creagan, "Public Law 78: A Tangle of Domestic and International Relations," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 7, no. 4 (October 1965): 541–56.

¹⁵⁰ "Termination of the Bracero Program: Some Effects on Farm Labor and Migrant Housing Needs," v.

missing.¹⁵¹ Immigration, he and his cadre of liberal advisers argued, had to be reformed to bring it in line with civil rights developments. To Johnson and postwar liberals, the racist and exclusionary immigration regime that had governed immigration policy since 1924 was a relic from a shameful age of exclusion and discrimination, an unacceptable and outdated system ripe for realignment with democratic, pluralistic, and liberal ideals. “More can and must be done” on immigration, Johnson urged in 1964.¹⁵² The Democratic Party pledged that same year to enact legislation that scrapped the national origin quotas implemented in the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act and further cemented in the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act,¹⁵³ which citizens, private organizations, and even government commissions had found over the years to be “an arrogant, brazen instrument of discrimination based on race, creed, color, and national origin.”¹⁵⁴

To be sure, there was significant resistance to ending the old regime, particularly from racist groups already embittered by, and resentful of, the advancement of African Americans. Decrying “the brotherhood of man racket”¹⁵⁵ the Ku Klux Klan openly fought the language of “equality” in immigration law as much as it had in other facets of social life.¹⁵⁶ It should not be surprising that individuals and groups that continued to deny the Holocaust fought immigration reform.¹⁵⁷ But others, less extreme, were also nervous about

¹⁵¹ For a comprehensive legislative history of Hart-Celler, see: Gabriel J. Chin and Rose Cuison Villazor, eds., *The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: Legislating a New America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁵² Democratic Platform Pledge, 1964, LBJ Papers, Statements, Box 93, Folder 4.

¹⁵³ Various documents, 1964, LBJ Papers, Box 74, Folder “LE/IM 09/10/64.”

¹⁵⁴ President’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization (“Whom We Shall Welcome”), January 1, 1953, Bernstein Papers, Box 11, Folder “Immigration.”

¹⁵⁵ Untitled document, ca. 1962, ACR Collection, Box 1, Folder “States Rights/Southern Rights, 1945-1971.”

¹⁵⁶ Untitled document, ca. 1960, “The Fiery Cross,” KKK Papers, Box 1, Folder “The Fiery Cross, Misc. Issues.”

¹⁵⁷ Untitled document, ca. 1961, ACR Collection, Box 1, Folder “States Rights/Southern Rights, 1945-1971.”

the racial implications of the pending legislation, arguing as one writer did, “that this country needs no more immigrants” and fearing especially a potential “influx of Orientals, Asians, Africans.”¹⁵⁸ The Daughters of the American Revolution went as far as suggesting that Johnson was selling out “the national interest” to foreigners and enemies of the state.¹⁵⁹ Nativists claimed that the American character would be irreparably harmed by an influx of “anarchists, nihilists, escaped criminals, the mentally retarded, and those having histories of mental illness.”¹⁶⁰

Others still were opposed to immigration reform on the pragmatic grounds that placing limits on the Western Hemisphere, as the bill did, would create tensions with Latin American neighbors who, until this point, had been exempted from such limits. William Bonilla, the immediate past president of LULAC when what came to be known as the Immigration Act of 1965 (or “Hart-Celler” after its principal sponsors, Michigan Senator Philip Hart and New York Congressman Emmanuel Celler) was being debated in Congress, exemplified the concern of those who, like him, “strongly opposed” the amendment limiting Western Hemisphere immigration, fearing that the “adoption of this amendment would damage our relationship with our Latin American [neighbors], whose friendship is so vital during these times.”¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, the egalitarian ethos of the civil rights moment

¹⁵⁸ J. R. Locke to Lyndon B. Johnson, December 28, 1964, LBJ Papers, Box 73, Folder “LE/IM 12/1/64-5/3/65.”

¹⁵⁹ AZ Society Daughters of the American Revolution to Lyndon B. Johnson, April 19, 1965, LBJ Papers, Box 73, Folder “LE/IM 12/1/64-5/3/65.”

¹⁶⁰ Junior Order of American Mechanics to Lyndon B. Johnson, August 25, 1965, LBJ Papers, Box 73, Folder “LE/IM 12/1/64-5/3/65.”

¹⁶¹ William Bonilla to Lyndon B. Johnson, August 27, 1965, LBJ Papers Box 73, Folder “LE/IM 12/1/64-5/3/65.”

propelled the bill forward, and the character and composition of immigration to the United States would be forever changed as a result.¹⁶²

In a speech he gave shortly before signing the bill into law, Johnson celebrated the imminent changes in immigration policy, changes which replaced what he believed was a system inconsistent with liberal democratic values. In his view, the old system “found little support in either logic or reason.” The exceptional American experience, he suggested, required exceptional laws. “We are now an amalgam, a people different from any other.” With his characteristic optimism, Johnson condemned the national quota system and repeatedly called it unfitting for a nation built by immigrants. “The story of our continent,” he said triumphantly to a gathering of supporters, “is the story of immigration and the history of our people is the history of immigrants.” On October 3, 1965, against a carefully orchestrated backdrop on Ellis Island, Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,¹⁶³ calling it “a noble and proud moment for America.”¹⁶⁴

It was—and remains—difficult to question Johnson’s intentions in this measure. Whatever his faults and his troubled relationship with power, Johnson was idealistic and well-intentioned—truly committed to advancing the cause of racial justice in the nation he loved and served. He whole-heartedly believed that domestic antiracist legislation and immigration reform had to be treated as twin and inseparable causes.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Charles B. Keely, “Effects of the Immigration Act of 1965 on Selected Population Characteristics of Immigrants to the United States,” *Demography* 8, no. 2 (May 1971): 157–69.

¹⁶³ Public Law 89-236, [H.R. 2580] “An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act,” October 3, 1965, http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USimmigration/1965_immigration_and_nationality_act.html, accessed November 10, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ “Draft Remarks for the President on Signing of the Immigration Reform Act,” August 31, 1965, LBJ Papers, Box 73, Folder “LE/IM 12/1/64-5/3/65.”

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Still, the passage of Hart-Celler, together with the termination of the bracero program, fundamentally changed the course of modern immigration history by at once welcoming former “undesirables” and inadvertently creating new problems with those closer to home. The law was supposed—indeed intended—to make immigration more humane, more just, and more rational. But by imposing limits on the Western Hemisphere at the same time that the bracero program ended, the problem of “illegal immigration,” thought to have been solved, was instead exacerbated, as historian Mae Ngai has demonstrated.¹⁶⁶ Few could know just how immense the problem would become. Certainly, few Mexican Americans understood how fundamentally changes in immigration law would change their own positions. What seemed like an opportunity soon proved to be just another challenge.

¹⁶⁶ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 265.

2. “A Shameful Betrayal”: Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers, and the “Wetback” Question

Delano, California, sits in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, the agricultural center of the state. In the summer, which seems intolerably long and inordinately harsh, Delano is hot, dry, and suffocating. Just outside the city limits are seemingly endless rows of grapevines. California produces ninety-eight to ninety-nine percent of table grapes consumed in the United States, and the vast majority of those are grown in the San Joaquin Valley. The region’s growers ship out 115 million nineteen-pound boxes each year. As a point of comparison, the next largest-producing region in the state is the Coachella Valley, which accounts for some 4.5 million boxes each year.¹

California’s agricultural sector is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and grapes are one of its most important crops. Though agricultural production in the region predates the 1960s, it was during this time that investors and growers were lured to the Valley by policies designed to develop an otherwise economically depressed region of the state.² As one trade publication noted in 1966, California’s vineyards “provide[d] as attractive an opportunity and highly leveraged tax-deductible investment opportunity as is available anywhere today.” Vineyards “combine[d] ownership of land with an interest in an industry experiencing a worldwide shortage.”³ Corporate investors answered the call, and by the early 1970s, the California Central Valley was producing upwards of 25 million boxes of grapes per year.

¹ Keith Loria, “California Grapes Poised for Big Season,” *The Produce News*, July 25, 2018, <http://www.producenews.com/category-list/24591-california-grapes-poised-for-a-big-season>.

² Richard White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*”: *A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 522; Oliver Rosales, “Mississippi West: Race, Politics, and Civil Rights in California’s Central Valley, 1947-1984” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2012).

³ Donald Lorimer, “On the Vine: With Minimal Risk and a Rising Demand for Wine, You, Too, Can Become a ‘Gentleman Farmer,’” *Mainliner*, February 1974.

Demand for labor skyrocketed, with employers reporting a shortage of workers early on, but an “abundance” of them by mid-decade.⁴

Though few Americans consciously contemplate about what it takes to produce a hundred million boxes of table grapes, one gets a glimpse of the process by driving up and down California Highway 99. Women and men labor just off the side of the road, in temperatures that can reach 110 degrees. They are covered head-to-toe in protective layers—gloves on their hands, baseball caps on their heads, bandanas over their faces—to keep from direct contact with rough vines, pests and pesticides, and the harsh rays of the unforgiving sun. The farm workers, some 50,000 of whom work here at least part of the year, are almost all Mexican and Filipino.⁵ Full-time, year-round work yields on average \$30,000 in income per year, but because of the nature of the crop, most farm workers only work seasonally, and as a result, earn something closer to \$17,000 per year.⁶

Many are no longer migrant in any real sense. They own or rent homes in Delano, McFarland, Arvin, or Earlimart. Others take up jobs in Bakersfield and Fresno in the off-season. Many of the Mexican immigrants used to return home every year or two, but few do so now because the journey has become so dangerous and costly. Many have brought their families to live north of the border instead. They send their children to school hoping they

⁴ “Table Grape Picking Increases in Delano,” *California News Service*, August 26, 1975.

⁵ Richard Mines, “Data on Crops, Employment, and Farmworker Demographics: A Resource for California Rural Legal Assistance,” February 2006, <https://migrationfiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/cf/files/2007-june/minescadata.pdf>, accessed November 2, 2008.

⁶ Philip Martin and Daniel Costa, “Farmworker Wages in California: Large Gap Between Full-Time Equivalent and Actual Earnings” (Economic Policy Institute, March 21, 2017), <https://www.epi.org/blog/farmworker-wages-in-california-large-gap-between-full-time-equivalent-and-actual-earnings/>, accessed June 2, 2018; Natalie Kitroeff and Geoffrey Mohan, “Wage Rise on California Farms. Americans Still Don’t Want the Job,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-farms-immigration/>, accessed May 19, 2019.

will find their way to college or professional occupations so they do not have to experience the harsh life of a farm worker.

A few years ago, there were only two middle schools in the city, one on each side of the railroad tracks that roughly divide the city into two halves, and only one high school. Today, there are three (not counting Valley High, a small continuation school): the oldest, Delano High, and two newer ones, one on the West side of town named after Robert F. Kennedy and one on the East Side, named for Cesar E. Chavez.

Immigration and Cesar Chavez are central to the region's identity, and their convergence and their historical relationship is the subject of this chapter.

But first, it is important to lay out what this chapter does not do. It does not aim to rehash the much-told story of how the union “got beat.” In the last decade and especially the last few years, historians and other scholars have offered much in the way of explanation for what went wrong with the farm workers' movement. Miriam Pawel and Matthew Garcia, in particular, have offered wide-ranging and harsh criticism of the union, of the many and frequent tactical and strategic missteps that as Garcia argues, led to its demise. Garcia has argued, specifically, that “the task of striking a balance between cultivating creativity among organizers and providing strong, timely leadership was a challenge too great for Chavez to sustain.”⁷ Pawel has offered a similar assessment, pointing out that Chavez lost his way after becoming infatuated with power and in the process, losing sight of movement's ideals.⁸

Perhaps the most balanced and insightful criticism has come from Marshall Ganz—himself a former farm worker activist and now an accomplished sociologist. He credited the

⁷ Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 3.

⁸ Miriam Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 198.

union's initial success to its "strategic capacity": its use of "informed, creative, and responsive" strategy grounded in democratic decision-making, diverse biographical perspectives, and a degree of tolerance for dissent and experimentation—and he pointed to the union's abandonment of these practices and principles as a reason for its demise.⁹

Others have suggested that along with Chavez's autocratic turn and his descent into paranoia, his union's treatment of the undocumented proved "his greatest historical failing."¹⁰ For Frank Bardacke, who like Ganz was a leader in the farm worker movement and later a chronicler of it, no sin was as mortal as Chavez's refusal to protect the undocumented, or to "[speak] for them or to represent" them. He "never even welcomed them," he has lamented.¹¹

While I agree that the union's treatment of the undocumented had at least some part in its demise, I do not argue that this was the only, or even the primary, cause, so this chapter does not attempt to further complicate the narrative of the UFW's downfall. Instead, I argue that Chavez's and the farm worker movement's handling of the "wetback" problem, which came at a historically critical time, unintentionally proved essential in the Mexican American shift from seeing "wetbacks" as a threat and a problem to seeing the undocumented issue as their own.

More specifically, I argue in this chapter that the United Farm Workers campaign against illegal immigration exposed serious fault lines among Mexican Americans about how to deal with this complicated new social and political landscape. During this period, Mexican

⁹ Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

¹⁰ Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (Verso: London, 2012), 728.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Americans exhibited anxieties about how “illegal” immigration would affect their own jobs, wages, and the union’s organizing efforts, even as some grew to feel compassion for their co-ethnics, whom they recognized as being exploited in the same ways they were. Pro-immigrant activists seized on the anti-immigrant stance of the labor movement to urge anxious Mexican Americans to focus on “the real enemy.”

The point of this chapter, then, is not to argue that the anti-immigrant project contributed to the farm movement’s defeat, but rather to highlight how it forced uncomfortable conversations. These revealed just how central immigration had become, by the late 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s, to a nascent Chicano political identity in a Brown Power movement arising alongside its Black Power counterpart, and like it, critical of capital and government and supportive of working class people of color. By bringing to the fore these conversations and debates and by demonstrating the futility and danger of an anti-immigrant stance in a labor force shaped by employers eager—and free—to hire rightless undocumented workers, Chavez and the UFW inadvertently galvanized pro-immigrant supporters. Such supporters anticipated the later findings of scholars like Ruth Milkman and Leon Fink, that immigrants, even undocumented immigrants, could be organized and should be seen as part of the U.S. working class.¹²

On September 8, 1965, some 1,500 Filipino members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) walked out of their jobs in the fields near Delano. Though the union’s roots can be traced to organizing efforts as far back as the 1930s, the committee

¹² See Ruth Milkman, *L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006) and Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

was largely incorporated into the National Farm Labor Union in the 1950s and officially founded in 1959.¹³

With the failure of the NFLU to fundamentally transform the labor landscape long-term, however, Filipino workers were forced to mount their own offensive. Workers often made less than one dollar per hour and had little bonus earning potential. They worked long hours under exhausting and dangerous conditions and lived in segregated housing without indoor plumbing or cooking facilities. At work, they lacked even basic outdoor toilets.¹⁴ Filipino workers demanded better conditions and wages of \$1.40 an hour, a figure equal to the wages paid to braceros in the last year of the program's existence.

A few days after the initial walkouts, AWOC leaders, among them Larry Itliong, Andy Imutan, and Philip Veracruz, asked the mostly Mexican American National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to join the Filipino strikers. It did so on September 16, a day of great cultural significance: Mexican Independence Day. Behind the organization was Cesar Chavez, the man who would come to serve as the face of the movement and to inspire a generation of activists well beyond Delano and the grapevines.¹⁵

Chavez, who grew up in a poor migrant Mexican American family and remembered the indignities his parents and other workers like them were forced to suffer in Yuma, Arizona, had, in years prior, worked under the legendary Fred Ross at the Community Service Organization. Chavez had left the CSO in 1962 to form the NFWA.¹⁶ Though the

¹³ Craig Scharlin and Lilia Villanueva, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 33.

¹⁴ Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gabriel Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist: Fred Ross and Grassroots Organizing in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 138.

unity between Filipino and Mexican Americans was itself a remarkable development, the challenge they faced together was colossal. After all, the men and women taking on California's powerful agriculture industry were poor ethnic migrant workers, most with little organizing experience, many of them uneducated or even illiterate.

The attention and support that the 1965 walkouts garnered surprised even some of the participants.¹⁷ Indeed, union leadership—including Chavez, Gilbert Padilla, and Dolores Huerta—almost immediately began to worry that the movement would quickly lose momentum. To prevent that from happening, farmworkers embarked on a 300-mile pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento that began March 17, 1966. The procession arrived in the state capitol on Easter Sunday, twenty-five days later, to be greeted by 10,000 energized supporters. Later that year, in August, the AWOC and NFWA merged to become the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), with Chavez as its president.

A year later, farmworkers began a national boycott of California table grapes. The boycott would become the union's most successful and creative tool, part of that "strategic capacity" that Ganz argues was so central to the struggle's initial success. At the same time, Chavez continued to publicize the struggle of farm workers, often embodying it through fasts, like the most famous one in 1968 that lasted an astonishing twenty-five days. When he broke that fast, Chavez was joined by Robert Kennedy, who was campaigning in the state at the time, signaling that the movement had become a national one, with broad political, as well as social, support.¹⁸

The movement owed its unlikely initial success to two developments in particular. One was the African American Civil Rights Movement, which had captured the imaginations

¹⁷ "March of Migrants," *Life*, April 29, 1966, 93-94.

¹⁸ Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 125.

of not only black Americans but all marginalized people across the country. Farm workers recognized that the moral capital and legal victories the black civil rights movement had earned had created openings them as well. They understood that although extensive sacrifices would be necessary, change in the fields was possible. And so began the movement that put California farm workers in the center of conversations about social justice, right alongside African American freedom fighters in Jackson, Mississippi, and Selma, Alabama.¹⁹

The other development that made the movement possible was the termination of the bracero program. The chronic use of millions of poorly-paid and easily deportable and replaceable workers from Mexico had proven organized labor's Achilles' Heel and nearly driven opponents and organizers like Ernesto Galarza mad.²⁰ The end of the bracero era promised to finally create a political opening for agricultural workers—particularly Mexican American workers in the Southwest—to mount an offensive against continued exploitation by a powerful industry, which as the previous chapter shows, had relied on government backing to keep workers powerless.

As the union worked to make something of the strike and the boycott that had garnered it national attention and support, however, another parallel development was taking place that threatened to upend the movement's gains: mass-scale, unsanctioned migration from Mexico. The two would soon collide. Mexican immigrants were driven north by uncertainty, unemployment, inflation, and an unstable peso; they were stymied by the end of legal channels for seasonal migration; and they were lured by relatively easy crossing opportunities and the promise of seasonal labor. Beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s, millions

¹⁹ Lauren Araiza, *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 95.

²⁰ Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 141.

of Mexicans headed north to the United States without documents, with tens of thousands arriving in the San Joaquin Central Valley. These workers did not migrate to undermine the efforts of the union, of course. They came simply because, as one man remembers, “We were very poor.” Year in and year out, they “survived by planting and harvesting corn and beans on other people’s land,” some years barely scraping by.²¹

Although the 1960s were at the center of the so-called “Mexican Miracle,” poverty, inequality, and disillusionment continued to surpass opportunity and promise. For half of the population, the years between 1940 and 1970 were far from miraculous. Between 1963 and 1969, the relative wealth of the poorest fifty percent of Mexicans actually declined.²² Another former undocumented migrant recalls that in provincial Mexico through the 1960s and ‘70s, many people struggled simply to survive. “We just didn’t have enough of anything,” recalls Isidro Jaüregui—not enough money, not enough food, and not enough opportunity.²³ Alfonso Torres remembers the Mexico of those years with profound sadness and as a place where “there was so much poverty.”²⁴ It was this crushing poverty that led people to migrate north.

Meanwhile, two separate but deeply intertwined developments during the mid-1960s profoundly changed the nature of U.S. immigration policy. The first was the termination of the bracero program, making once-invisible migratory workers an obvious and easily apparent “problem.” The other was the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of

²¹ Isidro Jaüregui, interview with author, Delano, CA, June 8, 2014.

²² Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 20.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Alfonso Torres, interview with author, Arroyo Grande, CA, June 14, 2014.

1965 (Hart-Celler).²⁵ As David Reimers has observed, “There is a vast irony in the 1965 immigration act,” as it “was restrictive for the Western Hemisphere and liberating for most nations in the Eastern one.”²⁶

Mexican laborers did not simply stop coming, as some had predicted or at least hoped. Instead, immigrants simply continued to cross into the United States without documents. So while the end of the bracero program had finally provided an opening for the organizing of farm laborers in California and the wider Southwest, a new problem was emerging. It, too, would cause tremendous problems for organizers.

The year 1965, in fact, was widely recognized as “a year of transition” in the region.²⁷ As Mexican Americans grew tired of poverty, prejudice, and discrimination, they emerged with an “increased militancy.”²⁸ Emboldened by the Civil Rights Act and movement, Mexican American groups—from the American GI Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens to the United Farm Workers union—were “making themselves heard,” in the Southwest, as one government official put it.²⁹

Yet as this militancy was building, so too was the new reality of illegal immigration, a problem perhaps bigger than the bracero program had ever been, and a “thorny question” for Mexican Americans historically and for farm workers at this time in particular.³⁰ In the

²⁵ Aviva Chomsky, *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 60.

²⁶ David M. Reimers, *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and the Turn Against Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 145.

²⁷ “Texas Migrant Labor,” 1966, Sánchez Papers, Box 18, Folder 13.

²⁸ Ray Shaw, “Overlooked Minority: Poverty and Prejudice Often Blight the Lives of Mexican-Americans,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 1966, 1.

²⁹ Marvin Alisky, “The Mexican Americans Make Themselves Heard,” February 9, 1967, LBJ Papers, John Macy Files, Box 889, Folder “Latin Americans.”

³⁰ Susan Ferris and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 243.

Southwest, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), the state arm of the War on Poverty's Legal Services Program, was one of the first to point to the potential threat of imported and immigrant labor, arguing that foreign competition was driving down wages, worsening conditions, and making collective bargaining impossible for American-born workers.³¹

And in fact, the problem of unsanctioned workers was real. By the late 1960s, some observers went as far as to claim that the situation was similar in scale to the run-up to Operation Wetback when the Border Patrol apprehended up to 3,000 migrants a day. Though likely exaggerated—the figure was probably closer to 200-300 a day—by the late 1960s, some years after Hart-Celler placed limits on Western Hemisphere immigration for the first time, Mexican Americans had begun to recognize the complicated new reality of immigration post-1965.³² In 1967, the California Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), one of the most vocal and influential organizations of Mexican American activists at the time, argued that “the time [had] come . . . to call a halt to the permissive use” of undocumented Mexican workers.³³

It took some time for labor organizers to fully understand the new shape of the problem. This can be seen in the way they often conflated the terms used to refer to various types of immigrants, illustrating how complicated and messy the question of immigration had become. Chavez, for example, in his earliest public complaints about immigration and its effect on the union, equated “wetbacks” with green-card commuters and braceros. And one of the union's first statements on Mexican labor spoke not of undocumented immigrants, but of “green card labor” undermining the Delano grape strike. In noting that some 3.2

³¹ Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 11.

³² Charles Hillinger, “Border Patrol Killings Were First Since 1952,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1967, A6.

³³ Jack Jones, “Mexican-American Groups Object to Use of ‘Wetbacks,’” *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1967, 3.

million Mexican residents lived in the United States, fifty-three percent of them in California, the union hoped to create a sense of urgency and spur decisive action.³⁴ Likewise, in May of 1968, the UFW published a scathing report on the use of Mexican scabs that routinely referred to them as “green card holders,” even when apparently referring to undocumented aliens.³⁵ That same month, Vicente T. Jimenez, chairman of the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, reported that Mexican Americans were criticizing him, quite forcefully, for failing to take on the issue of “green card” immigrants.³⁶

But as Mexican Americans began to understand the situation in the wake of Hart-Celler, their language and tactics shifted back to those of the 1940s and ‘50s. It was not “green card” residents that they spoke about and against, but once again “wetbacks” and “illegals.” The change in language indicated they had begun to understand the nature of “a new and complicated game” of immigration, as Sanford Jay Rosen put it.³⁷ What was “new” was an immigration policy that explicitly limited legal immigration from the Western Hemisphere, while implicitly allowing growers to hire vast numbers of unauthorized immigrants. But as the previous chapter and some Mexican Americans’ return to anti-“wetback language” illustrates, the issue was a familiar one to Mexican Americans, and during the first years after Hart-Celler, the tactics and strategies of most activists remained

³⁴ Richard A. Fineberg, “Valley, 1968,” October 31, 1968, Cardenas Papers, Box 7.

³⁵ “Green Card Red Tape,” *El Malcriado*, May 1, 1968.

³⁶ Memo, Vicente T. Jimenez to the White House, May 11, 1968, LBJ Papers, Box 1, Folder “EX IM 9/1/67-8/31/68”

³⁷ Sanford Jay Rosen, untitled policy document, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 2.

largely the same as before: demanding restrictions on the use of foreign labor, whether green card holders, guest workers, or illegal border crossers.³⁸

For their part, growers continued to insist that the importation and hiring of Mexican farm laborers were essential to their businesses because they could not find sufficient domestic labor. They suggested, often in quite alarmist language, that the efforts of organizations like the CRLA to limit the hiring of undocumented Mexican workers were “destroying thousands” of businesses.³⁹ Growers claimed that despite the legislative shutdown of the bracero program, they were legally entitled to continue importing guest workers, even as their definition of “guest workers” included undocumented workers who were not hired through any formal program or process.⁴⁰

Well aware of this, Mexican American and labor leaders continued to fight against the unauthorized immigration that was making organizing so difficult. Calling on civil rights organizations, they made clear they could not tolerate the “slave camps” that at once dehumanized and abused their Mexican co-ethnics and made it impossible for U.S.-born “Chicanos,” a term coming into vogue among Mexican American activists, to organize and win labor battles. As Raul Loya, a teacher and president of the Coachella Valley branch of MAPA put it, Mexican Americans were finding a new political “identity, self respect,” and a willingness to “fight back.” That meant, he said, that despite any sympathies they had for poor Mexican immigrants who found themselves in the United States in order to feed their

³⁸ Report of the Subcommittee of Executive Council, “U.S. Mexico Border Problems,” May 14, 1968, LBJ Papers, Gaither Files, Box 49, Folder “U.S. Mexican Border Commission.”

³⁹ “Sisk Blasts Legal Unit in Grape Crisis,” *The Fresno Bee*, September 22, 1967, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 1.

⁴⁰ Response from James D. Lorenz, Jr., September 23, 1967, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 1.

families back home, Mexican Americans had to work to keep such newcomers out of the fields.⁴¹

By 1969, Chavez was more vocal than anyone in this regard. He had concluded that immigrants could not be organized, and he embarked on a mission to rid the fields of them. Chavez saw labor justice as central to racial justice. And in his mind, the former had to come before the latter. Chavez insisted that the union could not make progress if “illegals” were present and easily available for growers to use in order to break strikes. This was by no means a novel position for labor unions, of course, and when the CLRA filed lawsuits against farmers for using illegal labor, it was merely following a long tradition of labor advocates’ efforts to restrict the labor force to maintain wage floors. As Samuel Gompers had argued earlier in the century, “Immigration is in its fundamental aspects a labor problem.”⁴² It was not entirely surprising, then, to find liberal labor allies like Walter Mondale “in rare agreement” with conservatives like George Murphy on “the curse of migrancy.”⁴³

That Chavez was concerned about large-scale undocumented labor arriving in California’s Central Valley—where so much of the farm worker movement’s drama played out—made sense. Chavez understood the destructive potential that cheap, disposable, and right-less labor could have on the union.⁴⁴ Agribusiness interests wielded tremendous power in the state, much of it as a result of having a virtually unlimited supply of cheap labor from south of the border. As Ronald Taylor, writing for *The Nation* a few years later explained,

⁴¹ “Sparks Fly at Banning Human Relations Meet,” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, April 17, 1969, 21.

⁴² Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1925), 157.

⁴³ National Bureau, “U.S. Hit on Flow of Aliens,” *Independent*, April 15, 1970, A15.

⁴⁴ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California 1942-1960* (Charlotte, NC: McNally & Loftin, 1964), 199.

“the casual labor force” since 1964 had “become the farmers’ insurance against organized labor,” saving agribusiness “\$3 billion a year by keeping farm labor unorganized and powerless.”⁴⁵

If defeating the bracero program had proven essential in igniting the movement, resolving the new wave of illegal immigration from Mexico appeared to be critical to maintaining its gains.

And the gains had been substantial. In 1970, Chavez declared “victory” to supporters, after signing some two hundred contracts with twenty-six growers, covering over 70,000 workers. Seventeen million Americans had engaged in the national boycott, refusing to consume grapes. Many more had supported the boycott abroad as a result of the international campaign led by charismatic union volunteers like Elaine Elinson.⁴⁶ So joyous was the mood in Delano when Chavez announced the contracts that, as Randy Shaw has written, “if life were a movie, the victory of Cesar Chavez and the UFW would end” there. (The National Farm Workers Association had become the United Farm Workers in 1972 when it became a full member of the AFL-CIO.)⁴⁷

But the victory proved hard to sustain. By 1973, a slew of problems faced union leadership—none of greater concern than the culmination of contracts negotiated three years earlier. In the run-up, growers signed “sweetheart contracts” with the rival Teamsters union, which took advantage of the gap in the 1930s-era National Labor Relations Act that

⁴⁵ Ronald B. Taylor, “Chavez and the NLRA: Something Is in the Wind,” *The Nation*, February 22, 1975, 206-209.

⁴⁶ Jim Church, “Boycott of California’s Table Grapes Sought,” *Freeport Journal-Standard*, June 12, 1969.

⁴⁷ Matt S. Meier, Margo Gutiérrez, and Margo Gutierrez, *The Mexican American Experience: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 402.

excluded agricultural work from collective bargaining protections and also allowed growers to sign agreements with a union of their choosing without the approval of workers.

That year, the union called a new strike against a number of Delano growers, but this time, things turned violent and bloody as two workers were killed on the picket lines. One, Juan de la Cruz, was a sixty-year-old man, a former bracero, and a union member. He was killed on August 16, when scabs in a truck caravan drove by a picket line between Arvin and Weedpatch and a passenger sitting in the front seat of one of the vans, later identified as a twenty-year-old Bayani Advincula, shot into the picket lines with a .22-caliber handgun. A bullet hit de la Cruz in the chest, proving fatal. The other was 24-year-old Nagi Daifallah. He had been killed a day prior, on August 15, from a skull fracture after a confrontation between farm workers and Kern County Sheriff's deputies. Department officials claimed Daifallah "was hit on the shoulder and hit his head on the pavement in a fall." Workers claimed deputies struck a blow to his head with a metal flashlight.⁴⁸

As problems mounted, Chavez appeared almost obsessed with a singular issue, however: undocumented immigrants. Worse, according to his growing cast of critics, Chavez had begun ignoring the perspective of others. He insisted, sometimes using conspiratorial language, on a vast network of "collusion" between growers and the Immigration Service that in his mind explained why the union could not make much progress after 1973.⁴⁹ Supporters became concerned that Chavez was being too harsh on immigrants and not allowing for the possibility that organizers could fold them into the movement. But instead of softening his position in response to growing criticism, Chavez hardened it.

⁴⁸ Joe Bigham, "Chavez Halts UFW Picketing," *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, August 18, 1973.

⁴⁹ Associated Press, "Chavez Raps U.S. Aid to Illegal Aliens," *The Fresno Bee*, May 1974, UFW Files, Box 17, Folder 18.

With membership numbers down to 12,000 from a high 70,000 a few years earlier, Chavez panicked. Certain that immigration was to blame for the losses, he stepped up union efforts to eradicate Mexican workers from the fields.⁵⁰ With the Border Patrol either unwilling or unable to reduce the number of migrants crossing into the United States, Chavez decided the union would tackle the problem itself. The UFW formed its own quasi-Border Patrol and set up what it called a “wet line” to keep undocumented immigrants out of the country and away from the fields. The union created a border corps made up of some three hundred “guards” to patrol the southern border near Yuma, Arizona, each earning \$10 per day, by no means an extravagant amount, but twice what the union’s office staff made, at a time when the union was relying heavily on unpaid volunteers.⁵¹ Border Patrol agents allowed the union’s border guards to do their vigilante work, hardly taking it seriously. To them, it was a useless effort, “just another annoyance.”⁵²

To union allies, on the other hand, the “wet line” proved extremely controversial and disorienting. Miriam Pawel has written that “stories had begun to surface about widespread violence and beatings along the wet line.”⁵³ Bardacke, too, has noted that “undocumented workers who fell into the hands of the UFW were often beaten, sometimes quite brutally.”⁵⁴ Firsthand experience corroborated these reports. One then-undocumented immigrant who

⁵⁰ George Rhodes, “Border Patrol Allows Illegal Aliens -Chavez,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 18, 1974, 4.

⁵¹ Don West, “The Chavez Border Patrol,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 22, 1974, 1.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 288.

⁵⁴ Frank Bardacke, “The UFW and the Undocumented,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 83 (2013): 166.

crossed paths with the UFW's border enforcers remembers that immigrants knew "they would hurt you . . . they would fuck you up."⁵⁵

How much Chavez knew and to what extent he bore responsibility for the wet line's worst abuses is still a matter of debate. More sympathetic scholars and union activists continue to claim the wet line was the brainchild of Manuel Chavez, Cesar's cousin—long considered a rogue disciple and "something of a loose cannon."⁵⁶ They believed that the violence on the border was the result of "supporters who had strayed from the nonviolent philosophy Chavez advocated."⁵⁷

Others have disputed this. Doug Adair, then a union activist who served on the staff of the union's iconic newspaper, *El Malcriado*, in Delano and Texas, believes the violence, which "was much more than violence against property," but "violence against people," was, if not directly approved by Chavez, certainly not opposed by him. "At least," claims Adair, "Cesar was turning a blind eye. I'm sure he had to have known what was happening."⁵⁸ The undocumented, Chavez claimed, "were playing an instrumental role in breaking strikes" and had, therefore, to be kept out of the country and away from the fields.⁵⁹ Adair remembers that with so much going wrong, especially after the resource-draining fight with the Teamsters in the early 1970s and the failed 1973 table grape strike, "We needed an excuse for why the grapes were being picked."⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Isidro Jaüregui, interview with author, Delano, CA, June 8, 2014.

⁵⁶ Ruben Navarrete, "The Shameless Dolores Huerta," *The Daily Beast*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/25/the-shameless-dolores-huerta.html>, accessed July 9, 2016.

⁵⁷ Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard García, *César Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 165.

⁵⁸ Doug Adair, interview with author, Thermal, CA, July 31, 2015.

⁵⁹ "Chavez Seeks a Halt to Nation's Worst Influx of Illegal Aliens."

⁶⁰ Doug Adair, interview with author.

“Wetbacks” were a convenient scapegoat for some, among them Chavez, who had come to believe that people who were focused only on improving their economic condition were antithetical to the union’s principles. Adair remarks that to Chavez, the union was a “family,” and undocumented workers who crossed the picket lines immediately excluded themselves from that family. Similarly, Kathy Murguia, a UFW volunteer from 1965 to 1983, remembers that to Chavez, “people that were only interested in money and in getting a better life through money and didn’t want to sacrifice were people he didn’t have much respect for.” These immigrants, in his eyes, “were the enemy along with the growers and labor contractors.”⁶¹ With recent works detailing the extent to which Chavez controlled every aspect of the union, there is little doubt that as Murguia puts it, ultimately “Cesar called the shots.”⁶² These testimonies are remarkable not only for their agonizing honesty but also because they come from people who wholeheartedly supported Chavez and *la causa* (“the cause,” as the struggle came to be known widely) and who have even taken issue with some of the recent scholarly criticism of Chavez.⁶³

Even as Chavez continued to attempt to limit the impact of immigrants on the movement, the immigrants kept coming, hoping to find a better life. While they often heard stories of people who returned home with newfound wealth, and while some imagined their own version of the American Dream, few bought into the mythology. Most knew they would never become rich by working in the fields of Central California. They did, however,

⁶¹ Kathy Murguia, interview with author, Tehachapi, CA, August 10, 2015.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See, for example, their “Commentary” in response to Matt Garcia’s *From the Jaws of Victory*, in the Farm Worker Documentation Project, here: <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/category/commentary/commentary-from-the-jaws-by-doug-adair/> (Adair) and here: <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/category/commentary/commentary-from-the-jaws-by-kathy-murguia/> (Murguia).

hope to find some relief from crippling poverty and the depressingly limited goal of surviving season-to-season and day-to-day.

While the most notable Mexican American critic of such workers, Chavez was not alone in his concern about immigration, of course. Through the late 1960s and the first part of the 1970s, Mexican Americans across the country increasingly noticed the influx of undocumented people and felt their impact on working conditions.

A number of alarmed low-wage workers wrote letters to the UFW on the subject by the hundreds. One man in New York complained that “those who cross the border from Mexico” were causing “Americans without work, especially Puerto Ricans and blacks,” to have a hard time finding work.⁶⁴ Another man in Hanford, California, complained that “here, it’s full of wetbacks” and that employers were firing American workers and opting for cheaper undocumented labor.⁶⁵ Others wrote to Chavez and the union’s leadership, urging them in a desperate tone, to “please do something about the illegals” who were receiving “preference” in hiring.⁶⁶

One Jesse Lopez, a farm worker, put it thusly: “We have complained about these illegals because the conditions in our neighborhood are getting to be unbearable. There are no toilet facilities for them. Sometimes they just urinate in the air within plain view of my wife and children.” “These illegals,” he added, “have no respect for our rights.” “At night, these people regularly make noise. Sometimes they wake us up in the middle of the night with their yelling and shouting. In the evenings they target practice with hand guns.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Jose Zeda, n.d., to Cesar Chavez, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 29.

⁶⁵ Ventura Navidad to Cesar Chavez, June 23, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 29.

⁶⁶ “S.S.,” n.d., to Cesar Chavez, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 29.

⁶⁷ Deposition of Jesse Lopez, Del Rey, CA, July 5, 1974, Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

Another worker, Jose Lopez (no relation to Jesse), recounted that “we tried to make the illegals understand that if they forced us to work for a misery, we were going to report them to the Border Patrol.”⁶⁸ Lopez complained that “my brother and I, being citizens of the United States, went to fight in the war and now I notice that there are more guarantees for the illegals than for me.” Salvador Gonzalez similarly explained, “I need work so that I can feed my family and four children.” “I felt humiliated and anxious about not being able to find a job.”⁶⁹ And Ramon Encina reported that illegal aliens were complicating the situation of working-class Chicanos like him: “Three weeks after I was laid off, I went back with my two sons who needed work to pay for their clothes for school. The 35 illegals were still working for Flores [the contractor] but he said that he had no work for my sons.”⁷⁰

The union routinely publicized the struggles of such Mexican Americans, of people like Rojelio Villareal, who complained that he did “not think it is fair for someone who has no legal papers to be in this country” to be offered “a job before me when I have to pay taxes in this country, and I have a wife and four children to support.”⁷¹ Chavez instructed a trusted group of union “investigators” to focus entirely on the wetback issue. They routinely called immigration officers to arrest undocumented workers,⁷² though in many cases, at least if their testimonies were to be believed, immigration never bothered to show up.⁷³

⁶⁸ Deposition of Jose Lopez, n.d., Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

⁶⁹ Deposition of Salvador Gonzalez, Sanger, CA, August 18, 1974, Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

⁷⁰ Ramon Munoz Encina, September 20, 1974, Reedley, CA, Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

⁷¹ Deposition of Rojelio Villareal, translated by Agnes Rose, June 23, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 4.

⁷² Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard García, *César Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 129.

⁷³ Affidavit of Manuel Diaz, May 23, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 6.

Still, in 1974, Chavez urged the Border Patrol to “hit the fields hard and cease mere token arrests.”⁷⁴ Such language and such apparent heartlessness horrified observers like the leaders of the National Coalition for Pro-Immigrant Laws and Just Practices, which condemned the union’s treatment of immigrants and urged Chavez and others to see immigrants first and foremost as “economic refugees” who were not in the country to cause problems for the union or for American workers, but merely to survive.⁷⁵ But Chavez remained steadfast in his conviction that unsanctioned immigrants “were playing an instrumental role in breaking strikes.” He called “the current influx of illegal aliens” the worst in U.S. history. And he was probably right. Countless Mexican Americans, he said, were in the position of Lopez, Encina, and Gonzalez, who were only a few examples in “hundreds of similar cases.”⁷⁶

UFW volunteers also collected depositions, many of which claimed that undocumented workers were being systematically hired and protected by employers from deportation and that when “illegals” were deported, they would be back within days.⁷⁷ While it is unlikely that the undocumented were being protected by anyone, given how easily they could be replaced with other undocumented workers, it is probably true that many immigrants who were arrested returned to work within a few days. Some immigrants, in fact,

⁷⁴Telegram, Cesar Chavez to Capt. Lewis Bartlett, July 17, 1974, UFW Files, Box 17, Folder 16.

⁷⁵“Political and Economic Refugees,” National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices,” n.d. (ca. 1973), Cardenas Papers, Box 3, Folder 1; Statement of the Coalición Nacional Pro Leyes y Practicas Justas de Inmigración (Los Angeles), July 23, 1974, Corona Papers, Box 9, Folder 5.

⁷⁶“Acción!,” AFL-CIO Report, 1974, Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

⁷⁷Deposition of Ramon Gutierrez, translated by Agnes Rose, August 31, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 9; Deposition of Clemente Castillo, translated by Agnes Rose, n.d., UFW Files, Walter P. Reuther Library, Box 38, Folder 4.

said as much, noting that “it was easier then” to cross the border, and that often after being deported, they would simply cross back north in a matter of days, sometimes hours.⁷⁸

The ease with which immigrants crossed the border had proven troubling to nativists, too, who had, since the early 1970s, looked for ways to stop the flow. In 1971, California Republican Assemblyman Dixon Arnett introduced legislation to criminalize the hiring of undocumented immigrants.⁷⁹ This push to pass legislation against the use of immigrant workers proved two points: that the immigrant issue was becoming more visible and that, at least for the labor movement, it was also becoming more complicated. In just one year, from 1970 to 1971, immigration officials estimated, detentions had jumped thirty-six percent. Over the previous decade, the change was an astonishing eight hundred percent. “We need more men,” urged Eugene Sabine, an immigration investigator.⁸⁰

Some labor leaders implied that the government, and especially immigration officials, had through incompetence or outright conspiracy, let the “wetback problem” get entirely out of control and even accused immigration officials of paroling immigrants to farmers, as was common in the 1940s and 1950s.⁸¹ While that is not entirely unlikely, most of the documentary evidence suggests that immigration officials were, in fact, attempting to tackle the problem—at times aggressively—but were simply understaffed and unable to keep up with the ever-rising number of undocumented immigrants in the Southwest and increasingly, elsewhere.

⁷⁸ A variation of this phrase appears in many of the oral histories I have conducted with immigrants who were undocumented in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Most agree that while not necessarily easy, in comparison to the increasingly militarized border, crossing in those years proved significantly less challenging.

⁷⁹ Arline Sherer, “Chaos, Pain Laid to Illegal Alien Job Law,” *Independent*, December 29, 1971, B1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Report to Leo McCarthy, n.d., Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

Certainly, immigrants remember the Border Patrol as a fixture of daily life. If they did not come across a green-and-white *perrera* (“dog cage,” as the iconic Border Patrol trucks were known to immigrants), they heard about others who did. Stories and rumors of raids, roundups, and chases provided ample reason for collective concern. For the migrants, it seemed that not much had changed since the 1930s when workers “not only lacked political rights but lived under the threat of deportation.”⁸² “*La migra* gave us constant scares,” according to Eliseo Murillo, a former farm worker who remembers the Border Patrol routinely raiding the grapevines where he worked in Central California. “In those years, ‘70, ‘75, the law was very hard on us. We saw immigration daily. Daily. We would be in the fields in Arin and at night we slept under the vineyards because immigration showed up at the camps at night.”⁸³ Likewise, Antonio Garcia remembers the Border Patrol being a constant presence. “They didn’t get us every time,” he said, “but they did often.”⁸⁴ “Immigration was everywhere,” remembered Agustin Guzman.⁸⁵

So routine were encounters with Border Patrol agents that immigrants developed sophisticated forms of evasion. Some became experts at camouflage and stealth, learning over time when and where to hide, or how to fit into crowds. Some got quite good at building early alert networks that passed along warnings from one end of a neighborhood or city to another in order to keep their compatriots safe from arrest. Others simply became really good at running away. In doing so, immigrants resisted attempts to control them and found ways to make life not just bearable, but on occasion, even fun and exciting. As

⁸² Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 48.

⁸³ Eliseo Murillo, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 28, 2014.

⁸⁴ Antonio Garcia, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 10, 2014.

⁸⁵ Agustin Guzman, interview with author, Earlimart, CA, July 22, 2014.

Gustavo Arellano has pointed out, Mexican popular culture is full of references to the ways in which poor, uneducated, “illegal” people outwitted agents of the most powerful government in the world. Even today Mexican kids today play “la migra” to get the same rush that their parents described experiencing when hiding from, outrunning, and outsmarting American authorities in real life, all while mocking the Border Patrol and paying a playful, if somewhat strange, homage to the sacrifices of their parents.⁸⁶

Mexican Americans, by and large, sympathized with the plight of immigrant workers, and they understood the desire to improve their lives from the conditions they left in Mexico. But, as one report noted, they were also forced to “face the fact that those same aliens adversely affect employment opportunities for Mexican Americans, lowering their wages by competing for work if not taking potential jobs outright.” To illustrate the difficult position of working-class Mexican Americans, the report noted that “there is probably no Mexican American in any barrio who is not familiar with the people in both positions—the illegal alien and unemployed young Chicano.”⁸⁷ Or as another report explained, “Chicanos do resent the aliens, and they don’t; they do fear for their jobs, and they don’t. They do feel a bond of *raza* with same roots, and they don’t. They like them, and occasionally, they hate them, and turn them into immigration authorities, knowing full well that the alien will be carried back to Mexico immediately.”⁸⁸ Plainly, Mexican Americans felt a great deal of ambivalence about how to deal with their undocumented co-ethnics.

⁸⁶ Gustavo Arellano, “These California Kids Got In Trouble for Playing La Migra, a Game Where ‘Border Agents’ Chase ‘Illegal Immigrants,’” *Reason*, April 18, 2018, <https://reason.com/archives/2018/04/18/these-california-kids-got-in-trouble-for>, accessed May 23, 2018.

⁸⁷ Frank del Olmo, “Chicanos Divided by Sympathy for Aliens, Fear of Own Jobs,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1972, C1.

⁸⁸ Scott Beaven, “Chicanos Seem Ambivalent,” *Albuquerque Journal*, March 15, 1974, C1.

Even so, Chavez appeared unmoved to the appeals of those who wished to see a more welcoming attitude toward immigrants. His view was simple: Chicanos needed to get rid of the “wetbacks,” a term he had used liberally to describe undocumented workers, even though it was, by the late 1960s, widely understood to be a slur.⁸⁹ This worried the Chicanos and Anglo leftists who imagined different possibilities. They were victims of a system, such sympathizers repeatedly tried to communicate to Chavez, that had failed to bring economic improvement to all sectors of Mexican society, and of the same corporate structure north of the border that he and the UFW were fighting.⁹⁰

Chavez was unpersuaded, and he continued to push for the restriction and deportation of illegal immigrants, something which troubled many of even his most dedicated supporters. In a 1973 open letter to Chavez (the format no doubt an attempt to alert others), Ken Lawrence, a radical labor organizer based in Florida, urged the farm labor leader to use the goodwill he had accumulated to organize all workers, including those without documents. “We have great admiration for you,” Lawrence wrote. “The farm workers’ struggles have helped ignite a new wave of militancy and involvement in all areas of social and political concern in the United States.” Lawrence applauded the UFW giving dignity and purpose to people who had been historically treated “worse than cattle.” But, “at the same time,” its anti-immigrant stance worried allies, who were increasingly feeling that “now it looks like you are beginning to back away from that commitment.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ “Chavez Explains the Need for Boycotts,” *KQED News* (NCPB/KQED, September 25, 1972), Leonard Library, The San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive; “Slur Angers Nats’ Chief,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 18, 1958, 26; William Reich, “Letters to the Editor: Ethnic Slurs,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 27, 1968, 14.

⁹⁰ Charles Gordon, “The Problem of Illegal Entrants,” *I&N Reporter* (Spring 1973), 48, Cardenas Papers, Box 5.

⁹¹ Ken Lawrence, “An Open Letter to Cesar Chavez,” *Southern Patriot*, January 1973, Corona Papers, Box 16, Folder 4.

Yet, Chavez appeared unfazed by the criticism and doubled down. He insisted that the Border Patrol work harder and put more resources into detaining and deporting immigrants.

In fairness to Chavez's perspective, the scale of the issue was not up for debate. Huge numbers of immigrants were indeed flooding the job market. By the early 1970s, an estimated 800,000 immigrants were arriving in the country each year, ten times more than the decade prior.⁹² Some 5.5 to six million were estimated to be in the country by 1975.⁹³ The problem was especially acute in the region where Chavez was attempting, against fierce odds, to make the largest strides for the movement. In the San Joaquin Valley, the numbers had skyrocketed during a critical period for the union. In the mid-sixties, just over three thousand undocumented immigrants had been arrested in, and deported from, the area. A decade later, twice that number had been apprehended and returned to Mexico. In 1973, the Border Patrol arrested 6,583 people in Stanislaus alone.⁹⁴ From various interviews, estimates, and arrest and deportation figures, *The Fresno Bee*, the largest newspaper in the area, concluded that upwards of 50,000 undocumented people lived and worked in the Valley by the mid-seventies.⁹⁵

⁹² Guy Sullivan, "Border Patrol Head Decries Manpower Lack to Control Aliens," newspaper clipping, UFW Files, Box 17, Folder 17.

⁹³ Arthur F. Corwin, "The Numbers Game: Estimates of Illegal Aliens in the United States, 1970-1981," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 229.

⁹⁴ J. Robert Bazemore, "Border Patrol Sets Record with Arrests of 6,586 in '73," *The Modesto Bee*, February 10, 1974, UFW Files, Box 17, Folder 16.

⁹⁵ "Chavez Seeks a Halt to Nation's Worst Influx of Illegal Aliens," *The New York Times*, July 23, 1974, 11. Although Central California was not the only region being affected by undocumented labor—the Midwest and even the Southern labor markets were also being harmed according to many labor leaders in those places—Chavez focused on getting the immigrants out of the area where he was doing his most pressing and visible work.

Chavez demanded to know why, in the midst of the worst influx of undocumented immigrants in the country's history, the INS had not grown.⁹⁶ When criticized for his actions, Chavez routinely responded with a recycled letter full of aphorisms, in which he explained that "I feel that illegal aliens are doubly exploited, first because they are farm workers, second because they are powerless to organize to defend their own interests." "We recognize the illegals as our brothers and sisters," he claimed, "and the union's position is that they should be allowed to enter the United States with their families as legal residents. But they should not be used as strikebreakers."⁹⁷ The Border Patrol and the Immigration service had a responsibility, he argued, to address the problem. The Border Patrol responded by saying Chavez's insistence that it was turning a blind eye "ridiculous, irresponsible, and unfounded in fact." Neil Henry, area chief for Kern County, even suggested that "it appears such information is designed solely for the purpose of harassment since the vast majority of tips have proven to have no substance."⁹⁸

More than a few Mexican Americans and labor allies came to the same conclusion, arguing that the union's stance against "illegals" was harmful, obsessive—even fanatical. For one, Todd Jefferson, another labor activist, noted that "already . . . opposition to this approach has surfaced among some farm workers, urban Chicanos, UFW staff members, and many boycott committee members." While they, and Jefferson included himself, "wholeheartedly support the just struggle of the UFW" and were "hardly enemies of the union," they predicted "that this strategy will be a disastrous one for the union." Jefferson, for one, argued that even "if it could work, it would strengthen the institutions that oppress

⁹⁶ Steve Robertson, "Illegals Harm Garment Industry" (ILGWU, July 26, 1974), UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 4.

⁹⁷ Cesar Chavez to Juan Manuel Gomez, August 1, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 29.

⁹⁸ "Border Patrol Hits UFW," *The Delano Record*, August 1, 1974, UFW Files, Box 17, Folder 16.

all workers, and in particular, minority workers.” The Border Patrol, Congress, and immigration officials in Washington were anything but neutral, he reminded Chavez, Chicano leaders, and labor activists. Secondly, “the international labor movement” had proven that movements failed “whenever workers of one race, sex, or nation are set against workers of another race, sex, or nation.” Finally, he said, “many UFW supporters feel uncomfortable about the union’s current position” and felt that they were being pushed in a counterintuitive, even dangerously destructive, direction.⁹⁹

Indeed, by the mid-1970s, at least half of California’s farm laborers were unsanctioned, with some estimates suggesting that a large majority of the agricultural labor force was made up of undocumented workers.¹⁰⁰

The reality in the fields was changing, but Chavez’s mindset was not. This meant that Chavez was fighting the very people his union ostensibly represented. And not only that, but his circle of outside supporters had gotten smaller since 1975 as a direct result of his anti-immigrant rhetoric, too, as a growing number of supporters, both inside and outside the organization, had come to worry that by vilifying unsanctioned Mexican workers, the UFW was alienating not only immigrants but also potential supporters and allies who had come to see the unions’ treatment of immigrants as antithetical to its founding principles of social justice and racial equality.¹⁰¹

In fact, more and more radical activists were openly discussing their displeasure with the union’s anti-immigrant crusade. In 1974, a number of Chicano activists wrote to the

⁹⁹ Todd Jefferson, “‘Illegals’ Are Not the Enemy,” *Southern Patriot*, Summer 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 4.

¹⁰⁰ Bardacke, “The UFW and the Undocumented,” 167; J. Edward Taylor and Philip L. Martin, “The New Rural Poverty: Central Valley Evolving into Patchwork of Poverty and Prosperity,” *California Agriculture* 54, no. 1 (February 2000): 26–32; Jennifer Medina, “California Farmers Short of Labor, and Patience,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2014.

¹⁰¹ “Farm Bureau Takes Stand in Labor Activity,” *Valley Morning Star*, June 12, 1975.

AFL-CIO, offering historical perspective about why Chicanos, who were grappling with difficult questions about their identity, had come to identify with the plight of the undocumented: “In the early [18]90s, when Mexicans were coming across in large numbers, the Anglo was whipped into a frenzy against them. We can say that 90% of the present Chicano population is descended from the refugees of that period. How can we be against these working-class refugees who are refugees of the same capitalist interests that oppress us?”¹⁰²

The following year, Frantz Derenoncourt, a human rights activist and executive secretary for the Defense of the Interests of the Haitian Community, expressed “alarm” at Chavez’s harsh language against the undocumented.¹⁰³ In almost every instance, critics reiterated their solidarity with the efforts of organized labor in the California Central Valley, while also calling for a more realistic and humane approach toward the undocumented.

But Chavez, who was by then deeply embattled by mounting problems, and according to some, losing control and even touch with reality, was not interested in history lessons. He continued to insist that “wetbacks”¹⁰⁴ were the enemy, which troubled both insiders and outsiders. Adair, for one, understood the logic of Chavez’s anti-scab position, “but from a worker’s point of view,” he, like many other union members and allies, believed “we should be organizing these workers and not beating them up.”¹⁰⁵ Still, few inside the union protested, especially if they wanted to remain part of “la causa.” As Murguia tells it,

¹⁰² William C. Taylor, Guadalupe Castillo, and Patricia Blawis, “Immigration, ‘Illegals,’ and Working Class Unity,” 1974, UFW Files, Box 17 (loose page).

¹⁰³ Frantz Derenoncourt to Cesar Chavez, November 5, 1975, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 3.

¹⁰⁴ “Chavez Explains the Need for Boycotts.”

¹⁰⁵ Doug Adair, interview with author.

“You had to be careful who you talked to and what you talked about” by the mid-1970s, and questioning Chavez and his anti-undocumented obsession would have been foolhardy.¹⁰⁶

Outside leftist allies, however, did not mince words about their discomfort with what was happening. Members of the Centro de Acción Social Autonomo (CASA), a Mexican-American civil rights and mutual aid organization founded by Bert Corona in 1968, were particularly vocal. Corona, though still diplomatic and friendly, himself wrote to Chavez to urge him to keep sight of “the real enemy.” Corona dismissed the union’s notion that “if all the ‘illegals’ are deported, the farm workers will win their boycott.” “Let us not ignore our brothers and sisters,” he pleaded.¹⁰⁷ Peter Camejo, then a young socialist activist, similarly pleaded with Chavez in 1975 to consider that “the ancestors of these brothers and sisters were here long before the Europeans made these laws. They’re being locked up for the ‘crime’ of trying to feed their families.”¹⁰⁸ Why compound their misery rather than reach out to them instead, he wondered. One former “cesarchavista” expressed the dismay that many others were feeling. He and many people he knew, the man told a reporter, had given up on the union entirely after coming to the conclusion that “Cesar Chavez no longer defends farm workers and instead turns them over to the authorities.”¹⁰⁹

Still, union allies continued to reach out to Chavez and urged him to rethink his strategy, believing that he was capable of a turnaround. Todd Jefferson continued to warn that the union’s stance on the undocumented was not only harming undocumented workers themselves but also creating anger in Mexican-American communities, who “[don’t] exactly

¹⁰⁶ Kathy Murguia, interview with author.

¹⁰⁷ “To Farm Workers, Members of the N.F.W.A., All Workers in General, to the American People,” C.A.S.A (Los Angeles and Chicago), October 24, 1974, UFW Files, Box 38, Folder 30.

¹⁰⁸ David Salner, “Camejo Hits Racist Deportation Campaign,” *The Militant*, November 21, 1975, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Arturo Palafox, “Lo Acusa de Entregar las Causas de Campesinos a las Autoridades,” n.d., Corona Papers, Box 11, Folder 1.

appreciate” their family members being harassed by the authorities or by the union’s anti-illegal squad.¹¹⁰ Besides, he argued, undocumented workers “could be won over to the cause of the union,” though not if a hard wedge were driven “between the union and the undocumented worker-scabs.” Allowing this to happen, Jefferson insisted, would play into the strategy of anti-labor forces, which, as Chavez and everyone in the labor movement well understood, saw worker divisions as its most powerful weapon against organized labor.¹¹¹

Richard Wagman, a young and outspoken Canadian activist concurred, offering criticisms along the same lines, criticisms that he knew the UFW leader would disagree with, but which he hoped would at the very least be seen as “serious and meant to be constructive.” Key among his suggestions was that the union’s “attitude towards the ‘illegals’ . . . represented a shameful betrayal of basic working class solidarity.”¹¹² Like Jefferson, Wagman reasoned that the undocumented could prove strong and committed allies if only they were allowed to be part of the movement. He reminded Chavez that in fact, in 1973, thousands of “illegals” had been persuaded to leave the fields immediately after being informed “of the strike and appealing to the common interest they share as workers.”¹¹³

The idea of including undocumented workers in union efforts was not entirely new or farfetched. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), a labor union with members in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Florida, Texas, and the Northeast, had found tremendous success organizing undocumented workers in several of those states. Rather than denying them membership, FLOC had accepted that “the same interests whose economic motives

¹¹⁰ Jefferson, “‘Illegals’ Are Not the Enemy.”

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Richard Wagman to Cesar Chavez, May 12, 1976, UFW Files, Box 15, Folder 7.

¹¹³ Ibid.

and policies cause the migration of workers not only across the U.S., but from Mexico to the U.S. as well” banked on a fractured working class. “We believe all workers,” FLOC leaders argued, “including those without documents have the right to organize and to have their human and civil rights protected.”¹¹⁴

A few other organizations, seeing the futility of reaching out to Chavez, took to the streets to speak out against deportations and discrimination against the undocumented, sometimes indirectly and often quite directly also denouncing the union’s anti-illegals crusade. As one example, some three thousand people marched in Los Angeles in late 1974, with the message “Raza Si! Migra No!” (“Yes to Our People, No to the Border Patrol”). Led by CASA, Teatros Unidos, the Committee for the Defense of the Bill of Rights, the U.S. Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners, the Young Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party, the Brown Berets, and other organizations, the march made clear that “the United Farm Workers do not speak for the Chicano movement in their recent attacks on undocumented workers.”¹¹⁵ Miguel Pendás pushed the point months later: “The undocumented workers will not be granted their full rights—including the right to join a union of their choosing—without a battle. They cannot win that battle unless they have the support of their sisters and brothers in the fields and in the barrios.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Central Committee Recommendations: Resolution Supporting the Defense and Organizing of Undocumented Workers, Farm Labor Organizing Committee, March 26, 1977, MWCLR Records, Box 51, Folder 13.

¹¹⁵ Mariana Hernandez, “3,000 Rally in LA: ‘End Deportations!’” *The Militant*, September 13, 1974, UFW Files, Box 17, Folder 22.

¹¹⁶ Miguel Pendás, “UFW Supporters Criticize Chavez Call for Deportation of Undocumented Workers,” *The Militant*, October 11, 1974, 18.

Despite the mounting challenges, Chavez refused to reconsider his position until 1975.¹¹⁷ That year, Chavez quietly and reluctantly had a change of heart and admitted, after years of criticism and profound changes in the composition of farm workers that, “in the heat of the struggle, [we] have committed errors.” He also promised to be more inclusive of all workers, “whether they be citizens or immigrants” in the future.¹¹⁸

In many ways, however, the damage was done.¹¹⁹ While undocumented workers often praised Chavez and the union for trying to improve conditions in the fields, few joined the union and many had bitter memories of “our own people,” as Abel Guzman put it—echoing what many other immigrants often expressed—turning their backs on them.¹²⁰ The immigration issue coincided with the rapid downward spiral the union experienced after 1975. From within and without, Chavez’s anti-immigrant position angered, frustrated, and alienated activists, among them Chicanos and civil rights volunteers, like “a group of lawyers who did free work for the union,” and who “withdrew their services over the issue.”¹²¹

In the years after the union’s years-long campaign against undocumented workers, radicals like Miguel Pendás suggested that the union’s anti-immigrant stance had revealed that labor unions could no longer be effective if they refused to organize undocumented workers. The socialist activist believed the UFW’s experience had proved that undocumented workers could be, and should be, organized. “The labor movement has the clout to win these struggles,” he told labor leaders and Chicano activists, “and Chicanos have

¹¹⁷ “Chavez Shifts View of ‘Illegals,’” *The Washington Post*, February 3, 1975, A6.

¹¹⁸ An Open Letter to Farm Workers from Cesar Chavez, *El Malcriado* leaflet series, July 7, 1975, Corona Papers, Box 17, Folder 24.

¹¹⁹ “Chavez Shifts View of ‘Illegals.’”

¹²⁰ Fidel Rodriguez, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 10, 2014; Abel Guzman, interview with author, Delano, CA, June 15, 2014.

¹²¹ Pendás, “UFW Supporters Criticize Chavez.”

the right to expect its support. But the labor movement will have to be transformed first and put on the right track.”¹²²

But as crucial as the issue of immigrant labor proved to be for the union’s trajectory, the union’s long and fruitless campaign against them had been even more consequential for how Chicanos, labor unions, and civil and human rights groups approached the issue. The UFW had, unwittingly but inevitably, highlighted the problems with fighting immigrants, rather than the forces that provoked and necessitated immigration, for the struggles of the working class. And together with other developments, it ignited a new way of thinking about immigrants, about their role in the Chicano struggle, and about their place in the fight for a more just and fair society in the United States.

¹²² Miguel Pendás, “Chicanos and Steel,” *The Militant*, January 14, 1977, 23.

3. “One People without Borders”: The Radical Roots of the Immigrants’ Rights Movement

In the early 1970s, a string of high-profile tragedies befell undocumented workers who found themselves in the United States trying to make a living. In 1970, Los Angeles Police officers fired on a group of four undocumented immigrants, apparently without provocation, killing two.¹ Then, in 1973, a truck carrying forty-seven Mexican undocumented workers to their work site crashed in Southeast, Kansas, near Sikeston, Missouri, seriously injuring a dozen of the immigrants and killing ten others, all of whom were buried in a mass grave after the Mexican government declined to pay for funeral expenses and the destitute families could not afford to send for their dead. Three years after that, news reports surfaced that a group of undocumented workers had been tortured in Arizona.²

In each of these cases, Chicano activists were incensed. In response to the news of killings and torture of immigrants, some even suggested the incidents served as proof that “it is not safe to have brown skin and live in the U.S. today.”³ In the case of the Missouri accident, indignant communities near and far quickly mobilized to raise enough money to send the bodies home to their grieving families. Leading Chicanos could not fathom the irony of the United States spending nearly a quarter of a billion dollars annually to fund the immigration service, with \$35 million allocated to deport the undocumented, “yet when they are found dead, nobody wants to assume the cost of returning them to Mexico.”⁴

¹ *Los Angeles Times* News Service, “Mexican Journalist Portrays Plights of Chicanos in U.S.,” *Arizona Republic*, December 10, 1970, 6C.

² “Three Illegal Aliens Tortured in Arizona,” *The Bakersfield Californian*, August 22, 1976, 2.

³ “CASA,” MWCLR Records, Box 51, Folder 13.

⁴ “Mexican Nationals Buried in Mass Grave in Missouri,” *Los Desarraigados* 1, no. 3 (August 1973): 1.

The response to these incidents was perfectly rational. What requires some explanation is the way in which Chicanos took them personally and internalized them. This is not to suggest that Chicanos were unperturbed by previous tragedies involving Mexican immigrants. Nor is it to claim that affinities with Mexicans were new. But it does hint that by the 1970s, the views of many Chicanos were shifting and that they increasingly came to feel and argue that they and undocumented immigrants were one and the same community.

Not all—perhaps not even most—of them, of course. As the few scholars who have examined *Mexicano*-Chicano relations well know, relations between Mexican Americans and immigrants (especially temporary workers and undocumented immigrants) have been complex and nuanced. They have never followed a linear path; indeed, they have often oscillated between sympathy and antipathy. Their views historically existed on a flexible spectrum and were always grounded in time and place.⁵

In fact, my own final two chapters will illustrate that some ambivalence about immigration in Mexican-descended communities continued well into the 1990s. It is also important to note that figuring out exact the patterns on the views of Chicanos (and Hispanics and Latinos, the ethnic categories that have become more common since the 1980s) has always been difficult because these have historically been unstable categories. Further complicating the task, the views of Mexican Americans have historically mattered little to the dominant society. Only since the late 1980s have opinion polls consistently tracked their attitudes, for example.⁶

⁵ Tatcho Mindiola and Max Martínez, *Chicano-Mexicano Relations* (Houston: Mexican American Studies Program: University of Houston, 1986); David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jimmy Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No: Chicano Movement Struggles for Immigrant Rights in San Diego* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁶ Rodolfo O. De La Garza, ed., *Ignored Voices: Public Opinion Polls and the Latino Community* (Austin: University of Texas, 1987).

Still, the available evidence suggests that in the years after 1965 and through the decline of the Chicano movement toward the 1980s, a number of vocal activists came to understand themselves and immigrants as “one people without borders.”⁷ This chapter aims to explain how this came about and to explain the lasting significance of that movement, a movement which spurred a vibrant immigrants’ rights movement whose foundations remain largely unacknowledged today.

Between 1969 and 1975, the population of undocumented immigrants doubled from about half a million to over a million—and almost tripled again by 1980.⁸ And certainly, increased numbers of immigrants also meant increased contact. The growing numbers of Mexican immigrants in the United States, especially as they began to move to cities and to stay in the country longer—particularly the in Southwest—forced interactions with U.S.-born Mexican Americans at work, in the barrios, in churches, and in the streets. Such interactions no doubt helped some Mexican Americans see that, as Mario T. García has put it, “wetbacks along with Mexican-Americans were . . . victims” of the same discrimination and inequality.⁹

But contact alone cannot explain the larger shift in attitudes. Activists made something of those contacts. Using a diversity of tactics and with a deep historical memory in their arsenal, many working-class Mexican Americans and their progressive allies began to take a different path in the 1960s and ‘70s than the one many Mexican Americans had taken until then. And while each of the factors I outline in this chapter contributed in its own way,

⁷ Resolution passed at the National Chicano Immigration Conference, May 24, 1980 Baca Papers, Box 43, Folder 1.

⁸ Robert Warren and Jeffrey S. Passel, “A Count of the Uncountable: Estimates of Undocumented Aliens Counted in the 1980 United States Census,” *Demography* 24, no. 3 (August 1987): 375–93.

⁹ Mario García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 52.

none ever functioned apart from the others. Their interplay at a historically specific moment was the reason why this shift happened so quickly and so decisively. And although by no means permanent, fixed, or unchanging, the impact was large and lasting. By learning from the disasters of the battered UFW, by emphasizing the ethnic and working-class character of the blossoming Chicano movement, by looking abroad and engaging human rights discourses and those of Third World struggles alongside civil rights developments at home, and by being subjected to the same discrimination and nativist racialization as immigrants, these activists found success in shifting how Chicanos, the broader left, and even sometimes ordinary Americans saw and spoke about undocumented people.

First, the Chicano movement, which ironically, often credited the farm workers' movement with its own genesis, soured on the tactics of Chavez and his most loyal supporters, especially after the embarrassment of the 1973 "wet line" experiment.

Second, and the point from which this chapter begins, the Chicano movement's emergence and its focus on "Brown Pride," lent Mexican Americans a new vocabulary and a new set of ideas, many of them borrowed from the African American struggle and the concurrent rise of Black Pride.¹⁰ This ethnic revival encouraged Mexican Americans—increasingly identified as Chicanos—about themselves and their place in the country and the world. This new social, cultural, and political vantage point made viewing their undocumented co-ethnics as natural allies, as members of the same struggle, not just easier, but almost inevitable.

Third, the "Cold War Civil Rights" moment and the emergence and popularization of global human rights discourse, with its focus on the rights of Third World people,

¹⁰ F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, 2nd revised ed. (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1997), 252.

strengthened the Chicano moral struggle and provided it with a transnational and internationalist perspective.¹¹

And finally, the growing presence of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the fields and in the barrios beginning in the 1970s also triggered a fierce nativist backlash. As its language lumped together citizens, legal permanent residents, and unsanctioned immigrants, reducing all ethnic Mexicans to what political scientist Elizabeth Cohen might call “semi-citizens” or what sociologist Jean Beaman might term “citizen outsiders,” Chicanos came to find common cause with those Mexican immigrants who lived and worked in the United States without documentation.

The convergence of the termination of the bracero program, the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler), and the ongoing economic troubles south of the Rio Grande ensured that immigrants continued to head north in search of opportunity and a more dignified future for themselves and their families—with, or most often without—documents. As the previous two chapters demonstrate, this kind of development was precisely the kind that had, in earlier years and decades, troubled Mexican Americans, who were among the most likely to be harmed by low-wage, less-skilled immigration.¹² Yet, beginning in the late 1960s and especially the 1970s, Mexican Americans appeared increasingly to feel an affinity for those immigrants.

When the bracero program ended, Mexican immigrants did not stop migrating north. Neither did the changes in immigration law in 1965, which placed, for the first time in

¹¹ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12.

¹² Vernon M. Briggs, *Chicano Worker* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

history, restrictions on Western Hemisphere migration, halt the desire of Mexican citizens to venture north in search of opportunity. With fewer available visas and no legal channel for contract work, Mexican immigrants simply migrated without documents. By the end of the 1960s, some five hundred thousand undocumented Mexican immigrants were living in the United States, according to the most reliable estimates, and by 1975, the figure had more than doubled.¹³ The one-million mark was symbolically, as well as numerically, significant, as it matched the number of undocumented immigrants believed to be in the country in 1954 when Operation Wetback ostensibly “erased” the “wetback” problem.

There was no expectation that immigration would cease any time soon. Observers on both sides of the border expected migration levels to keep pace, even to rise. In 1977, Mexican President José López Portillo admitted as much, saying that as long as Mexicans had trouble finding dignified and well-paying work, mass-scale migration was likely to remain a reality.¹⁴ As migration continued through the ‘60s and ‘70s, Mexican Americans gradually realized that, as one activist would later remember, “Neighborhoods [were] being changed.”¹⁵ As that change happened, Mexican Americans and immigrants increasingly shared a sense of identity in the barrios where they increasingly lived, worked, worshipped, and struggled together.¹⁶

The massive rise in undocumented migration, the product of strong push and pull forces, changing immigration laws, and relatively easy crossing opportunities coincided with the growing militancy in the Chicano movement, as Mexican Americans began to feel that

¹³ Warren and Passel, “A Count of the Uncountable,” 388.

¹⁴ Interview with José López Portillo, ca. July 1977, MWCLR Records, Box 11, Folder 18.

¹⁵ Richard Strout, “Illegal Immigration: We’ve Lost Control,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 8, 1983.

¹⁶ Walter J. Nicholls and Justus Uitermark, *Cities and Social Movements: Immigrant Rights Activism in the United States, France, and the Netherlands, 1970-2015* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 92.

the long-standing tactic of respectability politics and gradual accommodation—the strategy of working toward acculturation into the mainstream—had failed to pay off or even to deliver substantial gains. Ethnic Mexicans in the United States continued to experience discrimination, exploitation, and neglect and to suffer from a general lack of opportunity. Although by 1968, eighty-five percent of ethnic Mexicans were U.S. citizens, and more than half had been in the United States for three generations, most continued to suffer from endemic poverty, unemployment, poor living and working conditions, and racial discrimination.¹⁷

At the same time, there was reason for some optimism. Mexican Americans had seen the gains the black civil rights movement had made, even if slowly in the face of a ferocious and often violent backlash. Heavily influenced by the struggles of black Americans, Mexican Americans came to believe that as one journalist put it, “in the years ahead the world will hear much of what Chicanos can do.”¹⁸ The social and political changes brought about by the black struggle had a profound effect on Mexican Americans, especially after the mid-1960s. As historian Nancy MacLean has demonstrated, the changing social landscape, especially after the passage of the Civil rights Act, allowed, even encouraged, Mexican Americans to “embrace a pride in Mexicanness that they had long felt but hesitated to express publicly because the risks were so great.”¹⁹

Indeed, ethnic Mexicans were becoming more defiant, as evident even in the language they used to describe themselves. Increasingly, Mexican Americans self-identified as “Chicanos” (for women, Chicanas). The origins of the word itself remain largely a

¹⁷ Ian F. Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 16.

¹⁸ “U.S. Latins on the March,” *Newsweek*, May 23, 1966.

¹⁹ Nancy MacLean, “The Civil Rights Act and the Transformation of Mexican American Identity and Politics,” *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal* 18 (2007): 130.

mystery, but the most likely etymological explanation posits that “Chicano/a” is a corruption of the Spanish word “Mexicano/a.” Previously, “Chicano” and “Chicana” had been used as a slur and as a term of derision, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁰ But over time, as Mexican Americans in the United States grew more critical of the dominant Anglo society, they appropriated the term proudly. This was part of the larger quest among Mexican-descended communities to craft, as Lorena Oropeza has written, “a new understanding of themselves as a people of color, as a colonized people, and as women and men who had struggled against oppression for centuries.”²¹

The ideology of *Chicanismo* implied urgency and radicalism, a rejection of both Anglo society and of the gradualist and assimilationist posture that had characterized organizations like LULAC and the GI Forum.

But *Chicanismo* was complex and did not define itself merely by what it opposed. *Chicanismo* implied an entire worldview rather than a single thing: it was an ethnic identity, a political ideology, an economic struggle, and a social movement. It embraced otherness and brownness and, in some ways, found more in common with Palestinians, “strangers in [their] own land,” than with other (especially Anglo) Americans.²² At its core, Chicanos were looking for social advancement in the United States, while at once attempting to find their own place in the world. Tatcho Mindiola, a sociologist and scholar of the movement, noted in the 1980s that, in looking to escape their own past of accommodation and acculturation, and in their attempts to learn their own history as subjects of a settler-colonial society,

²⁰ Sherwood Thompson, *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 125.

²¹ Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 5.

²² Ernie Olivas, “Letter to the Editor: ‘Chicanos First,’” *The Fresno Bee*, May 26, 1969.

Chicanos were engaging in “a search of Mexico.”²³ That search was equal parts emotional, political, and intellectual. Often, it involved the mythical and the symbolic. Chicanos imagined themselves part of a great empire, Aztlán, a brown homeland in the American Southwest.

And instead of claiming to be white, as generations before them had done, some Mexican Americans came to insist that, in the words of José Ángel Gutiérrez, a radical activist and founder of the separatist Raza Unida Party in 1970, “before we were Chicanos we were Indian.”²⁴ Such proclamations simplified the long and complex history of Mexican-descended people, but it revealed in stark terms just how much their language and identity was changing.

Not all Mexican Americans identified, used, or even felt comfortable with the term “Chicano.” Many rejected the proto-nationalism of Chicanismo and believed it was dangerous and counterproductive. Others still felt “Chicano” to be a slur, and thus, found it insulting. But by 1975, one study found that half of all Mexican Americans preferred the term to any other identifier, and many more were at least comfortable with it.²⁵ The shift toward Chicanismo and “brown pride” could be seen everywhere in Mexican American communities. It was also visible in barrio murals, with their ever-present Indian motifs and

²³ Mindiola and Martínez, *Chicano-Mexicano Relations*, 10.

²⁴ “Indios,” JAG Papers, Box 44, Folder “Indios.” Also see James Diego Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican-American Culture*, 3rd. ed (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 253; Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 150; “Return to Aztlán: The Chicano Rediscovered His Indian Past,” in Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco A.

Lomeli, *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: Academia/El Norte Publications, 1989).

²⁵ Michael V. Miller, “Chicanos’ and ‘Anti-Chicanos’”: Selected Status Indicators of Ethnic Identity Polarization, Texas A&M, Dept. of Rural Sociology, April 1976, MWCLR Records, Box 12, Folder 55.

colorful Mexican imagery; it was clearly demonstrated in Chicano/a literature, with its defiant tones; and it was obvious even in Chicano fashion, with its “cholo” aesthetic.²⁶

This embrace of their own Mexicanness became increasingly incompatible with a rejection of immigrants in their midst. As immigrants continued to flow into in the barrios of the Southwest (and beyond), they were arriving in a society which, as Lawrence Fuchs observed a few years later, “had been radically altered with respect to diversity.”²⁷ In decades prior, Mexican Americans had often spoken of undocumented immigrants as dangerous “hordes” and as “an invasion.”²⁸ By the mid-1970s, that kind of language was exceedingly rare and had been replaced by notions of cultural revival. Mexican immigrants, in the eyes of a growing number of Chicanos, were not “invading” but “refreshing” their communities.²⁹

Each year, close to half a million undocumented immigrants were caught and deported in the country, but many more returned and remained in the barrios. As they did so, they built friendships and relationships with established Chicanos. It was one thing to decry some abstract invasion, as many Mexican Americans had done before; it was quite another to turn their backs on neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members.

This did not mean that Chicanos stopped being concerned about the economic impact of immigration on their own prospects. Even the radical Raza Unida Party continued

²⁶ Rafaela G. Castro, *Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero, eds., *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993); Charles M. Tatum, *Chicano and Chicana Literature: Otra Voz Del Pueblo* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader, Second Edition*, 2nd ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

²⁷ Lawrence H. Fuchs, “Immigration, Pluralism, and Public Policy: The Challenges of the *Pluribus* to the *Unum*,” Hesburgh Papers, Box 136, Folder 1.

²⁸ See the previous chapters for examples of anti-immigrant language among Mexican-American groups, especially the American GI Forum, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and the United Farm Workers.

²⁹ Alan Riding, “Chicano Groups Turning More to Mother Mexico,” *Progress Bulletin*, February 22, 1973, C4.

to admit that immigration was a problem for Chicanos.³⁰ But as journalist Frank Del Olmo put it in 1975, “While most Chicanos may not be familiar with the history of Mexican immigrants to this country most do know the story of their own families.” These family connections, he wrote, “are what pose such an emotional dilemma for Mexican Americans whenever we must face up to the issue posed by illegal immigration from Mexico and the rest of Latin America.”³¹ If it was true, as Carroll Norquest wrote in 1972, that Mexicans had often been treated like “trash” by “their own blood,” this tendency appeared exceedingly rare in later years.³²

One way in which Chicanos learned to empathize with their undocumented co-ethnics was by being forced to experience first-hand their lived experiences. By the late 1960s when panic about growing numbers of undocumented immigration prompted increased border enforcement and immigration control, Chicanos were routinely stopped, harassed, profiled, and otherwise accosted by immigration officials, both near the border and far from it. Chicanos, many of whom had never stepped foot outside the United States, routinely reported being stopped and harassed by the Border Patrol.³³

As journalist Ruben Salazar wrote in those years, Chicanos began to recognize that they and Mexican immigrants “look alike to the Border Patrol.”³⁴ Dick Reavis, another journalist covering Chicano issues during the 1960s and ‘70s, similarly explained that during this period, “any lawman . . . could apprehend the undocumented” or anyone suspected of

³⁰ Texas Raza Unida Party, “A Political Action Program for the ‘70s,” n.d., RUP Records, Box 1, loose materials.

³¹ Frank del Olmo, “Why Citizen Chicanos Fear Fresh Turmoil,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1975.

³² Carrol Norquest, *Rio Valley Grande Wetbacks: Mexican Migrant Workers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), xiii.

³³ A.I. Perez to John Dryfuss, November 19, 1974, De Baca Files, Box 4, Folder “Immigration, Aliens.”

³⁴ Ruben Salazar, *Ruben Salazar: Border Correspondent*, ed. Mario T. García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 251.

being an unauthorized immigrant based solely on the color of their skin or the language they spoke, and some officials even “made doing so kind of a sport.”³⁵ This had become such a common problem that in 1973, the American Civil Liberties Union, jointly with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), sued the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for allegedly engaging in “indiscriminate and unconstitutional arrests and deportations of Latin appearance, including American citizens and legal residents.”³⁶

Mark Day, a young priest in the 1970s and an early immigrants’ rights activist remembered that before this time, “there was no consciousness and no analysis” of what immigrants meant to Chicanos beyond possible competition for jobs. “Even Mexican Americans called them ‘wetbacks,’” he recounted. As the years passed, and as large numbers of immigrants became part of their communities, however, Chicanos began to see, often through shared experiences of discrimination, that they and the undocumented shared common threats and ultimately a common fate. Of course, this was not preordained; Chicanos could have turned their backs on immigrants, even resented them for bringing further scrutiny and discrimination to their communities. But as the Chicano moment pushed them to look at their own history of “neglect, alienation, and powerlessness,” in the words of Armando Navarro, they recognized that their condition could not be remedied by the old way of doing things, first because intra-ethnic division was wholly incompatible with Chicano ideology, and secondly, because that strategy had proven a failure in the past.³⁷

³⁵ Dick Reavis, interview with author, February 27, 2017, phone.

³⁶ “ACLU Sues Immigration and Naturalization Service,” *Los Desarraigados*, August 1973.

³⁷ Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 21.

Embracing the undocumented was not without its pitfalls. There would be no going back, as the Chicano movement left no room for claiming whiteness and offered no tolerance for accommodation. Some Chicanos also recognized that taking on the cause of the undocumented came with “the burden to take care of them,” according to Jose Ángel Gutiérrez.³⁸ Chicanos had to grapple with the reality that although connected by ethnic, linguistic, and class ties, joining with immigrants represented a political and economic risk.

By the time the movement was at its zenith, however, more and more Chicano activists had ceased to interpret immigration in zero-sum terms. As Gilberto Cardenas, a prominent scholar of immigration and the Mexican American experience, wrote in 1973, many Chicanos recognized that immigration was a “problem” insofar as social needs and capitalism clashed. But Cardenas also noted that Chicanos understood the problems tied to immigration “remain today . . . because public policy was subordinated to economic rationality—a type of rationality that emerges from an economic system that requires the subjugation of labor to capital.”³⁹

No one was clearer in articulating the complexities of the issue than the Mexican American activist and veteran labor organizer Humberto “Bert” Corona. Corona was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1918 to *fronterizo* Mexican parents. A talented athlete, Corona earned a basketball scholarship to the University of Southern California in Los Angeles but quickly grew disillusioned as he learned that his scholarship required work at a pharmaceutical company, where he found mistreatment of workers common. After participating in labor struggles there, he began working in the Longshoremen’s Union in Orange County, where

³⁸ Jose Ángel Gutiérrez, interview with author, May 19, 2015, video call.

³⁹ Gilberto Cardenas, *Mexican Migration* (Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones Sociales), ca. 1974, Cardenas Papers, Box 3, Folder 1.

he helped organize Mexican Americans and Mexican workers together, something that was uncommon then. In 1936, he led a strike of 2,500 workers that halted work of the region's \$20 million orange industry. Soon afterward, Corona left college, focusing his efforts on working with Mexican workers. In 1951, together with brothers Phil and Albert Usquiano, he purposed La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional (Mexican National Brotherhood) to organize workers in San Diego.

In 1968, Corona, together with Soledad "Chole" Alatorre, the Mexican daughter of a Railroad Workers Union organizer, founded the Centro de Acción Social Autonomo (CASA, the Center for Autonomous Social Action). As the name implied, the center was to be a "home" for Mexican immigrants, especially the undocumented. The organization was also devoted, however, to convincing Chicanos to support undocumented immigrants. In a famous pamphlet, CASA implored, "Despierta Chicano, Protégé a Tu Hermano" ("Wake Up Chicano, Protect Your Brethren!).⁴⁰ CASA's guiding principle, one that later activists would take up, was that no human being was "illegal" and that no worker should be excluded from labor and social struggles for his or her legal status. CASA sought, above all, to reinforce the notion that Mexican immigrants and Chicanos were "one people without borders."⁴¹ In 1968, when the organization was founded, "no one gave a shit" about immigrant workers, according to Mark Day, a friend and collaborator of Corona and Alatorre.⁴²

Corona, Alatorre, Day, and other CASA activists and allies saw direct action and self-help as the cornerstones of a just society. In its philosophy, the organization emulated the

⁴⁰ "¡Despierta Chicano!" Cardenas Papers, Box 4.

⁴¹ Dick J. Reavis, *Without Documents* (New York: Condor, 1978), 141.

⁴² Mark Day, interview with author, March 6, 2018, phone.

mutualistas of the late nineteenth century, Mexican self-help societies that helped ensure the survival and common good of Mexican communities through the pooling of resources, through health clinics, and even through co-parenting.⁴³ “From its inception,” a founding document explained, “CASA predicated and founded its existence on mutual self-help and dues-paying membership so that it could be free to represent fully the real life interests of immigrant workers without depending in any way on government, foundations, or other types of subsidies or funding.”⁴⁴ Functioning without paid staff and financed by a modest budget, all coming from membership dues (which ran roughly \$15 per year),⁴⁵ CASA had its limits, but its efforts were essential in bringing large numbers of Chicanos around to supporting immigrants. CASA imagined itself as an institution devoted to transforming a “racist and exploitative” world into a “human and fair” existence for all.⁴⁶ Its lofty and idealistic goals, however, were complemented by more practical efforts through classes on Mexican and American history, English, driving, reading and writing, and the functions and strategies of labor organizing.

Corona’s passion came from a radicalism forged in the Depression-era United States, as he saw Communists and Socialists link the realities of race and class in ways no one else

⁴³ Charles M. Tatum, *Chicano Popular Culture, Second Edition: Que Hable El Pueblo* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 12; Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88; David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 97; David M. Reimers, *Other Immigrants: The Global Origins of the American People* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 95; Eric V. Meeks, *Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 14.

⁴⁴ “What is C.A.S.A.? How Does It Function? How Was It Started?,” ca. 1968, Corona Papers, Box 11, Folder 2.

⁴⁵ Dick Reavis, *Without Documents*, 140.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

had. “I was . . . attracted to socialism,” he recounted in his memoir, “because of my sense that socialism could solve many of the problems created by capitalism.”⁴⁷

Corona was not alone in his belief that socialism could solve the problems of Chicanos and immigrants, and many believed that only socialism could solve the dilemma that Mexican immigration posed for U.S.-born ethnic Mexicans.⁴⁸ Not all Chicanos were socialists, of course, and sometimes the relationship between race, immigration, and socialism proved difficult to navigate. On the one hand, many middle-class Mexican American activists rejected socialism and feared that the movement’s association with it might invoke Soviet sympathies.⁴⁹ On the other hand, some Marxist-Leninists were turned off to the Chicano emphasis on ethnic identity.

Chicano socialists responded by insisting that only radical change could fundamentally transform the conditions of Chicanos in the United States. As the Revolutionary Communist Party stated in its influential document “The Chicano Struggle and the Struggle for Socialism,” “for all working people socialism will surely mean an end to the misery caused by capitalism.”⁵⁰ Other Chicanos responded by suggesting that race was simply “an intensification of class,” as Reavis put it.⁵¹ Or as Miguel Pendás, a vocal defender of immigrants’ rights said, “Wage exploitation is not the only kind of oppression that exists

⁴⁷ Mario T. García and David R. Montgomery, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 96.

⁴⁸ “Profiteers, Gougers, of Our Economy Take Away Jobs—Not Aliens . . . Labor Unions Must Act,” Corona Papers, Box 16, Folder 3.

⁴⁹ Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No!*, 59.

⁵⁰ Revolutionary Communist Party USA, *The Chicano Struggle and the Struggle for Socialism* (Chicago, IL: Revolutionary Union, 1975), 58.

⁵¹ Reavis, interview with author.

under capitalism.” “There is also,” he wrote in 1976, “national oppression of women, as well as oppression against youth, old people, gay people, and others.”⁵²

As Ernesto Chavez has pointed out, Chicanismo and socialism often went hand-in-hand to many young brown radicals “as a result of the social, economic, and political conditions in which they lived.”⁵³ CASA’s mission proved attractive to an increasing number of activists who were swept by the idealism of the organization and its leaders, who were proving that Mexican Americans, from the Southwest to the nation’s capital, were ready to confront poverty and economic and racial injustice in their communities.⁵⁴ As Walter Nicholls and Justus Uitermak have noted, CASA, especially after 1968, was quickly infused with a “rich, motivated, and increasingly university-educated pool of local Chicano volunteers,” which lent the organization increased capacity for outreach and legal campaigns.⁵⁵ By the mid-1970s, CASA was embattled by internal squabbles, but by the time its social influence waned, it had had a major impact on Chicanos’ views of immigration and on the development of other pro-immigrant organizations.⁵⁶

In part due to a revival of reform and social justice thought within the Catholic Church after Vatican II, Chicanos often sought and got the backing of religious figures. One was Rev. Sean O’Malley, an outspoken Catholic priest who was among the first to call for the church to minister to and speak on behalf of the undocumented in the 1970s.⁵⁷ O’Malley

⁵² Miguel Pendás, *Chicano Liberation and Socialism* (Pathfinder Press, 1976), 6.

⁵³ Ernesto Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!” (*My People First!*): *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 4.

⁵⁴ Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 27.

⁵⁵ Nicholls and Uitermark, *Cities and Social Movements*, 92–93.

⁵⁶ “A Call for Action,” Cardenas Papers, n.d., Box 6.

⁵⁷ Marco G. Prouty, *César Chávez, The Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers’ Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 36; Kenneth R. Himes, ed., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and*

implored Chicanos and others to see the undocumented in their communities as people who were ultimately seeking what all human beings seek: a dignified existence. They hurt no one, O'Malley repeatedly told his congregations and his community, and he urged people of faith to see immigrants not as foreign threats, but as people doing valuable work for society.⁵⁸

Similarly and around the same time, Bishop Juan Arzube called for the protection of immigrants, whom he called “a haunted species,” and who deserved, he often told his congregation and the public, sympathy and compassion.⁵⁹ Another priest, Father Allan Figueroa Deck, similarly called for people to “[see] Christ in Mexican immigrants.” Tolerating them was not enough, he wrote in the Catholic newspaper *Southern Cross*, and people of conscience, he argued, should make “serious claims of justice toward them as human persons.” Echoing (and at the same time influencing) radical Chicanos, Deck blamed “international elites and multinational corporations” for the immigration crisis.⁶⁰ The message reached large numbers of people, from everyday Chicanos who helped immigrants hide from authorities or who fed them on their journeys, to teachers and administrators who worked to educate the children of immigrant workers.⁶¹

Immigrants themselves understood their position at the margins. Immigrants without documents lived in a state of what one news reporter deemed “a hard, frightened life,” constantly working and trying to do right by their families while avoiding the

Interpretations (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 573; Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 71; J.S. Boswell, F.P. McHugh, and J. Verstraeten, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: Twilight or Renaissance?* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2000), 25.

⁵⁸ UPI, “Illegal Aliens—America’s Silent Minority,” *The Port Arthur News*, October 30, 1974.

⁵⁹ “Illegal Aliens—Refugees from Hunger,” March 26, 1975, talk at the Embassy Auditorium, Corona Papers, Box 9, Folder 23.

⁶⁰ Allan Figueroa, “Talking Point: Seeing Christ in Mexican Aliens,” *Southern Cross*, February 23, 1978, 10.

⁶¹ Unidentified school counselor to Charles H. Wilson, De Baca Files, Box 4, Folder “Immigration, Aliens.”

“boogeyman” seeking to drive and keep them away from the relative “paradise” of the United States.⁶² Some immigrants, surely speaking out of frustration, said they would welcome a truly closed border.⁶³ Perhaps then, some imagined, their government would begin caring for them and grant them what David Bacon has termed “the right to stay home.”⁶⁴ Some sympathetic Chicanos, too, echoed that notion. Mario Cantú, a controversial figure in Chicano politics, argued that the best way to support the undocumented was to encourage a workers’ revolt in Mexico,⁶⁵ which indeed, as American officials feared, was “ripe for revolution.”⁶⁶

The inequalities between the two neighbors made the outmigration and the tough life it represented necessary, but it certainly was not glamorous.⁶⁷ The United States offered immigrants a much-needed opportunity to earn money for their loved ones back home, but this opportunity was invariably accompanied by tremendous suffering that had gradually become evident to Chicanos. Some immigrants were fortunate and were able to find decent jobs with decent conditions, decent pay, and decent bosses. But others found themselves in such desperate conditions that they tried to get themselves caught so they could be sent home.⁶⁸

Most, however, carried on, knowing that a return home would prove an economic calamity for their loved ones. As one immigrant put it, “To return to my country would

⁶² Stephens Isaacs, “Aliens Struggle to ‘Paradise,’” *The Washington Post*, November 7, 1971.

⁶³ Omar Rios, “A Chronic Mexican Alien Immigration Offender,” *Federal Probation*, September 1970; “What Does It Mean to Be an Illegal Alien?”, Corona Papers, Box 9, Folder 5; Ramón “Tianguis” Perez, interview with author, June 24, 2015, email.

⁶⁴ David Bacon, *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

⁶⁵ Reavis, 144.

⁶⁶ “Hands Across the Border,” *Idaho State Journal*, October 18, 1974.

⁶⁷ Omar Rios, “A Chronic Mexican Alien Immigration Offender,” *Federal Probation*, September 1970.

⁶⁸ Mike Castro, “Chamber Seeks Curb on Illegal Alien Influx,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1974.

mean to practically die—no job, no money, no food, nothing.” Immigrants, human beings that they were, dealt with a bevy of emotions, from homesickness to fear, to hope. As the same immigrant added, “I want to show my family, especially my mother, that I can do something in life and not be a defeated person.”⁶⁹ Despite the difficulties they faced north of the border, the desperation and the possibility of a future with “nothing,” continued to motivate hundreds of thousands of immigrants to migrate north.

Immigrants were not voiceless, however, and their message was a familiar one to Chicanos: “We work hard. We are not begging. We are only asking for justice,” as one immigrant told newspaper reporters.⁷⁰ Although some Chicanos continued to fear what mass migration meant to their own livelihoods and social conditions, the tide was clearly turning.⁷¹ Not just leading figures, but ordinary Chicanos were willing to defend undocumented immigrants and to speak out in their support, not only because they identified with their struggle and had come to absorb them into their communities, but because they increasingly saw the ways in which immigration and the police used the language of “illegality” as cover for blanket racism, and the way they used the threat of raids and deportation sweeps as a form of social control that affected all brown people.⁷²

As Chicano activists promoted acceptance of the immigrant struggle as their own—and immigrant justice as key to racial and economic justice more broadly—they sometimes looked abroad for a better strategic understating of the issue and for models of how to approach it. And they did not have to work hard to connect the global to their experiences

⁶⁹ “What Does It Mean to be An Illegal Alien?” n.d. (ca. 1974), Corona Papers, Box 9, Folder 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Castro, “Chamber Seeks Curb on Illegal Alien Influx.”

⁷² Dan Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2–3.

and those of immigrants in the Southwest. As the Vietnam War was raging, peaking in intensity at the end of the 1960s, Chicano contempt for the war was palpable, as perturbed Chicanos protested the disproportionate burden they and other people of color were asked to shoulder during the war.⁷³ But in another sense, when in 1973, the Nixon administration contemplated building a “McNamara line, an electric fence, on the border,” Chicanos felt the government was bringing the war home.

And yet, Vietnam also convinced many Chicanos that the logic of scarcity—the notion that human beings had to compete for limited resources—was patently false. Whereas in previous decades, Mexican Americans had felt that immigrants posed a threat to their own wages, conditions, and livelihoods because resources were limited, the Vietnam War shattered those assumptions. Not only was the United States spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a war of choice, but it was also transporting, resettling, educating, treating, feeding, and transitioning hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and other refugees from communist countries to the United States, at a staggering cost.⁷⁴

The Cold War and the extraordinary costs the United States was willing to pay to fight and win it showed Chicanos that at issue was not a problem of limited resources, but of how those resources were allocated. At the same time, it allowed them to frame their appeals to the international community in the context of the same international human rights the United States claimed to be protecting around the world. In doing so, activists hoped to

⁷³ Steven Rosales, *Soldados Razos at War: Chicano Politics, Identity, and Masculinity in the U.S. Military from World War II to Vietnam* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 99; Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No!*, 142.

⁷⁴ “Operation New Arrivals, Phase 1: The Buildup,” US. Air Force Systems Command Armament Development and Test Center, Eglin AFB, April 27, 1975, Hesburgh Papers, Box 135, Folder 21; “After Action Report: Operations New Life/New Arrivals, US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program,” (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1975), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a036359.pdf>, accessed June 4, 2018; John F. Thomas, “Cuban Refugee Program,” *Welfare in Review* 1, no. 3 (September 1963): 1–20; William Mitchell, “The Cuban Refugee Program,” *Social Security Bulletin*, March 1962, 3-8; “Cuban Refugees Latest Thing in Wetbacks,” *Tucson Daily Citizen*, December 8, 1964, 8.

pressure the United States, which saw itself as the leader of the “western alliance of democracies against the Soviet Union” into recognizing the rights of all people, including “the human right to migrate.”⁷⁵

As black Americans had done in previous years, many Chicanos hoped to leverage the language of the Cold War to advance their standing at home. As the United State criticized the human rights violations of the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, Americans of color found an opportunity to challenge their own country to live up to the standards it set for its adversaries.⁷⁶

The United Farm Workers (UFW) union had been among the first to go abroad seeking international support for its cause. Even as they denounced its approach to immigrants, Chicanos were inspired by the movement’s global reach. Reavis, the author of *Without Papers*, a remarkable book almost entirely ignored by historians and other scholars, explained the mood of Chicanos at the time and the way in which activists connected the local and the global: “The shift in Chicano attitudes toward immigration was owed to the radicalism of the Chicano movement.” “Chicano radicals,” Reavis said, “identified with radicals elsewhere in the hemisphere and with the Third World generally.”⁷⁷

Pendás, a socialist with a keen eye for the way international relations influenced domestic affairs, insisted that as the world became smaller, and as capitalism became global, so too should citizenship. This may have been an idea too radical even for the most left-wing Chicanos. But with respect to the border that Mexico and the Southwestern United States

⁷⁵ Fuchs, “Immigration, Pluralism, and Public Policy,” 289.

⁷⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Reavis, interview with author.

shared, more and more Chicanos appeared receptive to transnational arguments and frameworks.

If Pendás and others like him were not speaking for a majority of Chicanos when he said that “we should not have fences around this country” and that “we should be seeing ourselves as citizen of the world,”⁷⁸ the growing popularity of such language indicates that at least, the sentiment was growing and becoming a larger part of the Chicano worldview. In their minds and their political imagination, many had come to believe that “there is no border.”⁷⁹ Mentally, psychologically, the distance between Chicanos and immigrants was narrowing, the differences and anxieties swiftly evaporating.

Recognizing that “illegal” immigration was not a uniquely American phenomenon, Chicanos also looked abroad to formulate concrete political positions. In the 1970s, Europe was also dealing with the question of immigration, especially unsanctioned immigration, leading many European leaders and citizens to express concerns similar to those that could be found in Anglo America. As in the United States, many in Europe were openly asking whether they had “lost control” of their borders, as Western European citizens grew increasingly anxious about “irregular” migration, leading to “stronger” and more “xenophobic defensive attitudes” in host nations becoming more prevalent.⁸⁰

Needless to say, the context was different, with the American and European cases quite distinct, particularly in regard to questions of race and ethnicity, those inextricably tied to immigration from poorer, once-colonized nations to wealthy ones. Europe’s recent

⁷⁸ Miguel Pendás, “Chicanos and Steel,” *The Militant*, January 14, 1977.

⁷⁹ Steve Montiel, “The Chicano—He Feels He Has Long Way to Go,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 21, 1973.

⁸⁰ Dennis Broeders and Godfried Engbersen, “The Fight Against Illegal Immigration: Identification Policies and Immigrants’ Counterstrategies,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 12 (August 2007): 1592; Klaus J. Bade, “Legal and Illegal Immigration into Europe: Experiences and Challenges,” *European Review* 12, no. 3 (2004): 345.

history and experience with fascism and genocide certainly made receiving nations there more cautious and diplomatic in their language and tone. The United States, in contrast to European states, was a massive country, shaped by racial laws so harsh that Adolf Hitler's Nazi apparatus had used them as a basis for their Nuremberg Laws.⁸¹ And certainly, the passage of Hart-Celler had complicated things, as a law designed with noble goals, had the unintended effect of essentially creating the phenomenon of mass illegal immigration from Latin America, and particularly Mexico.⁸²

But in more general aspects, the immigration question in Europe was not entirely unlike that of the United States. In numbers alone, the situation was comparable. As one report explained: "It can be estimated that in nine Western European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Holland, Luxembourg, the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden), the total number of immigrants at present exceeds nine million." Large as it was, that number excluded seasonal workers and what were commonly referred to as "frontier workers," those who lived close to the border and who moved back and forth regularly, the equivalent of border-zone "green card commuters" in the United States.⁸³ A number of European labor unions, which historically were more militant than those in the United States, had responded with sophisticated class analysis. Switzerland's Clothing and Leather Workers Union and France's General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), placed blame for the situation

⁸¹ James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁸² Charles B. Keely, "Effects of the Immigration Act of 1965 on Selected Population Characteristics of Immigrants to the United States," *Demography* 8, no. 2 (May 1971): 157–69.

⁸³ "Immigrants: An Integral Part of the Working Class," ca. 1971, Cardenas Papers, Box 7.

squarely on employers and capitalists, calling the causes of migration and its more worrisome consequences a result of “super-exploitation.”⁸⁴ One union document put it thusly:

The process of economic concentration and amalgamation on the national and international levels, and the introduction of scientific and technological progress into industrial production toward the middle of the century, have opened up a period of more rapid development of monopoly capitalism, and international economic integration and the still greater internationalization of capital.⁸⁵

Some component unions had been willing to experiment with organizing “irregular immigrants,” yielding important lessons for those in the United States. “All this process of transnational concentration,” argued the more militant unions, “could not have taken place without a great influx of cheap labour power.” In essence, the unions acknowledged the extent to which the use of cheap immigrant labor had enabled capitalist accumulation of wealth and led to deepened social inequalities. Yet, in critiquing the morally corrupt priorities of capital, these European unionists did not attack workers. Instead, they took the remarkable position that immigrants, as “an integral part of the working class,” should be protected and welcomed into the labor struggle.⁸⁶

In some ways, the radical inclusion that some European unions exhibited was less a testament to their moral fortitude than a pragmatic response to a problem no one could simply wish away. As Chavez had argued before his abrupt reversal, immigrants certainly brought down wages, at least for the poorest, most unskilled workers. Yet, for some leftist unions in Europe, the challenge could be reconciled if seen as a human rights issue.⁸⁷ In one sense, they argued that only an internationalist effort to protect human rights across borders

⁸⁴ Reavis, 158.

⁸⁵ “Immigrants: An Integral Part of the Working Class.”

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ International Conventions on Human Rights, LBJ Papers, Human Rights Files, Box 1, Folder “Human Rights.”

could keep people from migrating. They also believed that in the near term, they would not stop coming.⁸⁸ If treated with dignity and if protected with the rights afforded to citizens, unauthorized immigrants could be essential allies against capitalist exploitation. A number of unions had begun to understand that when they failed to support immigrants, employers actually found it easier to undermine union wages and working conditions.⁸⁹

By the middle of the 1970s, the most vocal Chicanos worked to underscore the way in which immigration, in their minds, was not a struggle between individual citizen and individual immigrant, but a global struggle between rich nations and poor people.⁹⁰ These activists viewed and framed immigrants as “economic refugees.”⁹¹ As they worked to send this message across the United States and the world, Chicanos appealed to transnational bodies like the United Nations, where in 1974, activists presented the Charter of Rights for Immigrant Workers.⁹² They modeled the charter on key United Nations documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (1974).

Corona crafted the Charter with the help of Mark Day, the two having collaborated for some time on the immigration issue.⁹³ The document, which was often referred to as the

⁸⁸ Jorge Agustín Bustamante, “Don Chano’. Autobiografía de Un Emigrante Mexicano,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 33, no. 2 (1971): 333–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3539364>.

⁸⁹ Julie R. Watts, *An Unconventional Brotherhood: Union Support for Liberalized Immigration in Europe* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 15.

⁹⁰ Reies Lopez Tijerina, “Tijerina Presents Another View on Mexican Entrants,” *Albuquerque Journal*, May 23, 1974.

⁹¹ “Economic Refugees,” Cardenas Papers, Box 3, Folder 1.

⁹² Mark Day, “A Charter of Rights for Immigrant Workers,” ca. 1975, Corona Papers, Box 11, Folder 8.

⁹³ Marcos Ronquillo, “Mexican Undocumented: The International Law of Human Rights,” *Migration Today*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1980), Gollobin Papers, Box 2, Folder “Immigrant Workers, 1 of 2.”

“Immigrants’ Bill of Rights,” insisted that immigrants had, among others, the right to be free from deportations, to right to unite with their families, the right to normalize their status, and the right to “all areas of employment,” including job security, equal pay, and access to labor unions.⁹⁴ These were positions so radical that such “rights” were “not even contemplated” before.⁹⁵ As Corona and Day appealed to the United Nations, they also hoped to attract the support of more ordinary Chicanos. As Day remembered, “Bert Corona sent it everywhere. He had thousands of copies printed and just sent it everywhere.” And the message worked, Day said: “It had the effect of making people think, making them think about it as an issue of human rights, as an international issue.”⁹⁶

The focus on human—and not just civil—rights is crucial to understanding why Chicanos were so successful in shifting opinions in favor of the undocumented when they did. Although historians and political scientists have traditionally placed the beginning of modern human rights activism in the 1940s, Samuel Moyn has convincingly argued that it was during the 1970s that broad international support for the concept of human rights really emerged. At the very least, he has demonstrated, the 1970s were the time when human rights activists found success in lobbying for “commitment to a humane international order.”⁹⁷ It was this opening that allowed Chicanos to imagine themselves and immigrants as a single group fighting for a common cause that necessarily transcended borders and the concept of “civil rights.”

⁹⁴ Day, “A Charter of Rights.”

⁹⁵ Nativio Lopez, Eulogy at the Funeral of Bert Corona, January 20, 2001, Los Angeles, CA, Baca Papers, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8260749z/1.pdf>, accessed September 2, 2019.

⁹⁶ Mark Day, interview with author.

⁹⁷ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 83.

In this context, Chicanos sometimes drew comparisons between ethnic Mexicans in the United States and other oppressed people around the world and in history, sometimes even going as far as relating their struggle to that of the European Jews before the Holocaust.⁹⁸ Obviously, such comparisons to people who faced expulsion and genocide were bombastic and disproportionate.

But the allusions nevertheless worked on a rhetorical, emotional level, as the conjuring of ethnic cleansing, only decades removed from the fact, served to remind people how immigration restrictions had indeed prevented many of the victims of fascism from reaching safety in the United States as refugees.⁹⁹ Only three decades removed from the Holocaust, many remembered the tragedy of the MS *St. Louis*, a ship full of Jewish refugees that the United States turned away, or of the deportation of stateless Jews from the country, resulting from unfounded but powerful fears that such people “stole jobs” from American citizens.¹⁰⁰ The strategic use of historical memory resonated with many in the United States, even government officials like a California state worker who, in response to proposals for a “forge-proof” universal identification card aimed at excluding undocumented people from social services, protested, saying, “We need no Stars of David in the United States.”¹⁰¹

But as sympathy for the growing number of Mexican immigrants grew throughout the 1970s, so did nativism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. The huge increase in immigration during the decade prompted Border Patrol leadership and agents on the ground

⁹⁸ “Letters to the Editor,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1973.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah A. Ogilvie and Scott Miller, *Refuge Denied: The St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010); “Department of Justice Sends Refugees Notice of Coming Deportation,” *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, November 22, 1946, 1; “Refugees Here Have Not Taken Americans’ Jobs,” *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, June 19, 1942, 1.

¹⁰¹ “State Health and Welfare Agency Position Paper,” 1977, Corona Papers, Box 12, Folder 11.

to warn that the “wetback situation” had become a “silent invasion,” representing “an affront” to national sovereignty. Such language promptly trickled down in a manner similar to the run-up to Operation Wetback some two decades prior. “We are being overrun by illegal aliens,” Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Commissioner Leonard Chapman told *The Bakersfield Californian* in 1974, so much so that the numbers overwhelmed his officers. That year, in the Southwest region alone, Border Patrol apprehended 686,669 undocumented people, a number that while large, represented only a fraction of the number of undocumented people in the country. In response, area chiefs sent an order down the chain of command to focus on smugglers and major crimes only, owing to insufficient manpower and funding to go after all unauthorized immigrants.¹⁰²

With immigration numbers surging and economic conditions deteriorating, immigration became an issue of tremendous political importance across the country. Concern was certainly to be expected in a decade that ushered in massive economic change, transformation, and restructuring in the United States and the globe. As Jefferson Cowie has demonstrated, this was a period in which the possibilities of worker democracy were being foreclosed, when working-class consciousness and militancy was “dying a slow death of a thousand cuts” and when the destruction of the New Era safety nets had all but been destroyed. And it was a time, as others have pointed out, where despair began to replace hope, where political fracture took the place of collective cohesion, and where militancy at work gave way to acquiescence, as popular democracy yielded to corporate control and made

¹⁰² Associated Press, “Border Patrol Gets Local Reins,” *The Bakersfield Californian*, October 23, 1974.

scapegoating the most vulnerable, rather than resisting the most powerful, the easier choice for a weary class of defeated workers and citizens.¹⁰³

Indeed a nativist panic developed, as daily reports of “illegal aliens” fueled fantasies of invaders creating their own “outlaw” society, and “taking” jobs from American citizens.¹⁰⁴ Even government reports that suggested that “each employed alien [is] occupying a job that would otherwise be available to a U.S. worker” and that undocumented aliens were not paying taxes, claims that reports from the time and since have shown to be misleading at best, and at worst, ideologically motivated and purposefully deceitful.¹⁰⁵ The sensationalist reporting of major news outlets suggested that “the greatest wave of illegal immigration in U.S. history is pouring into the country.”¹⁰⁶ As during Operation Wetback, American commentators questioned the tenacity and the “the entitlement of the illegal today,”¹⁰⁷ while

¹⁰³ Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking, 2016); Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016); Joan C. Williams, *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017); Justin Gest, *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012); Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2016).

¹⁰⁴ Barry Edmonston, Jeffrey S. Passel, and Frank D. Bean, “Perceptions and Estimates of Undocumented Migration to the United States,” in *Undocumented Migration to the United States*, ed. Bean, Edmonston, and Passel (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1990), 15. Paul L. Montgomery, “Illegal Aliens Pose Ever-Deepening Crisis,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Gilberto Cardenas, “Mexican Migration,” ca. 1974, Cardenas Papers, Box 3, Folder 1; Memo, IRS to David McDonald, Lynn May Files, Box 36, Folder “Illegal Aliens”; Memo, J. Dawson Ahalt to Agency Reps, February 25, 1975, Aranda Files, Box 4, Folder “Dr. Marrs’ Files, memoranda 2.”

¹⁰⁶ Roberto Suro, “Views Differ: Menace or Economic Scapegoat?,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 16, 1976.

¹⁰⁷ Carolyn Saylor, “Mexicans See Open Border as Major Hope for Stability,” *The Salina Journal*, November 17, 1978.

portraying the reaction against illegal immigration as “patriotic” and as “a taxpayer revolt.”¹⁰⁸ Some called on the government to clean up the “unholy mess” and others claimed it was whites who were being “exploited” because they were being forced to pay for “hundreds of thousands (perhaps even millions) of illegal aliens” on welfare.¹⁰⁹

These assertions held little truth. Only about five percent of immigrants used hospital services, even fewer used unemployment insurance, virtually none used welfare and only about four percent had children in public schools. Seventy-seven percent of undocumented immigrants paid into Social Security, and seventy-three percent had taxes withheld, even as they were barred from enjoying the benefits of such safety nets.¹¹⁰ Yet, despite evidence to the contrary, the notion that immigrants were “takers” who drained budgets and did nothing to contribute to society, proved a powerful narrative amid economic troubles.

With 6.5 million people on unemployment rolls by mid-decade, government officials insisted that taking quick and decisive action against illegal aliens could free up some one million jobs for Americans. It was implied that those citizens deserved these jobs, even though, by the 1970s, it was exceedingly rare for Anglo workers to do the kinds of jobs undocumented immigrants were doing, seeing them as occupations beneath the dignity of American citizens.¹¹¹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the INS ran pilot programs across

¹⁰⁸ “A Critique of ‘Guidelines for the Development of a Fair and Just U.S. Immigration Policy on Undocumented Aliens,’” August 1, 1977, Corona Papers, Box 12, Folder 7.

¹⁰⁹ J.E. Stanton to De Baca, December 15, 1975, De Baca Files, Box 4, Folder “Illegal Aliens, Correspondence”; Fred Ames to Gerald Ford, Aranda Files, February 23, 1976, Box 3, Folder “Illegal Aliens 2.”

¹¹⁰ Julian Simon, “Don’t Close Our Borders,” *Newsweek*, February 27, 1984.

¹¹¹ Merle L. Wolin, “Dirty Work: Americans Turn Down Jobs Vacated by Ouster of Aliens,” *The Wall Street Journal*, n.d.; John T. Wheeler, “Illegal Aliens Take American Jobs,” *Niagara Falls Gazette*, January 26, 1975AD; Testimony of Laurence Silberman, February 4, 1975, Aranda Files, Box 4, Folder “Illegal Aliens, Dr. Marrs’

the country that encouraged American citizens to take the jobs of ousted “illegals.” At first, the agency had no problem getting Americans to fill the vacancies, which were mostly in agriculture, landscaping, or construction, but most quit within days after finding that the work was a “dead end, demeaning, and underpaid.” One man, identified as “Fred L.” of Santa Ana, California, said he quit after about a week because “my arms got tired. I can’t do this anymore.” Another, Terry Cooper of Houston, related to interviewers that “we were treated like dogs.” “I ain’t never been to prison,” he said, “but it felt like it.” Another more directly (if also more crudely) pointed to the ways in which the work undocumented immigrants did had become socially marked. White men, he said, should not have to climb trees because it’s “too dangerous,” especially while there are Mexicans who are willing to do it “because they’re too stupid.” Workers often complained that these industries already had too many immigrants doing these jobs and they did not want to be around them. As one put it: “a few Spanish” (he was actually speaking of Mexican workers) “ain’t bad, but overdoing it is overdoing it.”¹¹²

While the fear of “too many Spanish” certainly possessed elements of economic anxiety, these testimonies suggest something deeper, a resentment driven by racial stereotypes, was at work, too. Some scholars of the period pointed to a more general “plausible fear,” the fear of that which is unfamiliar and unknown, and thus, vaguely threatening. To immigrants’ rights activists, what made the nativist wave so troubling was that it “was not reduced by the absence of much evidence” to support claims that

Files,”; Statement of Leonard Chapman, February 4, 1975, Aranda Files, Box 4, Folder “Illegal Aliens, Dr. Marrs’ Files.”

¹¹² Merle Linda Wolin, “Dirty Work: Americans Turn Down Jobs Vacated by Ouster of Aliens,” *The Wall Street Journal*, n.d., clipping in Hesburgh Papers, Box 136, Folder 1.

immigrants were any kind of real threat, either to American jobs or to the nation's social fabric.¹¹³ In fact, while reports regularly asserted that immigrants were less likely to be criminals or to make use of public services, public opinion in the 1970s turned decidedly against newcomers, with forty-two percent suggesting immigration levels were too high by 1977 and sixty-six percent wishing to reduce immigration by 1980.¹¹⁴

Unlike during Operation Wetback, however, Chicanos who supported anti-immigrant action and language were exceedingly rare. One reason, no doubt, was that although many of the voices speaking out on immigration framed their concerns in purely economic terms, others were much more racialized, sometimes outwardly racist. When a chili cook-off in West Texas in 1978 sponsored a “fence climbing contest,”¹¹⁵ Chicanos were incensed. Many noticed, too, the starkly different ways in which white immigrants were portrayed in comparison to Mexican immigrants. Ricardo Chivara, for example, cited a 1970 news profile of a “Swedish boy” who “loved the U.S. so much he would do anything to become a citizen.” Chivara noted that the boy, said to have a “cultured accent” was not once referred to as a wetback or even an “illegal,” but as an “entrant.”¹¹⁶ White European immigrants, though certainly fewer in numbers, elicited compassion and wonder, while Mexican immigrants encouraged fear and anxiety. Even in film, Chicanos saw themselves reduced to “beaners,” in the same way as Mexican immigrants.¹¹⁷ And large numbers of

¹¹³ Robert J. Shafer and Donald Mabry, *Neighbors--Mexico and the United States: Wetbacks and Oil* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 120.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War On “Illegals” and the Remaking of the U.S. - Mexico Boundary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 80.

¹¹⁵ “Fence Climbing,” October 27, 1978, JAG Papers, Box 44, Folder “Immigration Conference.”

¹¹⁶ Ricardo Chivara, “Reporting in Two Los Angeles Dailies of Mexican Deportations and Emigrations from the United States” (California State University, Northridge, 1975), 56.

¹¹⁷ “Racist and Sadistic Film,” *Daily World*, January 15, 1975.

Chicanos had felt that more generally, in the United States whiteness was “default” and “natural” and they were seen as foreign, even when born in the United States.¹¹⁸

Then there was the popularity of racist texts like Jean Raspail’s *Camp of the Saints* and William Luther Pierce’s *The Turner Diaries*, whose popularity at the time reflected a growing trend toward mainstream acceptance of nativist and racist ideologies that imagined immigrants and their children wiping out European identity from European and white societies.¹¹⁹ It was no coincidence that white supremacist provocateur Tom Metzger had come to prominence in Californian politics during this period, not despite, but *because* of his openly racist rhetoric, as when he called on the Border Patrol to do more to “protect our people” and “protect our women,” implying that Mexican men were dangerous criminals and sexual predators.¹²⁰ The “popular hysteria” against Mexican immigrants also emboldened the Ku Klux Klan, whose leader David Duke took the “opportunity to flaunt its brand of racism” on the border in October of 1977. Duke and a contingent of his followers arrived in San Diego to patrol the border “until the government does its job.” Although the Klan members claimed to be non-violent, they came armed, carrying guns “to protect themselves.” The “Klan Border Watch” claimed to have netted 44 undocumented immigrants. More important to Duke was the psychological victory he had earned by “putting fear in the hearts of Mexicans,” who Duke claimed, “were taking jobs, creating a crime problem, and disrupting the welfare program” while posing a threat to “our culture.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ “Report: National Conference on Immigration,” Corona Papers, March 3, 1974, Box 11, Folder 12.

¹¹⁹ “Criminals, Sweatshops Exploit Illegal Aliens,” *National Spotlight*, March 1, 1976.

¹²⁰ Nancy Skelton, “State KKK Chief: Striving for Inequality,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1978.

¹²¹ UPI, “Klan’s Border Patrol Success or Ruse,” *Hutchison News*, October 31, 1977.

Increasingly, Chicanos interpreted the nativist backlash against immigrants as a threat to them as well.¹²² Some rallied to speak for them, and when necessary, to act against aggression directed at them. In response to the Klan Watch, some fifty Chicano organizations, flanked by ministers, labor unionists (including Cesar Chavez), and California lieutenant governor Mervyn Dymally, arrived at the border to lead an anti-Klan protest. Undeterred, Duke, who was joined by Louis Beam, Jr., whom some have called the “godfather of the alt-right,” took the opportunity to pose for photo opportunities with area journalists, before telling them the Klan had at their disposal 150 men and three light aircraft that could be used to stop illegal immigrants.¹²³ Duke also claimed the vigilantes would “extend” their patrol to San Antonio, Texas, where by way of provocation or blind coincidence—it was never clear which—Chicanos were holding a conference on immigration. As Chicanos resolved to work as “brother and brother” with undocumented, they learned of the planned Klan action. Quickly, they mobilized to counter it. Members from the Barrio Club of Crystal City and the Texas Brown Berets reached the border on the 29, where they were confronted by Border Patrol officers who claimed they were there to stop both Klan and Chicano “patrols,” though they had apparently done nothing when Klan caravans had arrived there earlier in the week. Though in the end, the Chicanos found no Klan members, they had proven willing, even eager, to confront racists, and to use force if necessary, to defend immigrants in their communities.¹²⁴

¹²² Ronald Bonaparte, “The Rodino Bill: An Example of Prejudice Towards Mexican Immigration to the United States,” *Chicana/o Latina/o Law Review* 2 (1975): 40–50.

¹²³ Laura Smith, “Armed Resistance, Lone Wolves, and Media Messaging: Meet the Godfather of the ‘Alt-Right,’” *Timeline*, November 6, 2017, <https://timeline.com/louis-beam-white-supremacy-history-20d028315d>; Reavis, *Without Documents*, 169.

¹²⁴ Reavis, *Without Documents*, 168–69.

To be sure, the extreme white nationalists and hooded “knights” did not represent the opinions of most white Americans. As the eminent immigration historian John Higham warned, nativism and racism are not, and have not always necessarily been, the same thing.¹²⁵ Neither should we brush aside all criticism of immigration or all anxieties about it as simple racism. Nevertheless, whether expressed as economic fear or cultural resentment, the nativism of the 1970s put Chicanos on edge and forced them to carefully consider their responses to anti-immigrant rhetoric, whether coming from Klan members, ordinary Americans, or government officials increasingly under pressure to take action against unauthorized immigrants.

With workplaces routinely raided, with border agents regularly patrolling Chicano neighborhoods, and with racialized language becoming more popular, Chicanos across the Southwest and the country began to realize that the anti-immigrant sentiment also “impacts us.”¹²⁶ Radical activists also began to find allies in progressive organizations outside the Chicano movement, like the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, which warned that the hysteria surrounding the immigration was a dangerous one to all people of color: “The friendless alien has indeed been selected as the safest subject of a first experiment,” they warned, “but the citizen will soon follow.”¹²⁷ The brown citizen, in particular, had reason to believe this was already becoming true, and that it was not undocumented immigrants who were a threat to them, but that it was “*their* culture was

¹²⁵ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 3.

¹²⁶ “La Frontera: America’s Dilemma,” *La Prensa*, June 20, 1986, Baca Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

¹²⁷ “The Anti-Alien Hoax and Livelihood and Rights of Citizens,” March 1, 1975, Corona Papers, Box 9, Folder 5.

being altered or threatened by Anglos, and required defense,” as chroniclers of the Chicano movement put it.¹²⁸

The combination of increased contact in a moment of militant Chicano ethnic and class consciousness, deepening conventions and conversations about global human rights, and the emergence of a troubling nativist backlash, led Chicano activists to mobilize and to engender a growing attitude of acceptance and comradery toward immigrants. They became convinced that indeed, as CASA leaders had argued, “unjust immigration laws” and racist rhetoric “divides us.”¹²⁹ Instead of looking to the undocumented for an enemy, Chicanos increasingly chose to see “poverty, disease, and ignorance” as the real enemies of their community, and to believe that only a political platform that viewed immigration as the result of imperialist and capitalist forces, could properly improve their lot.¹³⁰ Chicano immigration conferences in 1974 and 1975, in San Antonio and Salt Lake City respectively, signaled that a united front in support of immigrants, a remarkable reversal, considering many of the same groups that had once demanded the deportation of undocumented immigrants, namely LULAC and the GI Forum, were now leading the fight for their rights. Activists across the country had come to fight for immigrants, sometimes at great personal cost, and it was not uncommon to hear Chicanos talk about immigrants not as competitors or even victims, but “as people who fought back.”¹³¹

Even with labor unions, pro-immigrant Chicanos were having success. As a whole, the George Meany-led AFL-CIO, remained hawkish on immigration issues, still unwilling to

¹²⁸ Robert J. Shafer and Donald Mabry, *Neighbors*, 120; “An Open Letter,” Cardenas Papers, Box 4, February 5, 1975. “Aliens,” ACPFB Records, Box 1, Folder “1970-1980.”

¹²⁹ CASA pamphlet, ca. 1976, Corona Papers, Box 16, Folder 4.

¹³⁰ David Salner, “Camejo Hits Racist Deportation Campaign,” *The Militant*, November 21, 1975.

¹³¹ Ernesto Portillo, “Wrong Credit for Sanctuary,” *Arizona Daily Star*, November 1, 2009.

take on a pro-immigrant position.¹³² Yet, there were signs that its position was ripe for change. In 1980, the 14-million-member union for the first time voted on whether to shift its position and embrace the undocumented.¹³³ It did not change its position at that point, but as the previous chapter showed, the United Farm Workers had reversed its stance and over the years came to serve as a leading advocate for immigrants' rights. Others, like The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), too, had come to embrace the undocumented.¹³⁴ Unions which just years prior had worked to curb unsanctioned migration now spoke "in defense of the undocumented" and of the need to "[organize] all workers—without consideration to race, religion, sex, national origin, or resident status."¹³⁵

Despite the success of pro-immigrant Chicanos, movement leaders understood that there was much work yet to do, especially in convincing those outside the Chicano community that immigrants' rights were human rights worthy of protection, and especially in formulating, shaping, and enacting favorable immigration policy, a topic the following two chapters tackle in depth.

Still, the work and activism of people like Bert Corona, Miguel Pendás, and Mark Day and of organizations like CASA, had had a remarkable impact. Where Mexican Americans once felt immigrants, particularly the undocumented, contributed only to the "barrioization" of their communities and represented threats to their advancement, many of the most respected and vocal Chicanos now saw an opportunity, even openly acknowledged

¹³² James Strong, "Meany Blasts 'Reverse Bias' on Jobs," *Chicago Tribune*, August 31, 1975.

¹³³ Roger Gillott, "Unions Try to Organize Illegal Aliens," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, February 17, 1980, 11.

¹³⁴ "Central Committee Recommendations," MWCLR Papers, Box 51, Folder 13.

¹³⁵ Jay Mazur, "Permanent Visas and Human Rights for Undocumented Immigrants," ILGWU Local 23-25, n.d., Corona Papers, Box 14, Folder 6.

that “migration is in our best interest,” as it created a larger political block in the long run. Where advocates of immigrant rights once found themselves alone, “a unified position” was apparently developing. And where a peculiar nativism was once a defining feature of their leadership, many Chicanos were now openly suggesting that “we cannot stop until full amnesty is realized.”¹³⁶

The debate for a growing number of Chicanos in the late 1970s was less about whether to support the undocumented but about how to do it effectively. The problem was no longer undocumented immigrants but figuring out where they fit in the struggle for brown liberation. The question was no longer whether borders and fences should be electric or manned, but how to tear them down, and how to truly forge a community—and a world—“without borders.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Telegram, Gilbert Rodriguez, Chairman of the CA GI Forum to Herman Baca, February 1, 1979, Baca Papers, Box 18, Folder 11.

¹³⁷ Resolution passed at the National Chicano Immigration Conference, May 24, 1980, Baca Papers, Box 18, Folder 11.

4. “Another Civil Rights Struggle”: Immigration Policy, Compromise, and the Politics of Failure

While visiting Mexico City in the spring of 1978, Raúl Yzaguirre, then the National Director of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), told reporters from both sides of the border what most of them already suspected: “The most potentially explosive issue in the news today is that of the undocumented alien.”¹ How explosive? In a book about the subject, two prominent historians and writers covering the U.S.-Mexico border, Robert Schafer and Donald Mabry, began their examination of the diplomatic consequences of immigration by imagining “a bad scenario,” in which troubles along the border snowballed into an all-out war between Mexico and the United States.² Certainly, few believed the worst-case scenario was on the horizon. But just as clearly, tensions were high and escalating.

From Jimmy Carter’s first days in the White House, immigration was a top priority for his administration. “No issue,” Carter’s labor secretary, Ray Marshall, told reporters, “with the possible exception of energy, has been studied as long and as intensely as immigration.”³ Building on the president’s campaign promises to be both tough and fair, the administration sought, from the beginning, to craft a message that appealed to both those who feared the nation had lost control of its borders and to those who thought the deepening concern merely revealed a xenophobic, nativist upsurge. The resulting ambiguity left the various cabinet officers to sell their respective, sometimes contradictory messages. On the one hand, Attorney General Griffin Bell stressed that immigration policy had to

¹ “Seminars on Undocumented Aliens Held in Mexico City,” *El Renacimiento*, February 27, 1978.

² Robert J. Schafer and Donald Mabry, *Neighbors--Mexico and the United States: Wetbacks and Oil* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981).

³ EIR News Service, “Carter Administration to Unveil New Immigration Policy: Militarize the U.S.-Mexico Border,” 4, no. 18, May 3, 1977, 1.

focus on “making the border more secure.”⁴ On the other, Leonel J. Castillo, Carter’s head of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), had the more difficult task of working to secure the border while demonstrating “concern for [the] human rights of illegal aliens.”⁵ As the first Hispanic American to hold that post, Castillo often admitted his frustrations with the juggling. He did not shy away from expressing his conflicting emotions, more than once admitting that he “felt like a [expletive].”⁶

The notion of immigration “reform” was far from new. Both Nixon and Ford had flirted with overhauling the nation’s framework for newcomers. In the early 1970s, Nixon had attempted to formulate a policy that addressed the growing concern among many Americans that too many immigrants were crossing the southern border illegally. The proposal immediately drew the ire of pro-immigrant groups, like those led by Bert Corona and his protégé, Herman Baca, who called the President’s proposal “racist and unfair.”⁷ The Watergate scandal and Nixon’s eventual impeachment and resignation for a time took immigration off the table and off the minds of ordinary voters and lawmakers.⁸ His successor Gerald Ford sought to revive the discussion; in late 1974, Ford asked his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to hold meetings with President Luis Echeverria of Mexico to discuss possible solutions to the problem.⁹ Under pressure to clean up what many around

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Illegal Aliens: They’re Here to Stay,” *Heraldsburgh Tribune*, December 14, 1978, 13.

⁷ “National Coalition,” Cardenas Papers, Box 6.

⁸ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 129.

⁹ “Ford, Kissinger, Mexican President Echeverria,” National Archives (1552833), digital document (see identifier number).

him were calling “an unholy mess,” Ford took seriously the need for immigration reform.¹⁰ But although firmly committed to studying the issue to find a reasonable solution, Ford did not prioritize immigration enough that Congress felt compelled to craft major legislation on the matter during his time in the White House. Ford simply outlasted the issue, leaving it, in turn, to his successor.

In this vacuum, two unlikely partners began the real push for immigration reform. The first was Leonard Chapman, the head of the Immigration Service under both Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. The other was Peter Rodino, a liberal member of Congress from New Jersey. Before the 1970s, these two were hardly household names—and had they lacked ambition, they likely would have remained largely unknown. How much they truly cared about immigration as a matter of national concern is debatable, though every indication suggests that prior to the 1970s, they saw the issue as mostly a regional problem and as a distraction from the larger, more pressing political debates of the day: the Vietnam War, black civil rights, women’s rights, and the War on Drugs. But being ambitious, they also saw in immigration an opportunity to advance their careers. In undocumented immigration, they had found their issue. As Dick Reavis wrote in *Without Documents*, a little-cited but illuminating study: “Immigration was seen as an essentially regional problem concerning only Southwesterners. The potential usefulness of *sin papeles* [those without papers] as scapegoats for aggravated social ills was unknown at the time. In order to make it into a public and national issue, politicians had to wage a public campaign.”¹¹

Chapman and Rodino assumed the role of policy entrepreneurs. Working together in their respective roles—Chapman as the Commissioner of the Immigration Service and

¹⁰ Fred Ames to Gerald Ford, February 23, 1976, Aranda Files, Box 3, Folder “Illegal Aliens 2.”

¹¹ Dick J. Reavis, *Without Documents* (New York: Condor, 1978), 89–90.

Rodino as the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee—they campaigned to convince the American people and their representatives in Washington that “an alien invasion” was underway.¹² Though previously minor players no one would have predicted would shape policy, the two men became allies. Although they represented different parties and ideologies and came from vastly different backgrounds—Chapman was a retired U.S. Marine general, while Rodino was a cold war liberal—the two were equally likable, according to more than a few of their contemporaries. They were also both known to have a flair for the dramatic.¹³

On January 26, 1972, William McCulloch, a Republican member of Congress, introduced the first Nixon immigration bill, H.R. 2328. Its primary goal was to punish employers who hired undocumented immigrants, something legislators had tried to achieve since 1952, but unsuccessfully, thanks to the so-called Texas Proviso, which exempted growers and farmers from being prosecuted for “harboring” undocumented immigrants in their employ.¹⁴ The bill failed to reach the floor, but Rodino thought he could revive it by giving it Democratic sponsorship and lending it his name. “Prior to the introduction of the McCulloch bill,” wrote Reavis at the time, “Peter Rodino’s interest in undocumented immigration was less than enthusiastic.”¹⁵ But from that point on, Rodino’s name became synonymous with immigration reform as he sought to “cover the void which now exists in the law.”¹⁶ The reintroduced bill immediately gained attention as it garnered significant support from both sides of the legislative aisle. Still, immigration reform remained on

¹² Ibid., 90.

¹³ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 66.

¹⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁶ Peter Rodino Press Release, Aranda Files, January 14, 1975, Box 4, Folder “Dr. Marrs’ Files, Press.”

Congress's back-burner. It likely would have remained there were it not for a growing panic about a perceived foreign invasion.

This is where General Chapman came in. A decorated veteran of the Korean War, Chapman was exactly the type of man the public listened to, trusted, and in many ways, venerated. He represented that intangible quality that red-blooded Americans appreciated, the kind of hyper masculinity that made Theodore Roosevelt a national icon, and the military demeanor that made many Americans confident in their nation's superiority. On immigration, Chapman offered a perspective that, as Reavis and other critics at the time noted, was quite simply "racist."¹⁷ Chapman spoke of the undocumented immigration in the 1970 as "different" in kind to previous waves. In earlier generations, he asserted, immigrants migrated to become American, indeed to become "good Americans." No longer, he warned. Immigrants in the 1970s were "clinging firmly to their own backgrounds, thinking less of the interests of the United States and more of the interests of the nation they left behind." He warned Americans that the issue was not just pressing, but outright dangerous: Against "a growing, silent invasion of illegal aliens . . . action must be swift, for there is no time to lose."¹⁸ His phrase—"illegal aliens"—would stick.

Strikingly similar in tone to Joseph Swing's characterization of immigration in the 1950s, when he too, proclaimed the need for deportation and tough border control as a matter of both national security and cultural survival, Chapman sounded alarms that not only reached the halls of Congress but the hearts and minds of ordinary Americans.¹⁹

Chapman, in fact, preferred speaking directly to the American people, over the heads of

¹⁷ Ibid., 100.

¹⁸ Peter Baird and Ed McCaughan, *Beyond the Border: Mexico and the U.S. Today* (New York: NACLA, 1979), 156.

¹⁹ Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

elected officials. Although he often testified to Congress about the issue, he just as regularly outlined his case against immigration in the pages of publications with large circulation numbers, including national newspapers and household magazines like *Reader's Digest*. Testifying before Congress irritated him, for he could be (and regularly was) challenged. But when doing interviews with, and writing pieces for, popular publications like the *Digest*, there was little holding him back, so he could frame the issue as he wished. At the same time, sensationalistic accounts such as his helped move magazines. Indeed, this appeal to readers, enabled by profit-minded editors, proved far more effective in helping sell the idea that immigration needed to be halted than did appealing to the government for which he worked.²⁰

Pro-immigrants' rights activists, among them Chicanos like Corona and Baca, tried to counter his viral narrative almost immediately. But their reach was far smaller, and they could hardly stop the wave of nativism that crested in this era. These activists had had tremendous success convincing Chicanos that anti-immigrant hysteria was harmful to them too. But at the same time, owing to rising undocumented immigration and its packaging by political craftsmen such as Chapman and Rodino, the dividing lines between ethnic Mexicans and white Americans were becoming sharper. Chapman's harsh words about immigration, in fact, incited others to go even further. One syndicated columnist, Paul Harvey, epitomized the increasingly disturbing language used to discuss unauthorized immigration. Over the years, Harvey cautioned with mounting urgency that immigrants were a threat to American society, and not only because some engaged in the "ritual slaughter of animals." Of more concern to him, they might one day demand "welfare, unemployment

²⁰ Rodney Benson, *Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 73.

pay, housing subsidies, food stamps, free education. AND IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.” The capital lettering, in the original, emphasized the point. Harvey stressed the horror of immigrants retaining Spanish, pointing out that even the Mexican American intellectual Richard Rodriguez opposed bilingual education.²¹

By the time Carter unveiled his immigration proposal, the issue was no longer his to frame, or even to attempt to shape. Carter had to work with the picture Chapman and Rodino had painted, with inflated numbers and equally inflated prejudices. At various times, Chapman had claimed there were as few as two million undocumented immigrants in the country and as many as fifteen million, though when pressed to produce sources for his numbers, he was forced to admit that his numbers were mere “guesses.”²² Brilliantly, rather than admitting fault, Chapman turned the table on critics, saying that his inability to pinpoint numbers was itself proof that the nation had lost control of the immigrants coming, insisting that “if we could count them, we could catch them.” And the move worked. In 1975, Congress appropriated \$2 million to study the problem. An initial report, riddled with methodological problems, but useful to restrictionists nonetheless, found that eight million undocumented immigrants resided in the United States, five million of them from Mexico.²³

The numbers could be frightening enough, but Chapman had another trick up his sleeve. He worked hard to convince Americans that immigrants were not simply working in agriculture or in low-wage jobs no citizens wanted. He regularly gave interviews on national platforms in which he claimed undocumented immigrants were working as well-paid plumbers, electricians, painters, salesmen, welders—even as computer technicians and

²¹ Paul Harvey, “Should U.S. Bend to Immigrants ‘Rights?’,” *Del Rio News Herald*, August 29, 1982, 20.

²² Leonard Chapman to Vincent Barabba, Lynn May Files, Box 36, Folder “Illegal Aliens”; Reavis, *Without Documents*, 103.

²³ *Ibid.*, 103.

chemists. “The influence of illegal aliens touches nearly every element of our society and economy,” he warned.²⁴ Other government officials backed his assessment. J. Dawson Ahalt, chief economist for the United States Department of Agriculture, suggested that quite simply, “each employed alien is occupying a job that would otherwise be available to a U.S. worker.” If in fact, there are jobs that some Americans refused to take, Ahalt said, it was because of the meager wages immigrants accepted.²⁵ With unemployment high in the nation’s worst recession since the Great Depression, the claim stung.

With such assessments marking and sparking growing popular anxiety at a time of high unemployment and economic crisis and uncertainty, it was not surprising that many in the Carter administration and in Congress seemed convinced that the country had indeed “lost control” of its southern border.²⁶ What made the matter so complicated was its multifaceted nature and the various interests that surrounded it. Certainly, many advocated taking a hard line and closing the entire border (working on the dubious assumption that such a thing was in fact possible). Among the most hawkish were members of Congress who expressed disdain at the “tradition of maintaining the border without armed troops,” and who wished to see a sizable contingent of soldiers stationed between the U.S. and its southern neighbor.²⁷

²⁴ Statement of Leonard F. Chapman, Jr., before the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law, February 4, 1975, Aranda Files, Box 4, Folder “Illegal Aliens, Dr. Marrs Files, Background Information 1.”

²⁵ Memo, J. Dawson Ahalt to Agency Representatives, “Domestic Council Committee on Illegal Aliens,” February 25, 1975, Aranda Files, Box 4, Folder “Illegal Aliens, Dr. Marrs’ Files, Memoranda (2).”

²⁶ James Sterra, “Flood of ‘Wetbacks’ Across Border Out of Control,” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, August 2, 1973, H3.

²⁷ David A. Andelman, “US Implanting an Electronic ‘Fence’ to Shut Mexican Border to Smuggling,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 1973, n.p.

For Carter and Congress, immigration reform was not just a domestic question, but a matter of diplomatic concern. Since the early 1970s, anti-immigrant policymakers in the United States had aspired to “secure” the southern border by strengthening the physical barriers that composed it and by militarizing the “line.” In 1973, for example, a few congressmen suggested installing along the border an electric fence and supplementing it with a substantial military presence, something modeled on the so-called McNamara Line previously used in Vietnam.²⁸

Historians have often underestimated the degree to which the Mexican government and American desires for amicable relations have influenced U.S. foreign and domestic policy, often choosing to see Mexico as subservient, irrelevant, or weak. Certainly, Mexico has historically been on the receiving end of American bullying, from the Mexican-American War to the formulation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. But particularly in this Cold War era, with tensions between the U.S. and Cuba and a radicalizing Latin America high, alienating Mexico was a real danger. During this period, the complexities of this relationship were evident, as were the limited but consequential ways in which Mexican politics served to complicate American politics. How Mexican president José López Portillo, who had entered office on December 1, 1976, would react U.S. troops along the border, was one question hanging over Carter and his policy advisers. More menacing still was the question of how any form of immigration restriction would affect Mexico’s internal politics and its fragile political economy.

²⁸ Ibid.

Some outliers, like agronomist William Paddock, advocated “sealing the border and watching them scream.”²⁹ Horrifying though this sounds, Paddock was not entirely unsympathetic to the Mexican people. He had, in fact, long worked on sustainability issues in Central America. In effect, Paddock advocated letting Mexico sort out its internal problems and forcing it to confront issues of inequality and corruption that were assuaged by migration to the United States. He wanted to force recognition that remittances, rather than domestic production, had become the accepted approach to “[offsetting] unfavorable trade balances with the U.S.”³⁰

Officially, Mexico maintained that immigration was “primarily an internal affair of the United States.”³¹ This was, of course, a line no one believed. Mexican officials were content to look the other way as long as the situation benefitted them. Because of Mexico’s internal problems, out-migration served an important purpose: it was a major social and economic escape valve. It literally pushed the country’s problem out of sight and out of mind. As long as Mexicans did not stay in Mexico, its government did not have to worry about either alleviating their circumstances or fearing their potential reactions to them. Some Carter officials hoped the situation would change in the long term, optimistic that Mexico would figure out how to take care of its own people. Indeed, many inside the administration noted that one promising development was the “recent discoveries” of “oil and gas reserves

²⁹ EIR News Service, “Carter Administration to Unveil New Immigration Policy: Militarize U.S.-Mexico Border,” May 3, 1977.

³⁰ Wayne A. Cornelius, “Illegal Mexican Migration to the United States: Recent Research Findings, Policy Implications and Research Priorities,” Migration and Development Study Group (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, May 1977), 16.

³¹ S. 2252, Alien Adjustment and Employment Act of 1977: Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-fifth Congress, second session, on S. 2252, Parts 1-2, Government Printing Office, 185.

rivaling those of important Middle East producers such as Iran and Kuwait.”³² That was no small thing so soon after the OPEC crisis. In the meantime, however, the Carter administration admitted that high levels of immigration would continue, and the problem would have to be tackled by the United States alone.³³

Mexican oil mattered to the immigration debate for at least two reasons. First, and quite simply, the United States needed and wanted Mexican oil, and it wanted it as cheaply as possible, especially in the wake of the oil crisis that had led to the “terrible inconvenience” of long lines at the pump, and worse, to increasing misgivings about the United States’ reliance on oil from the Middle East.³⁴ Getting a deal on oil from its southern neighbor, though, required sensitive and delicate maneuverings on immigration, which again, everyone involved understood as a tremendous escape valve for Mexico. Though data were always scarce, most analyses of migratory patterns agreed that Mexican migrants to the United States probably were not making good wages compared even to the American minimum wage. But even these paltry wages kept their families afloat back home. Remittances from the United States to Mexico by the 1970s were believed to reach upwards of \$200 million, double the amount of 1950.³⁵ And both the American and Mexican governments understood that mass deportation—or for that matter, attempts to seal the border—could well cause “massive social disorder and an economic collapse” in Mexico, which, in turn, “would affect the United States.”³⁶

³² Ibid., 186.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2016), 2016; AP, “Mexico Reportedly to Help Oil Crisis,” *Las Vegas Optic*, February 3, 1977, 10.

³⁵ Shafer and Mabry, *Neighbors--Mexico and the United States: Wetbacks and Oil*, 104.

³⁶ Ibid.

Like Carter's Democratic supporters, Republican Senator Harrison Schmitt of New Mexico was hopeful that the long-term prospects for Mexican economic recovery were good. The eight million "illegals" in the United States, five million of whom were Mexican, he suggested, came to "temporarily increase their income" and to escape crippling poverty. If Mexico could make wise use of "its huge reserves of petroleum, natural gas, and other resources" to develop its own economy, he reasoned, the unauthorized migrants would eventually stop coming.³⁷ In the short term, however, he, too, believed something had to be done on the American side of the border. While agreeing in principle with the Carter Plan's major premise that the border had to come under better control, Schmitt worried that the amnesty provision in the Carter plan would further condone and encourage "breaking the immigration laws of the United States." Schmitt was also concerned about Mexican American citizens. He feared the employer sanctions provision would "lead to employment discrimination against Americans whom some employers may suspect to be undocumented," a concern many Chicano leaders had voiced.³⁸ Stating what was becoming increasingly obvious, Schmitt pointed out the conundrum. He warned that something had to be done about immigration, but that "any serious crackdown on illegal immigrants would have disastrous consequences in Mexico."³⁹ Amid an oil crisis and ongoing concerns about Soviet influence in Central America, good relations with Mexico were of utmost importance to policymakers north of the Rio Grande.

If those concerned for the human and civil rights of the newcomers and immigration restrictionists agreed on something, it was that the problem was bilateral—that in fact, what

³⁷ "Testimony of Senator Harrison Schmitt before the Judiciary Committee," 1978, Baca Papers, Box 16, Folder 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

presented in Congress as a domestic problem began in the interior of Mexico. During the late 1970s, the country was, as one publication expressed it, “on the brink of disaster.”⁴⁰ With a massive population boom decades in the making, inflation at unprecedented levels, and consistently high unemployment, Mexico seemed to some observers “ripe for revolution.”⁴¹ There were, the keenest observers explained, two Mexicos. One Mexico, as a *Los Angeles Times* report put it, was “a land of boundless opportunity,” with an economy that in the postwar period had earned the moniker of “the Mexican Miracle.”⁴² It was a country where a small but vibrant middle class was thriving and where “progress” could be seen in the chic new cars that cruised on newly-paved roads throughout middle- and higher-class neighborhoods in the country’s sprawling cities.

But the other Mexico was substantially less miraculous. It was a country where 100,000 children died of malnutrition each year, as the economic boom had served only the richest Mexicans. Tycoons, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, lived luxuriously in a city full of squatters and beggars, resulting in “standoff that works.”⁴³ It “worked,” however, only because Mexicans living in the worst conditions left the country by the millions. *Sal si puedes*—“get out if you can”—had become an unofficial national motto. And millions did just that every year in an attempt to escape, as one immigrant put it, “the very heavy, very sad poverty” they and their families experienced every day.⁴⁴ As another immigrant remembered, people left because “life there was full of suffering. We went to bed hungry.

⁴⁰ “Mexico: Crisis of Poverty/Crisis of Wealth,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1979, 10.

⁴¹ “Hands Across the Border,” *Idaho State Journal*, October 18, 1974, A1.

⁴² “Mexico: A Crisis of Poverty.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Alfonso Torres, interview with author, Arroyo Grande, CA, July 14, 2014.

We woke up hungry.”⁴⁵ Another told the same story: “We lived in a great deal of poverty. We were limited in everything.” “Sometimes,” remembered Eliseo Murillo as countless others did, “We didn’t even have enough of anything. Not even enough tortillas to eat.”⁴⁶ Life in Mexico, Alfonso Torres said, “was very sad, very heavy. There was so much poverty.”⁴⁷

To be sure, it was not always the poorest of the poor who left Mexico, but those who had some reason to hope. These testimonies convey personal perception and feeling not to be taken literally, but they nevertheless meaningful and telling. When migrants referred to poverty and not even having enough tortillas, a staple, they rarely meant literal starvation. Rather, they spoke to a realization that they and their children would have no future if they stayed there. “Hunger” and a desire to get ahead were routinely stunted, as an American diplomatic report noted, by the power of “the entrenched establishment” that kept “the haves and the have nots in Mexican society” in their respective places.⁴⁸ Despite the occasional “wave of hope,” Mexicans were well aware that their government’s leaders were deeply corrupt and their nation nothing short of a kleptocracy.⁴⁹

One needed to look no further than López Portillo, who after winning a dubious election, as every president since the Mexican Revolution had done, promised in 1975 to use oil money to “increase public spending.”⁵⁰ Nearly a decade later in 1984, however, American observers noted that instead of public investment, there was “high unemployment and

⁴⁵ Rito García, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 2, 2014.

⁴⁶ Eliseo Murillo, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 15, 2014.

⁴⁷ Alfonso Torres, interview with author.

⁴⁸ “Why Lopez Portillo?” U.S. Embassy in Mexico, cable, NSA, September 30, 1975, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB115/index.htm>, accessed March 2, 2017.

⁴⁹ Enrique Krauze, “Mexico’s Dubious Reforms,” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2014, n.p.

⁵⁰ “The Outlook for Mexico,” Central Intelligence Agency Secret National Intelligence Estimate, April 25, 1984, NSA, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB115/index.htm>, accessed April 2, 2019.

underemployment, double- or triple-digit inflation, widespread business failures, and a crippling shortage of capital. ” What Portillo actually implemented was “harsh austerity.”⁵¹ Oil money barely helped pay for Mexico’s \$20 billion foreign debt (as of 1975, up from \$3.6 billion in 1970).⁵²

All of these factors combined to continue to squeeze Mexico’s lower classes and encourage outmigration. The economic situation in Mexico—and the collective realization that nothing better was on the horizon for a country living under a “soft dictatorship”—made American dollars all the more valuable.⁵³ If “progress” had come to Mexico, few could taste its fruits. “In Mexico,” an in-depth *Los Angeles Times* report noted, “progress is a terrible discriminator that works for a fifth of the country, flirts with perhaps another fifth, and thumbs its nose at the rest.”⁵⁴ Millions from that disregarded “rest” of Mexico could be found north of the country’s border, trying as best they could to survive, to send back a few dollars to their families, and to provide a less miserable future to their children.

American policymakers understood the severity of the situation and for this reason kept tabs on Mexico’s politics and economy. Central to the stability that concerned them was the much-needed pressure release that immigration provided. Carter’s plan, then, had to strike a delicate balance. It had to satisfy a wide range of interests often at odds with one another: business groups, who wanted cheap, deportable, and unregulated labor; American workers and their unions, who worried that immigration was causing unemployment,

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵² Sylvia H. Chant, *Women and Survival in Mexican Cities: Perspectives on Gender, Labour Markets and Low Income Households* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 37.

⁵³ “The Mexican Float: Many Unanswered Questions” National Security Council memorandum, September 14, 1976; Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2014).

⁵⁴ Laurie Becklund, “Get Out If You Can,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1979, 31.

displacing native workers, and depressing wages; cultural nationalists who feared the social fabric was being torn apart; and Chicanos, who worried about discrimination and the continued exploitation of ethnic Mexicans in the United States, whether citizen, legal, or undocumented.

Carter's team understood that sealing the border was not an option, diplomatically or practically. So instead, the President submitted to Congress what the administration considered a more realistic proposal on August 4, 1977. The Carter immigration package sought to make the "unlawful hiring of undocumented aliens" a civil penalty punishable by up to \$1,000 per immigrant found to be hired illegally. It also sought to more strictly enforce the Fair Labor Standards Act, and to offer "adjustment of status" to immigrants who had arrived and lived continuously in the United States prior to 1970. The enforcement portion sought to "substantially increase resources" at the southern border, and "promote continued cooperation" with Mexico to stabilize and grow its economy. Carter acknowledged that unsanctioned immigration represented "an enormous problem" that could not be solved easily but he reiterated his commitment "to aggressive and comprehensive steps toward resolving it."⁵⁵

Carter certainly appreciated the complexity of immigration reform, but he underestimated the force with which competing interests would pull the immigration debate in opposing directions. Restrictionists were driven by a burgeoning cultural anxiety, which although based on "overly simplistic" assumptions, as one policy analyst explained, felt very

⁵⁵ Jimmy Carter, "Undocumented Aliens, Message to Congress," August 4, 1977, The American Presidency Project, Santa Barbara, CA: University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws?pid=7923>, accessed November 2, 2017.

real to them.⁵⁶ Labor unions and members had economic concerns. They argued that the sanctions against employers were laughably weak and would prove ineffectual. With few exceptions, Anglo unionists also continued to believe that undocumented immigrants could not be organized, despite growing evidence to the contrary.

Growers and employers, for their part, claimed that any attempt to punish them was detrimental to their economic survival. They warned, too, that the costs of such legislation would be swiftly felt by consumers. Particularly since the bracero program began in 1942, American employers had relied on cheap Mexican labor; they continuously argued that it was necessary to the survival of their industries. But the situation was rather more complex. Low prices and expected profit margins may have suffered, and international competition was stiffening in some industries in the 1970s. Yet, Americans had always done difficult work, even the very same that entire industries had come to rely on Mexicans to do, though employers insisted that Americans would not take up the work. And there was ample evidence that it had become difficult to get Americans to do jobs dominated by immigrant labor.⁵⁷

Still, Ray Marshall was probably right that businesses' assertion that "they can get only undocumented workers" to do certain jobs was "a self-fulfilling prophecy" employers had crafted for their own benefit. They had always wished to control the labor process and segment labor markets.⁵⁸ Often, they "structured jobs that are so demeaning that only the

⁵⁶ Jose A. Bracamonte, "Carter Immigration Bill: A Critical Analysis," *Journal of Legislation* 5, no. 107 (January 1, 1977): 112.

⁵⁷ See, for example, the INS experiment to give Americans jobs vacated by undocumented workers and the accompanying anecdotes in the previous chapter.

⁵⁸ Tatcho Mindiola and Max Martínez, *Chicano-Mexicano Relations* (Houston: Mexican American Studies Program: University of Houston, 1986), 81.

frightened and desperately poor undocumented workers will take them.”⁵⁹ Marshall also warned that failing to address the exploitation of undocumented workers could come back to haunt the United States. Immigrant workers in the 1970s might be willing to work under horrific conditions and for low wages, he told the Congress, but “it would take a strong theory of human nature to conceive that their children will have the same attitude.” “Ignoring this problem,” he told legislators, “may consequently result in another civil rights struggle in our Nation ten or fifteen years hence.”⁶⁰

Marshall’s warning was remarkably prescient, but his timeline too optimistic. Indeed, the new civil rights movement of which he warned would not wait ten or fifteen years. It was already underway, as the previous chapter argued—and now the Carter immigration plan was in many ways inadvertently fueling it. Bert Corona, speaking at a workshop on the impact of the undocumented in Chicano communities, typified the Mexican-American response to Carter’s plan. Telling those in attendance that migration was the result of “powerful economic, political and social forces’ needs for profits and domination,” Corona concluded that “the consequences are the oppression of the Chicano people on both sides of the border.”⁶¹ That he spoke of “Chicanos” on both sides of the border revealed how seriously Corona took the notion of *un pueblo sin fronteras*. And that few questioned his language spoke volumes about the increasingly transnational understanding of ethnic and

⁵⁹ Statement of Ray Marshall, Secretary of Labor Before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Baca Papers, Box 16 Folder 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “Remarks of Bert Corona: Impact of Mexican Migration on California Communities,” n.d. Baca Papers, Box 21, Folder 11.

working-class solidarity among Chicano leaders in the Southwest, who advocated for the idea that Chicanos and immigrants were “one people without borders.”⁶²

Corona decried Carter’s plan as a ploy to bring back a bracero program in exchange for Mexican oil. In effect, Corona was accusing both the Mexican and American governments of selling out their people in an elite quid-pro-quo. Corona assailed “Carter, the large users of cheap labor and their friends in the Mexican government” as self-serving cronies with only their interests in mind. The United States, he told his audience, wanted cheap, exploitable labor and Mexican oil. Mexico, for its part, sought to keep, even expand, the escape valve that relieved it of its responsibilities to the Mexican people. In Corona’s estimation, the only winners were the powerful: Mexican and American elites, including politicians, oil interests, and big business on both sides of the Rio Grande. Meanwhile, he suggested, the workers on both sides of the border and especially Chicano and Mexican workers, would be left worse off. The often-conspiratorial tone of Corona’s and other Chicanos’ rhetoric notwithstanding, they pointed to hard truths about the motives of government officials in both countries. Neither worried most about workers’ well-being, but rather their own.

Though obviously critical of business interests, Corona opposed employer sanctions, fearing they would hurt only the workers, a position that most Chicano and Mexican American groups quickly adopted as well. He had little faith that employers would be punished with anything more than a slap on the wrist. And indeed, the language of Carter’s proposal suggested that it would be exceedingly difficult to prosecute employers since the burden of proof would be on the government to demonstrate that employers “knowingly”

⁶² Reavis, *Without Documents*, 141.

hired illegal labor. The proposal did not explain how this would be enforced, either. And even if employers were punished, the civil penalty was remarkably low. Meanwhile, Corona saw how employers could use such a law to discriminate against ethnic workers while also, aware that the penalties were low, telling “non-Latin workers that they better produce more, that they better maintain the speedup, that they’d better not demand too high a wage level because the employers could always get ready-and-willing Mexican workers to work for peanuts.”⁶³ Corona reiterated that all workers—citizen and foreign, legal and undocumented, Chicano and otherwise—should see one another as fighting the same fight and stick together.

Although many unions and even some Chicano organizations and individuals ignored his pleas, many did, in fact, respond to Corona’s call. True, the UFW remained ambivalent for some time, even after changing its official position. But some others stepped up. One such organization was the Bay Area Committee on Immigration (BACI), which recognized, with Corona, that undocumented workers were workers, and that therefore, regardless of immigration status, they should be protected. The BACI’s opposition to the Carter proposal was guided by a desire to correct misconceptions about the undocumented, who had “been made the scapegoated by the media, our government, and some union officials for high unemployment and the high cost of providing social services.”⁶⁴ The committee pointed to a 1975 Department of Labor study that concluded that undocumented immigrants neither took jobs in industries most affected by high unemployment nor made significant use of social services. Other contemporary researchers concurred. An often-cited

⁶³ “Corona Hits Rodino-Kennedy Bill: Why All Workers Should Oppose ‘Illegal Alien’ Laws,” Baca Papers, Box 21, Folder 11.

⁶⁴ “Carter’s Attack on Immigrant Workers: A Threat to All,” *Workers’ World*, May 2, 1977, 8.

study conducted by MIT economist Wayne Cornelius found that “there is uniform agreement among researchers that Mexican illegals make amazingly little use of social services while present in the U.S., and that the cost of services they do use is far outweighed by their contributions to Social Security and tax revenues.”⁶⁵ The Bay Area Committee on Immigration not only resented the anti-immigrant provisions of the Carter plan but also felt affronted by the “sham amnesty” provisions. Again following the lead of Corona and Baca, the BACI opposed the plan and warned that “non-Anglo workers who ‘look foreign’ would be subject to harassment and discrimination.”⁶⁶ In typically bombastic language, Baca himself went so far as to call the proposal “the most racist and blatantly anti-Mexican piece of legislation since the end of the U.S. Mexican War in 1850.”⁶⁷

More surprising than his anger, Chicanos found themselves flanked by clergy, human right leaders, legal organizations, leftist groups, student leaders—and sometimes, unexpected allies, like strict free-market libertarians, who were strongest in California, as was the Chicano movement. Obviously at odds over fundamental questions, like the nature of capitalism and the role of the state, the two camps nevertheless converged on certain issues, immigration being one of them. Libertarian Richard Ebeling, for example, questioned the logic of nativists who felt their culture was threatened by immigrants. Ebeling ridiculed xenophobic attitudes, noting that “it is difficult to see what exactly that American ‘stock’ was” that nativists felt was being threatened, since “America’s history has been one of ever-

⁶⁵ Wayne A. Cornelius, *Illegal Mexican Migration to the United States: Recent Research Findings, Policy Implications and Research Priorities*, Migration and Development Study Group (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, May 1977), 12, Baca Papers, Box 16, Folder 21.

⁶⁶ “Carter’s Attack on Immigrant Workers,” 10.

⁶⁷ “Simpson-Mazzoli: Two Views from Here,” *Chula Vista Star-News*, July 21, 1983, A2.

new faces and peoples.”⁶⁸ Indeed, pro-immigrant groups often cited and sometimes worked alongside libertarians on immigration issues as a matter of convenience, though more often than not, the strongest opposition to the Carter immigration plan came from leftist Chicanos and progressive allies.

With a meeting between Jimmy Carter and Mexican president José López Portillo scheduled for February 14-16 of 1979, Carter, who apparently had become aware of the pro-immigrant movement’s opposition to his immigration plan, invited Herman Baca and other San Diego-based Chicano leaders to the White House. He offered them a hearing and an opportunity to voice their opinions before the two presidents met in Mexico City. Richard Hernandez, deputy assistant to the president, sent a warmly phrased telegram to the Chicano Federation of San Diego on February 6 telling its leadership, “The president has asked to meet personally with you and other Hispanic leaders for the express purpose of discussing some of the key issues facing the United States and Mexico today.”⁶⁹ Though delivered on short notice, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the president’s invitation. After all, Carter had, as one scholar notes, made good on his election-period promises to be an ally of Mexican Americans. The President had “appointed more minorities, including Latinos, than any previous president, going far beyond previous tokenism by Democrats and Republicans alike.” He also had affirmed his commitment to strengthening civil rights mechanisms like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Office of Civil Rights.⁷⁰ And on

⁶⁸ Richard Ebeling, “The Case Against Immigration Laws,” *Libertarian Review*, June 1978, 18, Baca Papers, Box 19, Folder 9.

⁶⁹ Telegram, Richard Hernandez to Emma Creel, February 6, 1979, Baca Papers, Box 18, Folder 11.

⁷⁰ Craig A. Kaplowitz, *LULAC, Mexican Americans, and National Policy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 194.

the campaign trail, he had even offered Chicano leaders access to his direct phone line, inviting them to call him directly to speak about issues of importance to the community.⁷¹

In a baffling move, no Chicano leader took up the offer to visit the White House. Instead, Baca and others organized a march to coincide with the presidential visit to Mexico. Without a response from leading Chicanos, who simply ignored Carter's invitation, one is left to wonder what went through these leaders' heads. The most likely explanation is that they simply did not believe the American government, even if headed by an ostensibly liberal leader, cared about Chicanos or immigrants. After the disappointment of previous administrations, Chicanos had come to feel, as one historian writes, "a general dissatisfaction . . . with the responsiveness of the Democratic Party and its leaders to the needs of their communities." That distrust had led major figures like Corky Gonzales and José Ángel Gutiérrez, in Colorado and Texas respectively, to form an alternative ethnic political party, the Raza Unida Party. Movement Chicanos more broadly viewed electoral politics as a largely meaningless and ineffectual outlet for the deep social and economic change they sought.⁷²

Chicanos' refusal to engage the democratic process nevertheless had consequences. It irked liberal allies like Lowell Blankfort, a progressive journalist and long-time advocate of the Chicano cause. To sympathetic outsiders, Chicanos' refusal to meet with a president who had warmly extended an invitation smacked of arrogance. Rather than "give him an opportunity" to make pledges to the Chicano people, wrote Blankfort, "the Chicano leaders chose to get their message to the president by shouting at him from 3,000 miles away."⁷³

⁷¹ UPI, "Carter Backs Strict Alien Law," *The Arizona Republic*, July 2, 1976, A14.

⁷² Lisa Garcia Bedolla, *Introduction to Latino Politics in the U.S.* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), 82.

⁷³ Lowell Blankfort, "Chicanos: Rhetoric or Results?" Baca Papers, Box 18, Folder 11.

“People like me, who share many of the Chicanos’ goals for a more just and equitable society,” he continued, “find it difficult to sympathize with people who frequently seem more interested in rhetoric than results.” He cautioned that “Chicanos like those who rejected President Carter’s invitation are in danger of becoming leaders without followers and without influence.”⁷⁴

Back in Washington, it became clear to Carter and his team that immigration “was a no-win issue” for the administration. To gain support for reform legislation and come to an understanding about what it should look like, Carter persuaded congressional leaders to establish the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (SCIRP) in October of 1978. The goals of the commission were to study immigration and refugee policy and make recommendations that would have wide-ranging implications for economic growth, foreign policy, labor conditions, population control, and the environment. It was made up of four Carter cabinet members (the secretaries of state, labor, and health and human services, along with the attorney general); four Senators and four House members, appointed by the leaders of their respective chambers, and four public members, including the chairperson, appointed by the president.⁷⁵ For this critical post, Carter initially appointed Reuben D. Askew, an attorney and former governor of Florida, though he resigned in 1979 to serve as a trade advisor in the administration, a post he apparently thought was more fitting for him. Carter then tapped Rev. Fr. Theodore “Ted” Hesburgh to serve as the committee chair. Hesburgh at the time was the president of the University of Notre Dame and a figure universally

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Lawrence H. Fuchs, “The Corpse That Would Not Die: The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986,” *Revue Européenne Des Migrations Internationales* 6, no. 1 (1990): 114.

respected for his ability to see complex issues both compassionately and with the national interest in mind.

Considerable thinking went into formulating the makeup, structure, and stated goals of the commission, which came to be known simply as the Hesburgh Commission. In putting it together, Carter sought consensus from the various opposing interests. As Lawrence Fuchs, a leading immigration scholar and one of the public members appointed to the commission, put it: “In deciding who to appoint, the White House sought to represent those interests directly rather than appoint statesmanlike figures with a broad view.”⁷⁶ In other words, the goal was to put together in the same room people with vastly different views and interests and to force them to see and hear others’ points of view, to consider holistic measures rather than piecemeal legislation, and ultimately, to compromise. That way, Carter would wash his hands of the ultimate policy formulations by encouraging everyone to give a little in order to come up with a plan that all sides could live with.

The task was easier to formulate in theory than to achieve in practice. The commission identified four distinct interest groups that had major stakes in the discussion and which, as shown earlier in the chapter, had proven difficult to satisfy or even negotiate with: organized labor, Mexican Americans, restrictionists, and employers.

Fuchs was tasked with feeling out each constituency to test the limits of their willingness to compromise. When he visited Thomas R. Donahue, secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, Fuchs asked whether the labor federation would support a guest worker program in exchange for “strong protections for United States labor” that included employer sanctions, a legalization program for undocumented workers already in the country, and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

tighter enforcement of labor standards. The answer, he remembers, was “a clear, unequivocal, ‘no, never.’” Next, he sat down with the executive board of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), a litigation organization thought to represent the mainstream Hispanic lobby. Would Chicanos accept employer sanctions in exchange for a large-scale legalization provision, possibly augmented with the lifting of country ceilings for immigration from Mexico or a program to increase lawful admission of spouses and minor children, perhaps even doing away with numerical limits on the country altogether? Their response was resoundingly negative. “We will never accept employer sanctions,” they told him. Then, Fuchs spoke to several employers of the sort likely to employ undocumented immigrants or guest workers, to see if they would accept a program that added a legal-resident pipeline to their industries—something resembling a guest worker program but which gave employees green cards or semi-permanent legal status. Growers and other employers responded by saying, “Of course not. They [immigrants] would receive all the benefits of resident aliens, and that would be too costly and unmanageable.” Finally, Fuchs spoke with leaders of what had become the largest restrictionist organization by the late 1970s, the Federation for American Immigration Reform. They, too, proved rigid and told Fuchs they would accept nothing short of all-out restriction, believing that with the country facing inflation and a stagnating economy “time and public opinion were on their side.”⁷⁷ Indeed, through the late 1970s and early ‘80s, public opinion polls showed a marked tendency toward supporting strong immigration laws, though the numbers alone, as this chapter will demonstrate later, did not tell the whole story.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁸ David-James Gonzales, “Public Opinion and Federal Immigration Policy,” *Prospect Journal*, November 24, 2010, <https://prospectjournal.org/2010/11/24/public-opinion-and-federal-immigration-policy/>, accessed May 2, 2018.

Ultimately, the Select Commission put together a number of recommendations, which fell to Ronald Reagan to weight and implement after Carter lost the 1980 election. The overall recommendation of the commission was that the United States should “close the back door to undocumented and illegal immigration [and open] the front door a little more to accommodate legal migration.”⁷⁹ Specifically, the commission recommended the legalization of undocumented immigrants already in the country, the use of “a steady supply” of H-2 guest workers, and added enforcement. This combination of policy recommendations came to be known as the three-legged approach to immigration reform.⁸⁰

Still, the recommendations of the report, titled “U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest,” were just that, recommendations without the force of law or policy. Although the commission recommended swift action, there was much work to be done to transform the commission’s vision into legislation, since the commission’s eventual consensus, an astonishing accomplishment by itself, did not policy make.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the commission did spur action and at least hope that bipartisan legislation could be formulated. In the wake of the Republican victory in the 1980 election, Sen. Strom Thurmond replaced Senator Edward Kennedy as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and appointed Alan Simpson of Wyoming as chairman of the subcommittee on immigration. In the House of Representatives, Peter Rodino retained his role as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and appointed Romano Mazzoli of Kentucky to head the subcommittee on immigration. From

⁷⁹ Philip Martin, “Select Commission Suggests Changes in Immigration Policy: A Review Essay,” *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1982, 31.

⁸⁰ Muzaffar Chishti and Charles Kamasaki, “IRCA in Retrospect: Guideposts for Today’s Immigration Reform” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, January 2014); Austin T. Fragomen, Jr., “The Final Report and Recommendations of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy: A Summary,” *The International Migration Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 758–68..

⁸¹ “Excerpts from Final Report of Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy,” *New York Times*, 1981.

then on, Simpson, the Republican Senator, and Mazzoli, the Democratic Congressman, were tasked with drafting and passing immigration reform legislation, something neither man expected to be as taxing and difficult as it turned out to be.

By 1982, Simpson and Mazzoli had put together their draft immigration reform bill. Fuchs recalled that the challenges were immediately apparent. Simpson needed the help of Kennedy, but the Mexican American lobby immediately blasted the bill as “the most blatantly anti-Hispanic bill ever,” mimicking the language of Baca, the Chicano immigrants’ rights activist from San Diego. In the span of a week, Kennedy received some eight thousand letters urging him to oppose the bill, along with a tsunami of phone calls to the same effect. Labor unions also mounted strong opposition, as did businesses and growers, each for their own reasons. The bill, by the end of 1982, was effectively dead.

It was revived again in 1983, though opposition to it was no less fierce this time around. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), an organization once fervently anti-immigrant, now found itself rejecting legislating for not being friendly enough to immigrants. Its representative Arnoldo Torres noted in February of 1983 that there was “a tremendous amount of animosity” toward the bill and its supporters. A report later that year went as far as proclaiming the bill once again dead, noting there was no clear constituency supporting it.⁸² If Hispanic groups like the Torres-led LULAC viewed the legislation as “an unjust law, a repressive law, a discriminatory law,” conservatives hated it just as much. They spurned it as a law that “doomed America’s territorial security.”⁸³

⁸² Robert Pear, “Senate Approves Immigration Bill with Hiring Curb,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 1983; Martin Tolchin, “House Democrats Afraid of a Veto,” *The New York Times*, October 2, 1983, 11.

⁸³ Georgie Geyer, “Petiness Squelched Immigration Bill,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 11, 1983, 37; Miguel Muñoz, “Failure of Immigration Bill Was a Victory for Us Latinos,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 15, 1983, 50.

Public opinion did not offer lawmakers much clarity. Analysts offered widely variable data on what the people actually wanted done on immigration. FAIR routinely conducted or sponsored polls to show that American public opinion was squarely against illegal immigration and in favor of tough immigration policies.⁸⁴ But as an organization devoted to ending illegal immigration, its numbers could not be taken at face value. More reputable polls provided murkier and often contradictory views. Most Americans (sixty-one percent), for example, did believe that Latin American immigrants were too numerous and were much more likely to tolerate European immigrants (only twenty-six percent said there were too many European immigrants). But from that same poll, a more complicated picture could be extracted. Some two-thirds of those polled said immigrants took American jobs and fifty-nine percent believed they used welfare and thereby raised taxes for Americans. But at the same time, nearly mirror-image numbers suggested at least some sympathy for immigrants. The poll revealed that sixty-one percent of Americans agreed that immigrants improve the country and its culture overall and eighty percent said they believed undocumented immigrants only took jobs Americans did not want in the first place.⁸⁵ Another poll suggested that although Americans wanted tighter controls on immigration, nearly half supported amnesty.⁸⁶ Indeed, some pro-immigrant activists found hope in the polls. Bert Corona, for example, believed in the words of human rights activist Zechariah Chafee, Jr, who decades before had said that he had “enough hope in democracy to believe that public

⁸⁴ “Huddled Masses: Public Opinion and the 1965 U.S. Immigration Act” (Ithaca: Cornell University: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, July 10, 2015), <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/huddled-masses-public-opinion-and-the-1965-u-s-immigration-act/>; Edwin Harwood, “American Public Opinion and U.S. Immigration Policy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487 (September 1986): 201–12.

⁸⁵ “A Newsweek Poll on Immigration,” *Newsweek*, June 25, 1984.

⁸⁶ AP, “Tougher Controls on Immigration Favored,” April 15, 1985, *Texas Observer* Records, Box 4|c72.

opinion will eventually be influenced by the continuous search for what is best in human relations.”⁸⁷

Hispanics, a term increasingly overtaking Chicano/a in response to broadening political coalitions that included Puerto Rican and sometimes Cuban and other Latinx Americans, as well as new commercial tactics and media norms, were often assumed to have clearer views on the immigration proposal.⁸⁸ It quickly became clear, however, that Hispanic public opinion on the bill was not as clear or as unified as some of the more vocal leaders suggested—at times it was as fractured and contradictory as that of whites. Although admittedly a “sleeping giant,” that many felt had been awakened, the Hispanic population continued to worry that illegal immigration harmed them by making it difficult for them to get good jobs or to assimilate into American society.⁸⁹ Most Hispanic individuals in the United States, according to one reputable poll, actually supported employer sanctions, in contrast to the most vocal Hispanic leaders and organizations, which generally had assumed an anti-sanctions posture. One notable exception was labor activist Frank Lacayo, who continued to support employer sanctions, as long as it was balanced with “a generous amnesty” for immigrants already in the country.⁹⁰ One report on the growing Hispanic

⁸⁷ Zechariah Chaffee, Jr., “Federal and State Powers,” NLG Records, Box 48, Folder “Human Rights, 1949-1953.”

⁸⁸ G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 155, 41, 120.

⁸⁹ Dick Kirschten, “The Hispanic Vote: Parties Can’t Gamble That the Sleeping Giant Won’t Awaken,” *National Journal*, November 19, 1983.

⁹⁰ Memo, October 17, 1983, FAIR Records, Box 33, Folder 15; Gallup Institute of Public Opinion, “Majority Favors a Ban on Hiring of Illegal Aliens,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 13, 1983.

political clout suggested that “they’re unified that something must be done on immigration,” but “after that, it falls apart.”⁹¹

Supporters of the bill found it increasingly difficult to move forward, as it was attacked from all corners as “too soft and too tough,” as too permissive and too racist.⁹² Skeptics anticipated that even if the bill were passed, it would ultimately prove nothing more than a “gamble.” Democratic Congressman Charles E. Schumer, for example, explained why lawmakers, in his opinion, should proceed with caution: “There is no guarantee that employer sanctions will work or that amnesty will work. We are headed for uncharted waters.”⁹³

More alarmingly, some analysts viewed the bill and whether it passed or not as entirely irrelevant. “What happens in the halls of Congress has little effect on the movement of people across the Rio Grande,” observed one journalist.⁹⁴ Reagan himself had reservations that the bill was “overly generous in granting amnesty to illegal aliens and went too far in protecting the civil rights of permanent resident aliens living legally in the United States.” Nevertheless, by late 1983, he was determined to pass the legislation and worked hard alongside Congressional leaders to revive the bill.⁹⁵ In October of that year, he

⁹¹ Margaret Shapiro, “Diversity of Hispanics Hampers Compromise on Immigration Bill,” *Arizona Republic*, March 21, 1984.

⁹² “We Are Overwhelmed,” *Time*, June 25, 1984, 27.

⁹³ Qtd. in Debra L. DeLaet, *U.S. Immigration Policy in an Age of Rights* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), 60.

⁹⁴ Ed Griffin, “Help Mexican Workers at Home,” *The Nation*, March 3, 1984, 250.

⁹⁵ Robert Pear, “O’Neill Says Bill on Illegal Aliens Is Dead for 1983,” n.d., loose news clipping of *The New York Times*, Hesburgh Papers, Box 136, Folder 1.

“repeatedly expressed support,” now with the backing of industry leaders and the president of the AFL-CIO.⁹⁶

And yet, the passage of Simpson-Mazzoli remained anything but certain. Contradictions remained, and if the bill was to become law, navigating the many “odd coalitions” that had formed would be key. On one side, opponents included Hispanics groups, supply-siders, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and small businesses; on the other stood supporters, which included labor unions, environmentalists, the Business Roundtable, and a majority of editorialists and public intellectuals.⁹⁷ Again, the task of satisfying all sides (at least enough to get something passed) seemed a challenge too great—and again the bill appeared to fall apart.⁹⁸

FAIR leaders, who had supported the bill in hopes that its harsher provisions would discourage immigration in the future and punish employers who used unsanctioned labor, angrily reacted to reports that the bill was on life support. They vowed to support stand-alone legislation to restrict immigration if Simpson-Mazzoli fell apart. This was an empty threat, however. By the mid-1980s, it had become clear that purely restrictionist bills would never pass, just as amnesty by itself would never find substantial support. The Hispanics who had settled on a decidedly pro-immigrant stance had also gained enough political influence to thwart restrictionist legislation. At the same time, amnesty was quickly becoming “a dirty word.”⁹⁹ What made Simpson-Mazzoli workable, as many of the key actors

⁹⁶ Marvin Stone, “Snookered by ‘Tip’ O’Neill,” *U.S. News and World Report*, October 17, 1983; Katsuyuki Murata, “The (Re)Shaping of Latino/Chicano Ethnicity through the Inclusion/Exclusion of Undocumented Immigrants: The Case of LULAC’s Ethno-Politics,” *American Studies International* 39, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 4–33.

⁹⁷ Tom Bethell, “The Shifting Sands of Simpson-Mazzoli,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 16, 1984, 28.

⁹⁸ Robert Pear, “The Unpredictable Fate of Immigration Reform,” *The New York Times*, May 8, 1984, 15.

⁹⁹ Kathy Kiely, “Congress Takes Another Crack at Revising Immigration Laws,” *The Houston Post*, June 16, 1985, 6A.

acknowledged, was that, while it made no one happy, it gave something to everyone.¹⁰⁰ It also reflected the almost schizophrenic relationship Americans had with immigration policy.¹⁰¹

Lawmakers sought to bring “Lazarus” back from the dead, and over a period of eight months, Congress negotiated a “miraculous compromise” bill by October 1986. According to Chuck Schumer “everyone one of us gave up something painful as hell.”¹⁰² Indeed, not just Congressional leaders, but various factions with a stake in the bill wondered whether they had earned a victory at all. Anti-immigrant figures, like Richard Lamm, governor of Colorado and author of *The Immigration Time Bomb*, a text which, as he put it, served as “a warning concerning the massive flow of legal and illegal immigrants coming to the United States,” continued to fret about the “profound risks” they believed unsanctioned immigration posed to a unified American society.¹⁰³ Chicanos, meanwhile, continued to urge Mexican Americans to support immigrants because to nativists “we are indistinguishable from the Mexican worker crossing the border today.” Nativism, they repeated, ultimately hurt all ethnic Mexicans.¹⁰⁴

Meanwhile, Congress debated and ultimately accepted the recommendations of the commission, with broad if reluctant support from a coalition of conservatives and liberals, who each got enough from the bill to save face and proclaim victory to their constituencies. On November 6, 1986, Reagan signed into law the Immigration Reform and Control Act,

¹⁰⁰ Cecilio Jr. Morales, “Compromise ‘Impossible’ on Simpson-Mazzoli,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 12, 1984.

¹⁰¹ Otto Friedrich, “The Changing Face of America,” *Time*, July 8, 1985.

¹⁰² Mary Thornton, “Agreement Reached on Aliens Bill,” *The Washington Post*, August 15, 1986.

¹⁰³ “Illegals Who Don’t Learn English Threaten Unified Society, Gov. Lamm Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1986; Richard Lamm, *The Immigration Time Bomb* (New York: Dutton Adult, 1985).

¹⁰⁴ “La Frontera: America's Dilemma,” June 20, 1986, Baca Papers, Box 1 Folder 9.

known as Public Law 99-603.¹⁰⁵ The final law instituted employer sanctions, increased enforcement of labor laws, provided funding for added border and interior enforcement, created a new temporary worker program, gave the green light for the legalization of undocumented immigrants who had been in the country before January 1, 1980, placed numerical limits on further migration, and retained key provisions of the 1980 Refugee Act.¹⁰⁶

Historians have paid surprisingly little attention to IRCA, focusing instead on earlier landmark legislation. But IRCA was no less transformative or remarkable than Johnson-Reed or Hart-Cellar. And like them, it had unintended consequences. One key difference was the remarkable way in which the “Reagan amnesty” came to be regarded as a failure almost immediately by players on all sides of the issue. Pro-immigrants’ rights Chicanos wasted no time in denouncing IRCA. One year after it was signed into law by Reagan, who, at the signing of the law said he hoped it would “improve the lives of a class of individuals who now must hide in the shadows, without access to many of the benefits of a free and open society,” while also “[increasing] enforcement of the immigration laws,” Herman Baca, who had become the leading immigrant rights activist in Southern California, called IRCA “the biggest failure since Prohibition and the 55 mile speed limit.”¹⁰⁷ Corona similarly voiced his view that IRCA was a failure from the point of view of immigrants’ rights activists and

¹⁰⁵ An Act of November 6, 1986, Public Law 99-603, (100 STAT 3359), to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to Revise and Reform the Immigration Laws, and for Other Purposes, National Archives, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/31490816>, accessed November 3, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ “Final Positions Adopted by the Commission,” *Immigration Law Bulletin*, 2, no. 1 (January 1981), 20-21.

¹⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Statement on Signing the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986,” November 6, 1986, accessed February 2, 2015, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/110686b>, accessed June 2, 2018. “Amnesty: One Year Later,” interview with Herman Baca, *La Prensa San Diego*, April 28, 1988, Baca Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

said he expected little to change in the lives of immigrants or in immigration patterns.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps nothing in the law was as egregious to pro-immigrant activists as the expansion of the H-2 “guest worker” program, which to them was simply a revamped bracero program under a different name.¹⁰⁹

The characterization of IRCA as a failure, however, was at odds with what many of the three million undocumented immigrants said and remembered about the law.¹¹⁰ To people who had lived in fear of deportation, who had delayed seeing their families for months, even years out of fear they would not be able to come back, the new legal situation felt, as one immigrant put it told me, “like a blindfold was taken off my eyes.”¹¹¹ Life changed tangibly and totally for those three million people, as they suddenly found themselves with newfound freedoms and newfound rights.¹¹² Hundreds of thousands of those (mostly) men became citizens within years, which meant they could vote and participate in the democratic process. Just as importantly, they gained access to economic opportunities before denied to them, from the ability to buy homes to having access to unemployment insurance and Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid, which was sometimes a matter of life and death. And the change in status changed not only their lives but those of their families as well. Many brought their families with them, knowing that they could now petition for them to gain legal residence. At minimum, one member of the family

¹⁰⁸ Associated Press, “Professor: Law to Have Little Effect,” *The Seguin Gazette*, August 12, 1987, 2A.

¹⁰⁹ North American Congress on Latin America (LACLA), “The New Braceros,” Report on the Americas XI, no. 8 (Nov.-Dec. 1977), Gollobin Papers, Box 2, Folder “Immigrant Workers, 1 of 2.”

¹¹⁰ Nancy Rytina, “IRCA Legalization Effects: Lawful Permanent Residence and Naturalization through 2001” (The Effects of Immigrant Legalization Programs on the United States: Scientific Evidence on Immigrant Adaptation and Impacts on U.S. Economy and Society, Bethesda Maryland: Mary Woodward Lasker Center: National Institutes of Health, 2002).

¹¹¹ Manuel Guzmán, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 8, 2014.

¹¹² Associated Press, “INS Tells Agents to Advise Aliens on Amnesty Bids,” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, November 16, 1986, B5.

could work legally and provide for the family, while the parents sent their children to American schools and gave them a chance at a life that consisted of more than poverty and survival.¹¹³

As might have been predicted, the gains made by such people under the amnesty provision also produced a furious backlash from anti-immigrant activists. Like Chicano activists, they saw in the legislation pure failure, though for them, the failure was in its inability to seal the border to stem the flow of undocumented immigrants. Over the next decade, their reaction to IRCA set the stage for “the new nativism,” one akin to that of the early twentieth century in its dynamics, but different in its geographical home and targets. This time California would prove the “new Ellis Island,” as the ground zero of anxiety moved southwest from the old Northeast. The reactionary movement that played out in the Golden State had massive consequences for the direction of the United States at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Gabriel Thompson, *Chasing the Harvest: Migrant Workers in California Agriculture* (London: Verso Books, 2017).

¹¹⁴ Kevin McCarthy, “Immigration and California: Issues for the 1980s,” Rand Paper Series (The Rand Corporation, January 1983).

5. “For Us, There Are No More Back Doors”: The Roots and Consequences of California’s Proposition 187

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 had done anything but solve the problem of unsanctioned immigration. It had given increased enforcement to nativist groups, but immigrants continued to come. It had instituted employer sanctions, but employers understood that their liability was hard to prove and ultimately, not very costly. It had granted amnesty to some three million people. But what of future immigrants who surely would continue moving north?

In the minds of those who had supported IRCA because it promised to bring the border under control, disappointment quickly set in. One year after the legislation passed after much bi-partisan maneuvering and compromise, some Americans continued to worry about the “hordes of immigrants” continuing to pour across the border.¹ And in fact, it was true that although immediately after IRCA was signed into law, undocumented immigration fell to below 250,000 people per year, by 1990, the number of unsanctioned immigrants returned to pre-IRCA levels and actually began to increase.² In California alone, between 1988 and 1992, there was a 42 percent jump in unauthorized migration.³

Illustrating the point, some had begun calling the state “the new Ellis Island.”⁴ To them, California appeared to be a land of opportunity, a microcosm of the American Dream. But there was as a darker side to this story. Despite California’s image as a cosmopolitan,

¹ “Letter from George Mckinnon to House Judiciary Committee,” July 23, 1987, National Archives (44127796), digital document (see identifier number).

² Debra L. DeLaet, *U.S. Immigration Policy in an Age of Rights* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), 61.

³ Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁴ Kevin McCarthy, “Immigration and California: Issues for the 1980s,” Rand Paper Series (The Rand Corporation, January 1983).

progressive, and welcoming place, the Golden State also had a long history of nativism and racism. The same year that Ronald Reagan signed into law the Immigration Reform and Control Act, the state of California declared English its official language, part of a larger push by conservative state legislators to advance the “English only” movement.⁵ Despite the provision in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ceded California to the United States, that all official materials must be provided in English and Spanish and the law accorded equal dignity to both, Proposition 63 passed with overwhelming support.

Some supporters claimed that an English-only (or English as official language) policy was actually in the interest of minority groups, as it would prevent disunity and ethnic separatism. Heinz A. Ballin, a prominent supporter, claimed to worry that without legislation to codify English as a unifying language, “a fragmentation of this great country into areas separated by language” was imminent.⁶

But to others in and beyond the state, the move was little more than dog-whistle politics, a legal and ostensibly race-blind way to implement racist norms. “It tears the community apart,” said the state’s Attorney General, the Democrat John Van De Kamp. De Kamp called the proposed law a “mean-spirited, xenophobic measure.”⁷ Rabbi Henri Front, an outspoken opponent of the proposition, similarly saw in it not efforts to unite but to divide, saying, “Proposition 63, the ‘English Only’ California constitutional amendment

⁵ Rodney E. Hero, *Faces of Inequality: Social Diversity in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108; Joe Feagin, “Old Poison in New Bottles: The Deep Roots of Modern Nativism, 1860-1925,” in *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States*, ed. Juan F. Perea (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 13–43..

⁶ Heinz A. Ballin, “‘English Only’: Is It Necessary?,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1986, 16.

⁷ David Judson, “Van De Kamp: Treaty Could Void ‘English-Only’ Proposition,” *The Desert Sun*, October 9, 1986, C16.

threatens to divide and tarnish our proud heritage of tolerance and cultural diversity.”⁸

Despite heavy opposition from ethnic leaders and a coalition of progressive religious groups, the initiative passed with overwhelming popular support, receiving a “stunning” 73% of the popular vote.⁹

It was more than mere coincidence that Proposition 63 coincided with the passage of IRCA. The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time when questions of ethnic belonging and the meaning of immigration, race, and language were being negotiated in complex ways. IRCA had proven that immigration policy has, almost without exception, served countervailing ideologies and impulses, or as journalist Gregory Rodriguez has claimed, immigrants have always been needed—indeed essential, but also unwanted.¹⁰ Proposition 63 similarly pointed to the contradictions of race in America, as the nation sought to find a common identity, sometimes through exclusion.

While some, like radical Chicanos, saw in immigration policy unabashed racism, the truth was more complicated. IRCA certainly contained elements that could be fairly called, if not racist, exclusionary. But it also had elements that reflected the more progressive and welcoming aspects of immigration policy. That, precisely, was what troubled restrictionists. Nativist actors and many ordinary Americans were alarmed that unsanctioned immigration continued unabated after 1986. Worse, in their minds, was the fact that many immigrants were no longer “birds of passage” who came to work and then returned to their home

⁸ Henri E. Front, “Measure Threatens to Divide Us and Tarnish Our Proud Heritage,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1986.

⁹ M. C. Kate Esposito and Anthony H. Normore, eds., *Inclusive Practices and Social Justice Leadership for Special Populations in Urban Settings: A Moral Imperative* (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2015), 12; Jeffrey D. Schultz et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Minorities in American Politics: Volume 2, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans* (Phoenix: Greenwood, 2000), 427.

¹⁰ Gregory Rodriguez, “Undocumented Workers: Essential but Unwanted,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/oct/11/opinion/la-oe-rodriguez-column-illegal-immigr20101011>, accessed November 17, 2018.

countries. They were now bringing their families and staying put, becoming in the eyes of many Anglos, unwanted “invaders.”¹¹ Pointing to the era’s stigmatization of still-impoorished African Americans, FAIR warned these immigrants would join them and become “the next underclass.”¹²

This was not an unfounded fantasy, despite the alarmist language that was often used to discuss new immigration patterns. Defying ramped up security at the border, many immigrants, among them many who had been legalized by the Reagan amnesty, made a hard calculation, betting they could bring their families to the United States and give them a better life here than they might expect in their home countries. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants used the provisions of IRCA to improve their lives and those of their families. Having been granted amnesty, countless former “mojados” brought their families to the United States, knowing that at least one member of the family could not be deported.

Furthermore, a green card put immigrants on the pathway to citizenship. And in turn, citizenship made legalization of family members substantially less difficult and time-consuming, thanks to provisions in Hart-Celler that excepted from numerical limits the immediate family of U.S. citizens. This effectively allowed those who benefitted from amnesty to bypass long waiting periods for the legalization of spouses and children. It is also likely that at least some Mexicans who were not immediate family members came to the United States seeking protection-by-proxy and perhaps hoping that a new amnesty would be on the horizon. The new calculus resulted in more permanent immigration—and increasingly, family migration. Previously, men often migrated alone for a season or two,

¹¹ Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 29.

¹² “The Next Underclass,” ca. 1976, FAIR Records, Box 134, Folder 11.

then returned to their families in Mexico, just to do it again. After IRCA, many more women and families settled in the United States.

Still, Mexican Americans who had worked hard to get amnesty on the table and to make IRCA as favorable to immigrants as possible were often just as disappointed as restrictionists, though for entirely different reasons. Just two years after IRCA became law, Herman Baca, a leader of the Chicano movement for immigrants' rights in Southern California, called the law "the biggest failure since Prohibition and the 55 mile speed limit."¹³ Immigrants were still living in the shadows, discriminated against, and racially marked, he and others pointed out. Worse, they remained exploited workers living in conditions some deemed conditions similar to "concentration camps."¹⁴

This characterization had a way of frustrating more moderate leaders, however, and of obscuring the complicated realities of immigrant life. Baca, like many other Chicano activists, could often forget that the perfect is the enemy of the good. Nevertheless, his pessimism was not without some justification. Economists have found that, for example, "IRCA led to a deterioration in the wages and working conditions" of undocumented immigrants who had come after 1986 or who, for whatever reason, did not normalize their status through IRCA.¹⁵ Initially, scholars were not sure why this correlation existed, but more recent studies suggest that as employers were granted greater knowledge about who

¹³ Herman Baca, "Amnesty: One Year Later," April 28, 1986, Baca Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

¹⁴ "Concentration Camps of America," *Houstonian*, 1988, UH, <http://library.uh.edu/record=b1158762~S11>, accessed May 7, 2018.

¹⁵ Julie A. Phillips and Douglas S. Massey, "The New Labor Market: Immigrants and Wages after IRCA," *Demography* 36, no. 2 (May 1999): 233–46.

was and was not undocumented, they could more easily target and exploit those “sin papeles.”¹⁶

Nevertheless, an old joke goes, ask a Mexican to tell you who his favorite president is, and he won't say Benito Juárez or Lázaro Cárdenas. He'll say Ronald Reagan. The joke no doubt overestimates Mexicans' (especially Mexican immigrants') affinity for Reagan. But Mexicans who benefitted from the “Reagan amnesty” certainly did not think of it as a “failure.” Three million people—mostly men—stopped living in fear of deportation. They could work “the right way” and advance in their jobs, even start new careers or businesses, or get an education. They could buy homes. They could even petition for citizenship after a few years. And with that, they could vote and have the same legal claims to citizenship as anyone born in the United States. They could simply walk down the street or go shopping without fear that the wrong step would land them in the back of a Border Patrol van. “It was like a blindfold as taken off my eyes,” one immigrant said of the way amnesty changed his life.¹⁷

More importantly, now legal permanent resident immigrants could send for their spouses and children without documents. Sometimes they had children in the U.S., hoping to bring them a better life but often failing to consider what would happen if the parents were deported.¹⁸ Although the cost of crossing illegally had gone up, it was still relatively

¹⁶ Peter B. Brownell, “Sanctions for Whom? The Immigration Reform and Control Act's ‘Employer Sanctions’ Provisions and the Wages of Mexican Immigrants,” Ph.D. diss. prospectus (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 3.

¹⁷ Manuel Guzmán, interview with author, Delano, CA, July 8, 2014.

¹⁸ Keila E. Molina and Lynne M. Kohm, “Are We There Yet?": Immigration Reform for Children Left Behind,” *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal* 23 (2013): 77–108.

cheap, as many immigrants attested.¹⁹ And with a legal member of the family in the U.S., the risk had more manageable consequences. There could always be someone in the north with papers to work and send money home. It no longer made sense for many men to go back and forth, though for those who wished to do that, amnesty had also made things easier (and cheaper and safer).

Before the amnesty, immigrants remember, family life was always under tremendous stress for all involved. As with *braceros* before, who often left wives and young children to fend for themselves and to create self-care networks, as Ana Rosas has explained in her important book *Abrazando El Espiritu*, these immigrants also faced difficult, often fragile family relations.²⁰ “Your loved ones would be gone for two, three years sometimes,” remembered Lisa (pseud.), an undocumented immigrant brought here by someone who had benefitted from the Reagan amnesty.²¹ “People returned because they missed their families, their roots,” but it was not always easy. So those who received amnesty were emboldened and many brought their families north. Antonio Garcia was one such immigrant. Reflecting on what amnesty meant, he said, “What changed when I got my green card is that I could bring my family so they could work and study here, so they would have more opportunities than I ever did.” For Garcia and his family, “it worked out.”²²

But for others, life north of the border was not all they had imagined. As Garcia himself explained:

¹⁹ Pia M. Orrenius, “Illegal Immigration and Enforcement Along the U.S.-Mexico Border: An Overview,” *Economic and Financial Review* (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, First Quarter 2001), 4–5.

²⁰ Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando El Espiritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

²¹ “Lisa,” (pseud.), interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, June 25, 2014.

²² Antonio Garcia, interview with author, Delano, CA July 10, 2014.

Not all that glitters is gold. Often, it's not the best decision to leave one's country because of what we hear. It's better to become informed. It's difficult and it's sad when we see the reality, when we see the other side of the coin. We come with the idea that we'll cross, earn money, go back home with money, buy a car and a house. But just like that might happen, the opposite might happen. People can complicate their lives, and many don't even make it. Their journey ends in the desert. And the saddest part is that sometimes, family back home think these people are bad people—bad sons, bad fathers, and they have ceased to exist. They are not here doing bad things. They're dead.²³

Another formerly undocumented immigrant, Israel Vera, similarly described the disconnect between what immigrants heard and what they found. “The stories were always good,” he said, as men worked to display their value and their success when visiting home. “You had lots of comforts, or so it seemed. What we saw [in Mexico] was that no one came back empty-handed. They came back with new cars, with fancy clothes, so this created the fantasy that those who went north became rich.”²⁴

Fantasies notwithstanding, many immigrants had made lives here and understood that the United States, while not the “dream” they had imagined, it did afford families and individuals a relatively better life. IRCA certainly changed the lives of millions of men and families, usually for the better. It also changed migration patterns by increasing family movement. By “feminizing” migration, IRCA altered the face of the “illegal” from an image of a lone young man to one of men, women, and children.

With family migration, gender roles also changed among immigrant families and communities. In many parts of provincial Mexico from which large numbers of immigrants came, the norm was “women at home, men in the fields.”²⁵ That is, women were expected to stay home, raise children, and keep the home clean while men were responsible for

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Israel Vera, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, July 25, 2014.

²⁵ Manuel Guzman, interview with author, Delano, CA, June 8, 2014; Elizabeth Murillo, interview with author, Madera, CA, June 17, 2014.

providing financially for the family. In the United States, that division of roles and labor was not sustainable, as households often required two incomes to survive.

Yet, despite the stereotypes of Mexican men as controlling *machistas* and of women as subservient, the political economy of the United States revealed both Mexican women and Mexican men to be remarkably flexible, adaptable, and willing to break stereotypes. People took note. Even in fiction, the trope that “el hombre es libre,” was breaking down, as women began to be portrayed as similarly decisive, strong, and independent.²⁶

Increased family migration also opened the way to growing numbers of women who migrated alone, rather than with husbands, brothers, or fathers.²⁷ Some left to escape sexual violence, to avoid political turmoil, or simply, as most immigrants did, to escape extreme poverty. Many even left their children behind in the care of family members while they earned money in the north.²⁸ Some became housekeepers, others entered factory work, and a large number of them worked in agriculture, proving to be just as skilled and capable as the men at doing difficult manual labor.

It was often the wage-earning women who changed roles at home. Working as much as men outside the home, they began expecting men to also engage in traditionally female roles: cooking, cleaning, taking care of their children. And although the type of work most undocumented immigrant women took on could be back-breaking, many saw it as an

²⁶ Alfredo Mirandé, *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 165.

²⁷ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11; María E. Enchautegui, “A Comparison of Today’s Unauthorized Immigrant’s and the IRCA Legalized: Implications for Immigration Reform” (Urban Institute, December 2013).

²⁸ Luz Elena, interview by Kendal Walters, SAF Records, Box 51; Angel, interview by Adriana Sanches and Elizabeth Hayes-Lozada, SAF Records, Box 51; interview number 0624, in the SOHP Collection (#4007).

opportunity, “a real chance.” For the first time in their lives, they were earning their own money and making their own decisions, in and outside of the home.²⁹

But the failure of IRCA to stop migration—indeed, to encourage more permanent family and feminized migration—set off a swift reaction from whites who feared the new “chain migration.” In their perception, was that amnesty had essentially incentivized immigration.³⁰ As many openly complained that they were “tired of massive waves of non-white immigrants and refugees,” opinion polls increasingly suggested white Americans were ready for a tighter immigration policy after the Reagan amnesty.³¹

Most Americans, of course, did not agree with extremists, like the KKK, who called for a platform of “white rights” in the 1980s.³² But as a steady stream of immigrants continued to arrive in the United States—and many on the left and right alike attributed that to IRCA’s provisions—a majority of Americans began to feel anxious about increasing immigration.³³ Changes in immigration law in 1990 that encouraged further migration from some regions and instituted a diversity lottery only strengthened the conviction of many American who felt the door had been opened too wide.³⁴

As before, Chicano, Latino, and Hispanic individuals and organizations figured prominently in the debate. After a decade of pro-immigrant consensus, debates were raging again within the community. A majority continued to feel a strong affinity for immigrants

²⁹ Javiera Infante, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, June 11, 2014.

³⁰ “Children of Immigrants,” 1990, FAIR Records, Box 190, Folder 4 “Poverty, 1 of 4.”

³¹ Poster, “White People,” ca. 1991, SPLC Files, Box 8, Folder “Misc. Literature, Pro-Aryan/Pro-White.”

³² SPLC Files, April 1, 1992, Box 1, Folder “American Nazi Party,” 1980s-1990s.

³³ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*.

³⁴ “1990 Immigration and Nationality Act: An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to Change the Level, and Preference System for Admission, of Immigrants to the United States, and to Provide for Administrative Naturalization, and for Other Purposes,” Pub. L. No. 101-649; 104 Stat. 4978, S. 358 (1990).

and a desire to protect them. Others, however, once again felt undocumented immigrants were limiting their own livelihoods and opportunities. One opinion poll in California found for example, that while a majority of Americans wanted a freeze on immigration and tighter limits, Hispanics “[felt] even more strongly than the general population.”³⁵ Some questioned the methodology of this poll, but when Proposition 187, a nativist referendum appeared on the ballot in California in 1994, a third of Hispanics voted in favor of it, proving that many Mexican Americans could be, as journalist Ruben Navarrete wrote in 1992, “a strangely nativist breed.”³⁶ Some polls suggested that at various points, over 50 percent of Hispanics supported the so-called “SOS,” or “Save Our State” initiative.³⁷

Sympathy with immigrants notwithstanding, illegal immigration had certain adverse effects on minorities, especially low-income Latinos, even if Chicanos and Latinos had become more hesitant to acknowledge it.³⁸ In *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority*, the conservative political scientist Peter Skerry explained:

As the decade of the 1980s wore on, the number of illegal immigrants steadily (with a record high of approximately 1.6 million border apprehensions in 1986). Mexican American leaders remained fixed in their stance—even in the face of research findings indicating that Mexican Americans already settled here were competing with illegals for jobs. Indeed, as scholars pointed with increasing outrage at substandard housing, inadequate barrio health-care facilities, and overcrowding in schools, they seldom if ever acknowledged that solutions might at least in part be found in moderating the continuing influx of immigrants.³⁹

³⁵ Peter T. Kilborn, “Tides of Migrant Labor Tells of a Law’s Failure,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1992; James R. Carroll, “Poll Finds Majority Wants Tighter Immigration Limits,” *San Jose Mercury News*, May 20, 1992.

³⁶ Lina Y. Newton, “Why Latinos Supported Proposition 187: Testing the Economic Threat and Cultural Identity Hypothesis” (Irvine: University of California, Irvine, 1998), 187; Ruben Navarrete, “Should Latinos Support Curbs on Immigrants?,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1992.

³⁷ Ben Seeley, “Prop. 187 Will Save Our State,” *The Star-News (Chula Vista)*, October 22, 1994, A4.

³⁸ Norman Matloff, “The Adverse Effects of Immigration on Minorities,” § House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration (1995).

³⁹ See quote in “Claims that Latinos Oppose SOS Debated,” *The Chula Vista Star-News*, August 6, 1994, A4.

In fact, many Latinos, even if they eventually changed their views, were anxious about large numbers of immigrants.⁴⁰ The third of Latinos/Hispanics who voted in favor of the unmistakably restrictionist measure was a reminder that, as Armando Navarro has pointed out, quoting pollster Bruce Merrill, “there are as many VFW, flag waving Hispanics with pickup trucks in their racks as there are Cesar Chavez Chicanos.”⁴¹

Proposition 187 began as the brainchild of Alan Nelson and Harold Ezell, with the backing of Assemblyman Dick Mountjoy of Monrovia. The “Save Our State” initiative made little effort to disguise what it was “saving” the state from. Complaining that California spent some \$3 billion a year on social services for undocumented immigrants, about half of that on education, some saw a fiscal emergency.

Governor Pete Wilson, then running a reelection campaign against Democratic challenger Kathleen Brown became a vocal supporter of the Proposition, making it the centerpiece of his push for re-election. In one such television advertisement, typical of the many his campaign ran across various channels, Wilson’s campaign opened with a decontextualized video of “illegals” running across a border entry point, with a voiceover ominously declaring that “they keep coming,” and that something had to be done. The ad ended with Wilson, in a calm and soothing voice, proudly reminding viewers that he had been willing to deploy the National Guard to “secure the border,” and announcing that he, like many in California, felt “enough [was] enough.”⁴²

⁴⁰ M.V. Hood III, Irwin L. Morris, and Kurt A. Shirkey, “‘¡Quedate o Vente!’: Uncovering the Determinants of Hispanic Public Opinion Toward Immigration,” *Political Science Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1977): 627–47.

⁴¹ Armando Navarro, *The Immigration Crisis: Nativism, Armed Vigilantism, and the Rise of a Countervailing Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Altamira, 2008), 287.

⁴² “They Keep Coming,” television ad, 1994, archived on YouTube and C-Span, various users.

The bill contained ten core provisions. The first dictated that law enforcement would not only be allowed but would be *required* to report anyone “suspected” of being an undocumented alien. Another barred local governments from preventing this “duty” by enacting local laws that challenged the state initiative, effectively outlawing what in more recent years have come to be known as “sanctuary cities.” Anyone applying for or receiving public services was required to verify their citizenship or legal residency status, and this included health care and public elementary or secondary school. Government agents, broadly defined to include teachers and public health workers, were required to report in writing anyone suspected of being an illegal alien. The law required that by 1996 school districts verify the legal status of every child in their districts and of each respective parent or guardian.

The scope of the law, then, was as broad as it was Draconian, requiring state officials, essentially, to double as law enforcers and immigration agents.⁴³ This drew the ire of many government workers who believed it was neither their duty nor their right to act in this capacity and that doing so could have harmful consequences for public health, law enforcement, and education.⁴⁴

The so-called “feminization” of immigration did little to temper the fear of nativists. In fact, while their usual epithets about immigrants continued, they now pointed to a new evil to be combatted: “illegal” women and children, whom they more regularly and with increased viciousness regarded as a burden on the state and on taxpayers. As Leo Chavez has

⁴³ Proposition 187: Text of the Proposed Law, 1994, retrieved from KPBS, <https://www.kpbs.org/documents/2014/oct/24/proposition-187-text-proposed-law/>, accessed February 1, 2019.

⁴⁴ Deirdre M. Moloney, *National Insecurities: Immigrants and U.S. Deportation Policy since 1882* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 20.

written, Proposition 187, sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly, demonstrated deep concerns among backers about the “fertility of Mexican immigrant women.”⁴⁵

Paul Lilibright, an Indio resident, echoed the concerns of many pro-187 voters when he stated that “our prisons are full of illegal immigrants, our schools are crowded because of illegal immigrants” and declared that “we are giving far too many rights to illegal immigrants and legal immigrants while stepping all over the rights of United States citizens.”⁴⁶ Charley Reese, a syndicated conservative columnist, insisted that it was time to put to rest the “nation of immigrants” trope because, as he put it, “We are in 1994 a nation of 250 million people with a shrinking job base, a severely decaying infrastructure, a Himalayan-sized public debt and a dangerous social meltdown in the underclass.” America, he said, “does not have the jobs or the resources to absorb . . . largely uneducated, unskilled immigrants.”⁴⁷ He said nothing of the true causes of those troubles, focusing instead on the added burden that immigrants might have.

Likewise, Kathryn Weinmann viewed the proposition as “a chance for those of us who pay taxes to voice our disapproval of using our tax dollars to benefit citizens of other countries to the detriment of our own citizens.”⁴⁸ Such attitudes were not new, but especially since IRCA, “critics felt that the labor performed by immigrants did not compensate for the

⁴⁵ Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 153.

⁴⁶ Steve Dimeglio, “The New Immigrants,” *The Desert Sun*, December 8, 1996, A13.

⁴⁷ Charley Reese, “U.S. Being Tricked by Irrelevant References,” *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, November 10, 1994, sec. Opinion, A6.

⁴⁸ “March Against Proposition 187,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1994, http://articles.latimes.com/1994-10-25/local/me-54333_1_american-flag-dana-point-proposition, accessed August 19, 2017.

services they received.” They were increasingly comfortable voicing their reservations and complaints about immigration.⁴⁹

By the mid-1990s, a full-blown panic was underway in the Golden State, one that saw unauthorized immigrants marked as unwelcome foreigners who were siphoning off resources from worthy and deserving citizens. The anxiety illustrated how immigration is about more than territorial integrity and the rule of law and is largely about determining who is “worthy” of the protections of the state and the privileges of citizenship.⁵⁰ As the broader perspective on the history of immigration reveals, nativism is an emotional response to perceived threats—often real, more often imagined. As Dale Knobel puts it, “federal immigration restriction” has generally been “an act of impatience, even frustration.”⁵¹

In reality, immigrants, by most authoritative accounts, have generally benefitted the national economy in the long run, but human beings are not apt at seeing the long term, and so, even if, as John Higham explained decades before, immigrants historically “actually created more opportunities than they absorbed,” Americans “were impatient of long-run views during periods of hardship and stress.”⁵² California, in the early-to-mid 1990s, demonstrated with remarkable precision, the truth in Higham’s eloquent summary of the history of American nativism.

Certainly, Governor Wilson’s campaign staff understood how powerful nativist forces and emotions could be and how politically expedient it could prove to appeal to them,

⁴⁹ Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 229.

⁵⁰ Dale T. Knobel, *America for the Americans: The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne, 1996), 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁵² John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 45.

to distract from other issues that had made Wilson deeply unpopular. Many blamed him for mismanaging the nagging economic woes facing the state, for example, and felt he had done little to contain racial unrest after the Rodney King riots of 1992.⁵³ In the middle of his 1994 re-election campaign, Wilson found himself with record low approval ratings and trailing Brown by 20 percentage points. It was at that point that he turned to what Leo Chavez has called the “Latino threat narrative.”

Thereafter, his campaign ran almost exclusively on the immigration issue, believing, correctly, that strategically leveraging the language of “crisis” and “flooding” and “invasion” could save his administration. Wilson’s “increasingly shrill anti-immigrant rhetoric . . . helped bring a strong recovery for his poll standing,” one observer noted.⁵⁴ His team likely understood the historical utility of the issue. As Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren have found, the political exploitation of the words “crisis,” “flood,” and “invasion” in relation to immigration has a long history.⁵⁵

And indeed, the nativist camp made extensive use of this “threat narrative.” One of the architects of Proposition 187, Ron Prince, adopted a jiu-jitsu approach, positioning Anglos as victims and avowing that “we will be the ACLU of the 21st century. We will be suing them back to get rights back for the majority.”⁵⁶ The striking use of “us vs. them” language, the allusions to criminality that “illegality” implied, and the growing acceptance of

⁵³ George Skelton, Wilson’s Legacy a Mix of God Policy, Bad Politics, *Los Angeles Time*, December 4, 1998, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/dec/14/news/mn-54020>, accessed March 14, 2019.

⁵⁴ Bill Elias, “Save Our State May Do the Opposite,” *San Clemente Sun Post News*, July 15, 1994, 5.

⁵⁵ Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America,” *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 1 (March 2012): 1–29.

⁵⁶ Patrick J. McDonnell, “Despite Legal Snags, Prop. 187 Reverberates,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1995, A1.

the need to prioritize the concerns of the Anglo majority resonated powerfully with whites in California who felt they were being victimized by an entitled class of invaders.

If in previous decades, the language of “white rights” had been the exclusive domain of white nationalists and extremist groups, not-so-subtle dog-whistle allusions to them were increasingly gaining acceptance among the mainstream. This was made easier, ironically, by the growth of identity-based social movements, including the Chicano-led immigrants’ rights movement, which, intentionally or not, had ceded the language of citizenship to the right when it took up an ethnic-based, human rights posture.

In a state that was quickly growing browner, cultural anxiety among many white Californians was palpable. Celia Munoz of the National Council of La Raza believed this was the primary reason for Proposition 187—not fiscal prudence. “Clearly,” she told *The Des Moines Register*, “there are people out there who find the growth of the Latino population in America and California very threatening.”

Meanwhile, supporters continued to “insist their agenda is not racist, but economic, bearing a message that Californians are fed up with spending scarce state tax dollars on people who don’t belong here.”⁵⁷ Attempts to separate the two notwithstanding, economic anxiety and cultural anxiety, in practice fused. Americans have always been wary of “newness, fear of strangers.” And “misery stems,” political scientist Allen Rosenthal has concluded, “from the economy and from feelings of persecution and malaise.” When Americans have not felt economically safe, they have found any sort of assistance toward non-white immigrants unacceptable.⁵⁸ In California, this was precisely what was playing out,

⁵⁷ “Judge Delays Enforcement of Measure,” *The Des Moines Register*, November 10, 1994, 14A.

⁵⁸ Associated Press, “Money and Misery,” *The Muncie Star*, November 6, 1994, 18A.

as the state found itself in a stubborn recession, even as immigrants continued to flock there in search of a relatively better life.⁵⁹

Most Latinos and Hispanics—terms that had eclipsed Chicano partly to capture not only ethnic Mexicans but a growing number of Central American immigrants and ethnics—understood the question of “belonging” in starkly racial ways, and perceived such sentiments more broadly than the language of “legality” and “welfare abuse” implied.⁶⁰ The California Latino Civil Rights Network warned that “the S.O.S. initiative is not just anti-immigrant, it is anti-Latino.” “Our community is at risk,” leaders of the San Diego-based organization argued.⁶¹ Activists sprang into action to oppose the bill, creating voter registration drives, making phone calls, and reaching out to the media, which had been saturated with Wilson’s pro-187 political ads.

The resistance came mainly from offshoots of the groups who had advocated for undocumented immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s. Chicano academics like Armando Navarro called Proposition 187 an extension of the long fight to keep “our Latino community in a defensive posture.”⁶² Herman Baca called it, in typically inflammatory rhetoric, a declaration of war on Latinos.⁶³ Catholic clergy generally opposed the bill too. Some like Cardinal Roger Mahony invoked scripture, saying the moment would “test our relationship with God” based on society’s “treatment of the poor, the widow, and the

⁵⁹ R. Michael Alvarez and Tara L. Butterfield, “The Resurgence of Nativism in California? The Case of Proposition 187 and Illegal Immigration,” *Hispanics in America* 81, no. 1 (March 2000): 167–79.

⁶⁰ G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁶¹ “Reminder,” ca. July 1994, Baca Papers, Box 32, Folder 1,

⁶² “A Post 187 Strategy for Mobilization,” Armando Navarro, January 13-14, 1995, unclassified material, Baca Papers.

⁶³ “Governor Wilson/Prop187 Is Not About Immigration but Racial War in California,” Committee on Chicano Rights, n.d., Baca Papers.

alien.”⁶⁴ Many others echoed Mahony’s words, warning that the law was malicious and immoral. It was one thing for the nation to create and uphold immigration laws, said Jonathan Freedman, quite another “for citizens en masse to subvert immigration laws by inviting illegal immigrant to do their dirty work and then hound their children.”⁶⁵

Others who worked on civil liberties issues worried that the law would create a real-world dystopia. In the words of one such critic, it would set up a situation “so full of social booby-traps and so fraught with bureaucratic nightmares, with intrusions into the lives of ordinary people with invitations to people to turn on their neighbors, and so corrosive of civic trust that it would be better called the Mandatory Truancy and Communicable Diseases Promotion Initiatives, or if you like, initials, the Snoop or Snitch Act of 1994.”⁶⁶

Many Hispanics protested, but aware of the popularity of 187, they also prepared for the worst. As they watched poll returns and the anti-immigrant storm 187 had kicked up, and as the date of the vote approached, growing numbers of activists began to accept and anticipate that the law was likely to pass, worrying that when it did, it was “going to hit close to home.”⁶⁷ By September, in fact, it was clear to most that the measure would succeed. “As the election nears,” one report announced, “polls show an unusually broad consensus of support has emerged for Proposition 187.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ “Unofficial Translation of Cardinal Mahony’s Immigration Address at the Hispanic Evangelization Conference,” July 28, 1994, Baca Papers, digital file, <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb89092194/1.pdf>, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Freedman, “Save Our State? It’s More Like Sink Our State,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1994, 42.

⁶⁶ “If SOS is Voted In, California Will Call for Emergency Help,” *Escondido Times-Advocate*, June 14, 1994, n.p.

⁶⁷ Leonel Sanchez, “Angry Latinos Line Up Against Prop. 187,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 12, 1994, B1.

⁶⁸ “Poll finds Broad Support for Measure Barring Services to Illegal Immigrants,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1994, A2.

Still, hoping the predictions were wrong, many kept up the fight. In the fall of 1994, in the lead up to the November election, protesters took to the streets in the state's largest cities. Los Angeles saw "one of the largest mass protests in the city's history": a mile-long column composed of 70,000 women, men, and children, waving Mexican and American flags. Some protesters worked to make the issue a question of family values, hoping to stress that "this proposition is not against the illegal [immigrant], it's against children."

One marcher expressed what many protesters were thinking: "They are playing games with us and that's not right. Politically, it's wrong and it's racist."⁶⁹ In nearby Ventura, 61-year old Fidel Martinez, worried "they are trying to take away our rights." There, Mexican Americans and other Hispanics were joined by others. Jackie Smith, a white woman who worried about her immigrant neighbors, brought out her nine-year-old to show her that "it's neat to see people coming together for something."⁷⁰ As in the 1970s, some saw historical parallels and called for moral self-reflection. As Patrick Murphy, a resident of California put it:

Now that it appears that Proposition 187 may pass overwhelmingly, it is time for the "Schindlers" of California to rise up. It is impossible to miss the parallels between the proposition and ethnically biased laws of other eras. All previous measures were equally legal. They were favored by a majority of the population. They were enacted for the best reasons. They resulted from dulled consciences and faulty memories. At least in Poland the people were promised brandy, sugar, and cigarettes for turning in illegal residents. In California morality is to be sacrificed to the god of supposed tax relief. Only here could a program to control illegal immigration become an attack on children and those least able to defend themselves against the strength of the state. Proposition 187 is a wake-up call for those with high ethical standards. Many people who consider themselves to be ordinary will be called on to be heroes in the face of a self-righteous measure based on deep-seated injustice.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Patrick J. McDonnell and Chip Johnson, "70,000 March Through L.A. Against Prop. 187," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1994, A1.

⁷⁰ March: Ventura Protest Urges Defeat of Prop. 187, *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1994, B1.

⁷¹ "March Against Proposition 187," *Los Angeles Times*, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-10-25-me-54333-story.html>, accessed January 17, 2019.

In a final push days before the election, new protests took place across California. In Monterrey Park, 7,000 people again marched, enveloped in a sea of American flags to portray nativism as unpatriotic and to drive home the idea that this was their home. “California does not need Proposition 187, California needs human rights for all,” said one protester, Juan Jose Gutierrez.⁷² But when protesters felt they weren’t being heard, many took to the streets again, but now with a “hard edge,” now displaying the Mexican flags more prominently, sometimes alongside American flags flying upside down.⁷³

The symbolism was powerful—and likely detrimental to the protestors’ cause. For many Anglo voters, the imagery was damning: proof that immigrants and their supporters did not respect the country, that they were not only unassimilable but hostile to the United States. Even some Hispanics expressed disgust, like S.L. Rubio, who wondered why “if those demonstrators love Mexico with such devotion, why don’t they go back to their country?”⁷⁴ Jose Soto, a Hispanic opponent of 187 provided a rebuttal: “Could it be,” he asked, “that some of these marchers see in the American flag the image of Gov. Pete Wilson and what he represents?”⁷⁵

Labor unions, which had softened their position on immigration since the UFW’s debacle, partly in the recognition that immigrants increasingly made up an important part of their (potential) membership, had to make a difficult moral and strategic choice. Although “a new attitude was emerging within the AFL-CIO,” by the early 1990s, many unionists were

⁷² Robert J. Lopez, “7,000 Attend Protest Denouncing Proposition 187,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1994, A16.

⁷³ “Protests: Hard Edge,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1994, B1.

⁷⁴ S.L. Rubio, “Proposition 187 Has a Particular Irony,” *The (Chula Vista) Star-News*, November 26, 1994, A4.

⁷⁵ Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1994, B12.

still concerned about the influx of immigrants in the country.⁷⁶ Still, some of California's most prominent unions responded with surprising clarity against Proposition 187, and "were some of the main organizers of the huge 150,000-strong march of immigrant workers in Los Angeles in the weeks before Proposition 187 passed."⁷⁷ Even the United Farm Workers, which, just two decades prior had not just voiced concerns about immigration but fought immigrants with vicious tactics, now waged a passionate, well-coordinated door-to-door campaign against 187, led by the charismatic Dolores Huerta, heir to Cesar Chavez and *la causa* and others who had first come to activism through their involvement with the UFW.⁷⁸

In the end, all the grassroots organizing, marches, and demonstrations did not suffice to keep the law off the books. The bill passed with 59 percent of those voting in favor and 41 percent against, with a turnout of about 60 percent. One San Diego journalist bemoaned the vote as "a grotesque development in America, the nation of immigrants."⁷⁹ Almost immediately after its passage, advocates for Hispanic groups went on the offensive. Calling it discriminatory against ethnic minorities, an alliance led by MALDEF and the ACLU filed lawsuits in state courts. Other organizations and states threatened to boycott the state.⁸⁰

At the same time, the Mexican government reacted with much dismay. The outgoing president, Salinas de Gortari, expressed his disappointment, saying "Mexico affirms [its]

⁷⁶ Vernon M. Briggs, *Immigration and American Unionism* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2001), 165.

⁷⁷ Susanne Jonas and Suzie Dodd Thomas, eds., *Immigration: A Civil Rights Issue for the Americas* (Wilmington, DE: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). Bacon, *Illegal People*, 156.

⁷⁸ Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁷⁹ James O. Goldborough, "Pete Wilson's Immigration Dilemma," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, ca. 1994 (date illegible), B7.

⁸⁰ William F. Rawson, "Latinos Making Plans to Stage Boycott of State," *The San Bernardino County Sun*, December 3, 1994; Nuevo Mexicanos en Contra de la Propuesta 187, "Stop Prop 187, Open the Border: A Resource Manual for Organizers," 1995; Associated Press, "Proposition 187 Triggers Numerous Threats of Boycotts," November 18, 1994.

rejection of this xenophobic campaign, and will continue to act in defense of the labor and human rights of our migrant workers.” It was something of an odd scene, Gortari chastising others about human rights, given his reputation as a corrupt politician who had turned a blind eye to years of human rights abuses by police and security forces under his command.⁸¹ Still, it was clear that Proposition 187 posed a diplomatic problem for the United States, which had, the very same year, signed a trilateral trade agreement with the governments of Canada and Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).⁸² The incoming president, Ernesto Zedillo, explained that while the Mexican state “[could not] object to legitimate enforcement of US laws,” his government and his country found reason to believe Mexican citizens and their human rights were now being threatened in the state of California and the United States.⁸³

Though passed with significant support, the law quickly ran into trouble. Legal scholar John Park, writing two years after the proposition first became law noted that it “spoke of undocumented aliens as objects or assets to be used or removed, and not as persons with basic human rights.”⁸⁴ Just three days after the bill passed, Judge W. Matthew Byrne issued a temporary restraining order against the law. And in December of 1994, Judge Mariana Pfaelzer issued a permanent injunction, striking down most of the bill’s provisions.

⁸¹ “Human Rights Watch World Report, 1990: An Annual Review of Developments and the Bush Administration’s Policy on Human Rights Worldwide,” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 21.

⁸² Barbara Driscoll, “Nativism as a Diplomatic Problem: Proposition 187,” *Voices of Mexico*, March 1995, 17.

⁸³ Philip Martin, “Proposition 187 in California,” in Darrell Hamamoto and Rodolfo D. Torres, eds., *New American Destinies: A Reader in Contemporary Asian and Latino Immigration* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 330.

⁸⁴ John SW Park, “Race Discourse and Proposition 187,” *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 2, no. 1 (1996): 175–204.

In doing so, the judicial system had found that Prop 187, though “color-blind” in language, was, as Robin Jacobson has written, “a powerful racial project.”⁸⁵ Indeed, it was not difficult to see through the racialized way in which proponents of Proposition 187 invoked dog-whistle racism. Millions of Californians—and increasingly, Americans across the country, echoed historian Arthur Schlesinger’s admonition about “the cult of ethnicity” and “the attack on the common American identity” posed by immigrants and their families.⁸⁶ “The rhetoric” of pro-187 factions, the legal scholar Juan Perea has written, “sounded very similar to the rhetoric used between 1890 and 1924,” against the racialized immigrants of an earlier era.⁸⁷

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the law was so quickly struck down, and not simply because it was so blatantly racist. And although it was undeniably that, Proposition 187 revealed more complex realities. As Robert Scheer noted, the “dirty secret” behind Prop 187 is that no one in a position of power really cared about reining in illegal immigration. Did people really want to create a segregationist regime “far more onerous than that which existed under George Wallace in Alabama?” Did people really want to create “an untouchable subclass” made up of “the children or women who clean our homes and raise our children”? Did the state really want to deny, in the cruelest fashion, medical care “to those who harvest our crops, bus our dishes, wash our cars and every night leave spotless the very office towers who top executives support the governor behind this mean proposal”?

⁸⁵ Robin Dale Jacobson, *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate over Immigration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xxi.

⁸⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, Rev Sub edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 125.

⁸⁷ Juan F. Perea, ed., *Immigrants Out!: The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 5.

Scheer scoffed and insisted that were the state to somehow actually succeed in deporting or forcing the undocumented to leave, its economy would quickly collapse.⁸⁸ Or as the popular writer Molly Ivins put it in her *Washington Post* column, “blaming ‘messakins’” was merely a “simple solution to a complex problem,” because the country actually benefited from porous borders, such that the law was “guaranteed to make everything worse.”⁸⁹ Instead of honest policy, she said it was a mere political ploy to “send a message” to the federal government and to the immigrant community.⁹⁰

If the message wasn’t simply that Americans wanted to get rid of Mexicans, what was it? Perhaps it was best summarized by Milton Friedman, the Nobel-prize winning libertarian economist. Asked whether he supported open borders, Friedman responded this way: “Look, for example, at the obvious, immediate, practical example of illegal Mexican immigration. Now, that Mexican immigration, over the border, is a good thing. It’s a good thing for the illegal immigrants. It’s a good thing for the United States. It’s a good thing for the citizens of the country. But, it’s only good so long as it’s illegal.”⁹¹ In other words, immigrants were economic assets when they served to provide cheap labor and indirect economic subsidies while having no rights, but they would be liabilities if given political and human rights and especially access to social safety nets.

⁸⁸ Robert Scheer, “The Dirty Secret Behind Proposition 187: If Wilson Was Serious about Illegal Immigration, He’d Put Muscle Behind the Labor Laws,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 1994, sec. B7.

⁸⁹ Molly Ivins, “Blaming Messakins,” *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1994, online archive (URL unstable).

⁹⁰ “Proposition 187 and the Law of Unintended Consequences,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1994, M4.

⁹¹ Milton Friedman, “What is America?” in “Milton Friedman Speaks” lecture, sponsored by the University of Chicago, October 3, 1977, https://miltonfriedman.hoover.org/friedman_images/Collections/2016c21/BP_1978_2.pdf. Also, see email from Milton Friedman to Henryk A. Kowalczyk, October 16, 2006, <https://www.freedomofmigration.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Friedman-20061016.pdf>. (Both accessed March 1, 2019.)

Friedman may not have understood the distinction in racial terms, but many Americans did. And increasingly, they applied Friedman's logic to both immigration policy and ethnic relations, interpreting any rights gained by immigrants and more broadly, Latinos, as a threat to their own social position.

California in the 1990s was not George Wallace's Alabama. But Proposition 187 did lay bare the racial tensions that had engulfed California. Although the provisions of 187 were never enacted, the passage of the law had a powerful effect on race relations. Emboldened by the support 187 had received, some Anglos took "matters into their own hands" in the weeks after the proposition passed. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported, for example, that a Hispanic cook in a Santa Paula restaurant was threatened with a "citizen's arrest" by an Anglo customer. In Los Angeles, children in an elementary school were assigned an essay about their parents' immigration status. In Palm Spring, a pharmacist refused to fill a prescription for someone s/he thought might not be a legal resident. And hate crimes, according to the *Monitor*, spiked in the weeks that followed.⁹²

And what to make of the third of Latinos who voted for Proposition 187, like Art Alvarez, a 28-year old from Alhambra, who felt "too many illegal immigrants take advantage of public services"?⁹³ Hispanic opponents of 187 called it "disheartening" that, as Baca said, "our own people have not grasped the simple fact that Wilson, and the proponents of 187, are not talking about immigration but are talking about us; our wives, parents, brothers,

⁹² Daniel B. Wood, "California's Prop. 187 Puts Illegal Immigrants on Edge," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 22, 1994, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1994/1122/22021.html>, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁹³ Efrain Hernandez, Jr. and Richard Simon, "Despite Gains, Latino Voters Still Lack Clout," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1994, A39.

sisters and more importantly their children and their children's children."⁹⁴ But there was something good to come out of it, he suggested: "One thing we can be thankful for is that Wilson and the [Republicans] have done that [sic] we have not been able to do with our own people: Wake them Up" [sic].⁹⁵ Latinos had come to feel under attack by Proposition 187. "For many Latinos," the law would mean "harassment, or the possibility of it, virtually every time they leave home."⁹⁶

Pete Wilson and his conservative allies, predicted Baca, had "made a grave political error. For us, there are no more back doors."⁹⁷ In the wake of Proposition 187, many Hispanics, even those who had voted in favor of the viewed that the door had been "open too wide" and that felt threatened by new entrants challenged their assimilation and advancement, began to feel the negative effects of "the new nativism."⁹⁸ Whatever reservations or concerns Hispanics may have had about illegal immigration, the lessons from Proposition 187 was that all people of brown skin were fair game for those experiencing racial and economic anxiety. Republican Hispanic Jose Legaspi, looking back at what 187 meant for the party, summarized the message Pete Wilson sent to the Hispanic community: "He was saying we don't work hard." Another Republican Hispanic, Gregory Rodriguez,

⁹⁴ Herman Baca interview, "Governor Wilson/Prop 187 Is Not about Immigration, but about Racial War in California," *La Prensa San Diego*, October 28, 1994, Baca Papers, loose materials, <http://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8124229j/1.pdf>, accessed June 7, 2018.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "And the INS Sweeps Go On," *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1986, 16.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Scot Lehigh, "Is the Door Open Too Wide?," *Focus*, June 23, 1996; David A. Price, "Anti-Immigration Immigrants," *Investor's Business Daily*, September 9, 1997, 1.

remembered thinking, “it was a big civics lesson. People felt they were being maligned as a group. We were being called lazy and loafers.”⁹⁹

In this way, Latinos had achieved a kind of victory in defeat. Although they had lost at the ballot, opponents of Proposition 187 were emboldened by the legal challenge and eventual striking down of the law, such that many saw an opportunity to make the short-term political defeat a long-term social movement. Immigrants’ rights activists vowed to take the lessons of Proposition 187 seriously and insisted “the passage of Prop 187 did not mean the end of efforts to increase our voting strength, but just the beginning of a new phase.”¹⁰⁰ By January of 1995, individuals and groups who had emerged with new energy to fight anti-discriminatory and anti-immigrant efforts, which had to begin, according to Armando Navarro, with “eliminating confusion, non-synchronized efforts, and apathy” in order to create “a unified national Latino counter-offensive against the nativist anti-immigrant forces.”¹⁰¹

But the quest for a united front was less a moment of triumph than a realization that the effort to stop unauthorized migration to the United States would continue by other means. Among them was Operation Gatekeeper, which under liberal president Bill Clinton, increased the number of border agents from 4,200 in 1994 to almost 10,000 in 2000 and double that in 2010, along with a massive budget increase that doubled from \$400 million to \$800 million in 1993 and 1997, respectively, and reaching \$7.6 billion in 2010. The tighter

⁹⁹ Alex Nowrasteh, “Proposition 187 Turned California Blue,” Cato at Liberty, July 20, 2016, <https://www.cato.org/blog/proposition-187-turned-california-blue>.

¹⁰⁰ “News from the Political Battleground,” ca. 1995, Baca Papers, Box 32, Folder 1.

¹⁰¹ Armando Navarro, “A Post 187 Strategy for Mobilization,” January 13, 1995, Baca papers, Box 32, Folder 1.

security led to more dangerous crossing that over the next decade resulted in upwards of 5,000 immigrant deaths.¹⁰²

Although less intentionally punitive, Operation Gatekeeper was in line with efforts like Proposition 187 in sharpening the division between Mexico and the United States and their respective peoples. As Joseph Nevins pointed out, these developments cemented the national belief “that the illegal deserves nothing from the United States, regardless of his contribution to the society might be or what his or her rights as outlined in the U.S. Constitution, in the wide body of American law, or in the various international human rights covenants.”¹⁰³ Or as Alicia Camacho sees it, “The migrant presence would indelibly mark ethnic Mexicans in opposition to the ideal,” and others might add, to the deserving “citizen-subject of the U.S. nation.”¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, few actually believed in, or indeed, wanted, a closed border.¹⁰⁵ Rather, immigration control policy served to separate deserving citizens from non-deserving, and therefore easily exploitable, “illegal” people, who are also easily disposable and deportable.¹⁰⁶

Two laws passed in 1996 made that clear. One was the Illegal Immigration Reform and

¹⁰² Sarah E. Keller, “Immigration and Naturalization Service,” in Stacy Lee, ed., *Mexico and the United States, vol. 1* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2003), 415; Gene Cubbison, “Operation Gatekeeper, 15 Years Later,” *NBC 7 San Diego*, September 20, 2009, <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/politics/Operation-Gatekeeper-at-15-62939412.html>; Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives, “U.S. Border Patrol’s Implementation of ‘Operation Gatekeeper’: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology.” (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997); “INS and the Executive Office for Immigration Review: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundred Seventh Congress” (U.S. Government Printing Office, May 15, 2001).

¹⁰³ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War On “Illegals” and the Remaking of the U.S. - Mexico Boundary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 177.

¹⁰⁴ Alicia Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁰⁵ Patrick W. Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 176.

¹⁰⁶ Joshua Linder, “The Amnesty Effect: Evidence from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act,” *The Public Purpose*, Spring 2011, 13–30.

Immigrant Responsibility Act, which made legalization more difficult and deportation easier, particularly for immigrants convicted of even minor crimes.¹⁰⁷ The other was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the law that signaled, according to President Bill Clinton, that the “era of big government [was] over” and that restricted, even for legal permanent residents, to access social safety nets.¹⁰⁸

Yet, while rejecting unauthorized immigrants in principle, the United States continued to enact policies that necessarily spurred immigration. Extensive studies, for example, have explained the extent to which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) triggered a massive wave of migration post-1994 by, among other things, displacing rural farmers in Mexico who were suddenly forced to compete, without subsidies, with large U.S. producers. As a result, David Bacon has argued, “Economic desperation is at the root of these political and social movements, and is a major source of pressure on people to migrate.”¹⁰⁹ As “ecological victims” as well as victims of capitalism, Mexicans have historically been forced to migrate by conditions imposed upon them. As Timothy Henderson has succinctly put it, “immigration from Mexico is a creature of American capitalism.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ “1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act,” Pub. L. No. 104–208; 110 Stat. 3009–546, H.R. 3610 (1996).

¹⁰⁸ President Bill Clinton’s State of the Union Address, January 23, 1996, video in the *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/clinton-says-era-of-big-government-is-over-in-1996-state-of-the-union/2014/01/22/da7c0cb4-83b6-11e3-8099-9181471f7aaf_video.html?utm_term=.54cbc5899d19, accessed January 19, 2019; “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” Pub. L. No. 104–193, 110 Stat. 2105 (1996); Audrey Singer, “Welfare Reform and Immigrants: A Policy Review,” in *Immigrants, Welfare Reform, and the Poverty of Policy*, eds. Philip Kretsedemas and Ana Aparicio (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 21.

¹⁰⁹ David Bacon, *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 23.

¹¹⁰ Timothy J. Henderson, *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 4.

While this has long been the case to some degree, the 1990s and the years since offered peculiarities. For one, it was not only Mexican immigrants who were streaming into the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Central Americans joined them, having been displaced by civil war, crime, and continued economic suffering—much of it caused by U.S. military intervention and political meddling in the region by in the decades prior.¹¹¹ By the year 2000, about two million Central American immigrants resided in the United States.¹¹²

Like their Mexican counterparts, undocumented Central Americans were routinely exploited in the United States, but they also had to contend with abuse in Mexico, where smugglers, gangs, and the notoriously corrupt Mexican police routinely abused and exploited them.¹¹³ And not only were traditional areas like the Southwest affected, but there was increased migration to the Midwest and South, even as through the 1990s, the overwhelming majority of undocumented immigrants, some eighty percent, still lived in five states: California, New York, Texas, Illinois, and Florida.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Karina Oliva Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, and Ester E. Hernández, eds., *U.S. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 153.

¹¹² Gabriel Lesser and Jeanne Batalova, “Central American Immigrants in the United States” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017).

¹¹³ María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 159.

¹¹⁴ Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago*, Reprint (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity and Nation, 1916-39* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933*, Revised (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Michael Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); Raymond A. Mohl, “Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22, no. 4 (July 1, 2003): 31–66; Julie M. Weise, “Dispatches from the ‘Viejo’ New South: Historicizing Recent Latino Migrations,” *Latino Studies* 10, no. 1–2 (Spring 2012): 41–59; Julie M. Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South since 1910* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Perla M. Guerrero, *Nuevo South: Latinas/os, Asians, and the Remaking of Place* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Chavez, *Shadowed Lives*, 13.

Although Proposition 187 failed to pass legal muster, and although the media and many academics continued to extol the virtues of immigration in all its forms, Americans continued to feel a great distance between “the economy” and “their economy.”¹¹⁵ Polls consistently showed that Americans across the country wanted stringent limits on immigration. And although many of these polls were funded by anti-immigrant organizations like FAIR, the Center for Immigration Studies, and other less-than-objective sources, many other polls came to similar conclusions.¹¹⁶

By the mid-2000s, perhaps as much or more than at the height of the Chicano movement, Latinos came to see immigration as their problem, and to interpret attacks on immigrants as attacks on them and their communities. Some social scientists even suggested that the backlash to Proposition 187 was what turned California blue (and has kept it so). They even had a name for the phenomenon: the 187 Effect.¹¹⁷ More importantly, the furor over Prop 187 spread well beyond California. As a result of it and copycat measures, Latinos all over the country began to interpret legislation to curtail immigration as racist and discriminatory.

Voting patterns were a testament to how Latinos began to view Republicans as hostile to them, even hate-driven, and to align more consistently and in large numbers with Democrats. This was significant not least because stances on immigration came to outweigh

¹¹⁵ “The Immigrants,” July 13, 1992, FAIR Records, Box 181, Folder “Economy”; David Frum, “Does Immigration Harm Working Americans?,” *The Atlantic*, January 5, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/01/does-immigration-harm-working-americans/384060/>, accessed March 1, 2019; Thomas B. Edsall, “What Does Immigration Actually Cost Us?,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/29/opinion/campaign-stops/what-does-immigration-actually-cost-us.html>, accessed March 2, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Frank Green, “FAIR Immigrant Poll Called Unfair by Some,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 20, 1992. FAIR Records Box 179, Folder “Roper Poll” and “Roper Poll Clips.”

¹¹⁷ Matt Barreto, “The Prop 187 Effect: How the California GOP Lost Their Way and Implications for 2014 and Beyond,” *Latino Decisions* (blog), accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/10/17/prop187effect/>, accessed October 16, 2018.

other concerns. While many Hispanics and Latinos were socially conservative on issues like gay marriage and abortion, they continued to throw their support behind Democrats who advocated for immigrants' rights. Even the AFL-CIO, which had earlier resisted making immigrants' rights part of its platform and work finally reversed its position in 2000, notes Caroline Wang, "following a decade of intense debate within the federation, forming a pro-immigrant rights coalition with Hispanic advocates."¹¹⁸

This newfound unity was put on display nationally in 2003, when nine hundred immigrants' rights activists traveled across the country, passing through over one hundred cities, to demand a number of rights for immigrants, including a path to citizenship, workplace justice, family reunification.¹¹⁹ Further efforts to bring light to the injustices immigrants continued to suffer coalesced in 2006, during the so-called "May Day marches," which according to David Bacon, "provided a vehicle in which immigrants protest their lack of human rights and unions call for greater solidarity among workers facing the same corporate system," finally promising to create the robust movement that activists like Bert Corona, Miguel Pendas, and Herman Baca had been working to develop for decades.¹²⁰ But the marches, which drew hundreds of thousands of people across the nation, from the half a million in Dallas to the 50,000 in Salt Lake City, did not result in policy change, in large part

¹¹⁸ Carolyn Wong, *Lobbying for Inclusion: Rights Politics and the Making of Immigration Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 77.

¹¹⁹ "We Will All Survive Together: Lessons from the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 2, no. 1 (2003): 115.

¹²⁰ David Bacon, *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 212.

simply because despite growing numbers, undocumented aliens had no political rights to leverage.¹²¹

On the other hand, the nativist impulses of vast numbers of Americans, the same that had propelled Proposition 187 to state law (albeit, immediately annulled), continued to surface, and more fiercely than ever. In fact, while Proposition 187 marked a conclusion of sorts, it also marked the beginning of our current political moment, one in which bizarrely but effectively, racist, xenophobic, and hateful elements of the right, appropriated, twisted, and emulated the tactics of the left, as it spoke of “white rights,” of white oppression and of conservative victimhood. Navarro, the nationalist Chicano and political scientist, had anticipated this as well. In the aftermath of Proposition 187, when he called for a renewed and vibrant immigrants’ rights movement, he made clear that he was doing so because he felt “an ominous message of a powerful nativist presence and movement” that would act “as a catalyst” for anti-immigrant and white nationalist forces across the nation.¹²² Recent developments have confirmed Navarro’s fears, but activists have not remained silent, as the millions who marched in 2006 and in the years since have made clear.

For better for or for worse, immigration policy (and immigrants’ rights) had become a central debate in the United States in the twenty-first century, and one that would not simply disappear if ignored. From the streets of East Los Angeles to the corridors of state houses and the halls of Congress, this much was clear. In fact, when he was asked to anticipate what the next civil rights struggle in the United States would be, veteran civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis, did not have to think too hard: “comprehensive

¹²¹ Mortiga Lohn, “Hundreds of Thousands Rally for Immigrants’ Rights,” *The Indiana Gazette*, April 10, 2006, 1.

¹²² Navarro, “A Post 187 Strategy”

immigration reform. It doesn't make sense for us to have millions of people living in fear,” he told *Time* magazine recently.¹²³

But as this dissertation has showed, if just and reasonable immigration reform is to succeed, it will be not only because of honest debate, cross-party negotiation, and smart policy but also because of the hard work of people on the ground, activists like immigrant Javiera Infante, an undocumented woman who led young people in the 2006 May Day marches in Los Angeles, and who continues to believe—like Luisa Moreno, Bert Corona, Chole Alatorre, Miguel Pendás, and the many other activists in this story from decades ago—that even in the face of mighty obstacles, “we have a chance.”¹²⁴

¹²³ “10 Questions: John Lewis,” *Time*, 56, April 10, 2017, 56.

¹²⁴ Javiera Infante, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, June 11, 2014.

Conclusion

When I began this project several years ago, I hoped to write a story of triumph: of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants joining together to build a social movement for ethnic and social justice that fundamentally transformed the way the country talked about, thought about, and more importantly, treated immigrants. I also expected to be able to write a hopeful conclusion. But in writing this final piece of my dissertation, as I do in 2019, in the age of Donald Trump, a man elected in no small part by exploiting people's xenophobic tendencies and racial anxieties, that becomes a more difficult task. At this very moment, migrant parents and children remain separated in government custody, often in what can only be described as human cages.¹

I am the son of immigrants and an immigrant myself. And working on this dissertation in the midst of such injustices has not been easy—but it has been a useful reminder of how impossible it is for historians to avoid their own identities, life stories, and experiences, as well as the concerns of their day—in thinking and writing about the past.

That is not to say there aren't inspiring developments or triumphs to consider. This story has always reminded me of a passage I read in Joseph Heller's masterpiece, *Catch-22*, many years ago while deployed in the Middle East. In the novel, a young soldier named Nately spends much of his time arguing with an old Italian known to be something of a contrarian. Nately is patriotic, brave, and deferential to the law. The old man ridicules him for that and tells him that his idealism is going to get him killed, that he will not make it to old age if he continues to play by established rules. Nately responds, proud of himself, that

¹ David A. Graham, "Are Children Being Kept in 'Cages' at the Border?," *The Atlantic*, June 18, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/ceci-nest-pas-une-cage/563072/>, accessed June 25, 2018.

“it is better to die on one’s feet than live on one’s knees.” The old man mocks him. “You have it backward,” he tells Nately. “It is better to live on one’s feet than die on one’s knees.” That’s the way the saying goes, or at least, the man implies, the way it should go.²

This dissertation has presented the story of Mexican Americans’ shifting attitudes toward unsanctioned immigrants, from a time in the 1950s when leading activists worried about a “wetback invasion” to a more recent position that many Mexican Americans have adopted, wherein they have seen themselves and the undocumented as “one people without borders.” Considering the importance of intra-ethnic debate to the larger contours of immigration, ethnic, and social history of the United States, I have been struck by how little scholarly attention this matter has garnered. The last major historical treatment of the subject, historian David Gutiérrez’s groundbreaking *Walls and Mirrors*, was published nearly a quarter of a century ago.

Perhaps because it is so foundational and seemingly definitive, few have bothered to engage with his interpretations. Certainly, his framework serves as the foundation of my own work. But *Walls and Mirrors* was written in a particular time and place, and much has changed since then. The story has continued, so in the simplest sense, my dissertation extends the chronology and timeframe of the story of Mexican American-immigrant relations.

In another sense, however, I seek to complicate Gutiérrez’s narrative more generally. For one, Gutiérrez’s generalization that middle-class Mexican Americans historically have been more wary of immigrants than working class ones seems less clear now than it did in the 1990s. As I show in my second chapter, the history of the UFW—a quintessentially working-class organization—and its immigrant crusade in the 1970s casts doubt on this

² Joseph Heller and Christopher Buckley, *Catch-22: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 233.

generalization. Instead, I argue that it was less class and more social and political context that defined Mexican American attitudes toward immigrants.

Similarly, and partly because it was published in 1995, just after Proposition 187 was passed in California but well before it was struck down, Gutiérrez could not have accounted for the unintended consequences of the growth and development of a pro-immigrants' rights stance among Mexican Americans and other Latinos, the "sin fronteras" moment he writes about in his conclusion. He was too close temporally to the moment to be able to see how, while the "sin fronteras" posture represented a promising ethnic social movement, it was also fueling the rise of a rabid right-wing, anti-immigrant and white nationalist movement nationally.

And in fairness, neither could the actors that I write about.

Like the old man in Heller's novel, the activists whose story I told here began in the late 1960s to rewrite the rules of the game. They discarded old notions about unauthorized Mexican immigrants and beliefs about how their coming to the United States would affect those already north of the border. These activists did so by crafting new ways of conceptualizing and approaching the problem and by imagining new and better solutions.

Bert Corona, in particular, believed that in a just world, one not driven by greed or exploitation, all people could live on their feet, as sisters and brothers, "without borders." Indeed, the phrase "without borders" in this context is often attributed to mean that ethnic Mexicans north and south of the border were a single people divided by an imaginary line—a people that had much more in common than what set them apart.

It certainly meant that.

But a closer look at Corona’s ideology, and an important point I think scholars have largely missed, reveals that it actually meant much more to him and people like him: it meant that *all people* were one people without borders. It was not just borders that formed unnatural boundaries between people, Corona thought. It was “race” that divided them. And yet, in the post-Civil Rights era, race-based claims and the promise of racial unity seemed like vehicles for social justice, and activists like Corona fought for racial justice *as* racialized people.

Historians have written extensively about the ways in which immigration policy has itself always been a racialized project, but they have paid far less attention to the causes and consequences of the ways in which pro-immigrant activists have also racialized themselves. It is that notion—so simple and yet so easy to miss—that I hope to further develop as I wrap up this iteration of the project and move on to what comes next.

In fact, as I completed a draft of this dissertation, I found in the last of my archival trips a question that I hope to answer in the future, with this project serving as a starting point. The question, asked by a political scientist working on human rights issues, was this: “does the institutionalization of race . . . lock victims and advocates into the use of racial categories in order to obtain relief, even when these racial categories are constructed, false, and harmful?” At this juncture in time, I have only partial answers.³ Biologically speaking, “race” is effectively a meaningless concept. Humans of “distinct” “races” often share more genetic markers with geographically distant people than they do with those closer to them in proximity.⁴ In the most fundamental sense, therefore, it is clear

³ “Work Log,” CSHR Records, 1981-2004, Box 6, Folder “Rethinking Human Rights Course, 2002,”

⁴ D. J. Witherspoon et al., “Genetic Similarities Within and Between Human Populations,” *Genetics* 176, no. 1 (May 2007): 351–59, <https://doi.org/10.1534/genetics.106.067355>, accessed April 2, 2019.

that race is, as Corona and others have implied, an invented and unnatural social boundary, like borders themselves.

Yet, like borders, race has, over time, become real in ways that no one can easily escape. Activists understood that too. The process of racialization that began hundreds of years ago to subjugate slaves and colonized people cannot be easily dismissed simply as “constructed,” for once barriers are built, they are difficult—though never impossible—to break. The ideology one finds in this text, then, can be read and interpreted in various ways, with profound consequences for how we think about, treat, and respond to the notion of race.

The complexity of living with and struggling against notions like borders and race, which are at once real and imagined, proved to be a momentous challenge for activists throughout the 1960s—and that continues to be true in the present day. When students, activists, or colleagues have made the case that borders are “socially constructed,” I have always pushed back, telling them that they are actually quite real. I know because I had to cross one. I know because my father risked his life crossing it for decades.

At the level of the abstract, of political philosophy, the idea of a world “without borders” is both logical and sound. And it is a beautiful, poetic idea, but one that clashes against the realities of lived experience. Dealing with race is, similarly, not without its problems. In the 20th century, Mexican-descended people, like others before them, understood themselves in racialized ways. Much to the dismay of those in power, ethnic Mexicans, by the 1960s, began to turn the tables on racists. They began to take pride in their *raza*, in their culture and in their history.

Until the 1950s, leading Mexican Americans had hoped to “become” white, as previous waves of immigrants (mostly from Europe) had. By the 1960s, they came face to face with the reality that this might never happen. But the civil rights movement promised to change the relationship between race and citizenship by making rights explicitly available to people of all colors and “races.” It was then that the Mexican American strategy changed, and as Mexican Americans embraced their racialized identities, they opened up new ways of thinking about immigrants as well.

The movement for immigrants’ rights grew and pointed toward a future when ethnic Mexicans on both sides of the border would fight side-by-side against racism, exploitation, and oppression. But the pitfalls of race-based claims quickly became apparent. By embracing unsanctioned, undocumented, and right-less people, Mexican Americans did not—could not—emancipate their immigrant brethren. Instead, they too became “otherized” subjects, foreign and un-American.

Pro-immigrants’ rights Mexican Americans and human rights advocates who pushed a “without borders” ideology succeeded in shifting the conversation about immigration among ever-growing numbers of brown Americans and progressive allies. But they were not able to transform the context in which this conversation happened. The United States remained a country where economic and political power remained concentrated in the hands of the few and where racial tensions continued to fuel nativist resentment. The 1970s, in particular, as historians of the time have noted, dealt a blow to organized labor and to race and class consciousness.

Whereas the 1960s appeared to be moving in a positive direction for people of color and working-class people, by the late 1970s, their hopes had been dashed, their economic

and political power greatly diminished. Even if they could find a seat at the table, activists had too few bargaining chips. This led to strange moments and odd coalitions. For example, in the lead-up to immigration reform legislation in 1986, Mexican Americans worked alongside employers to prevent the passage of employer sanctions, bizarrely, because these Mexican Americans worried about those very employers discriminating against them if sanctioned were enacted.

I pay significant attention to immigration reform in 1986 for a couple of reasons. One is simply that while historians like Mae Ngai, Kelly L. Hernández, Natalia Molina, and others have done an excellent job of explaining the significance of the period between 1924 and 1965, few have adequately registered the significance of IRCA. An exception is historian Ana Minian, who has argued that IRCA transformed the United States into, as she calls it, a “golden cage” for immigrants.⁵

Yet, in painting IRCA as merely another iteration of racist immigration legislation, we lose sight of the ways in which the law actually Americanized large numbers of formerly undocumented people and changed the lives of millions of immigrants and their families, both in the United States and in Mexico. We also miss the ways in which IRCA was different from previous legislation. Unlike Jonson-Reed, which was undeniably racist, or Hart-Celler, which was explicitly *anti-racist*, the architects, defenders, and opponents of IRCA generally framed it in grander terms, even as stakeholders regularly talked past each other.

⁵ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Kelly L. Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Ana R. Minian, “Undocumented Lives: A History of Mexico-U.S. Migration, 1965-1986” (Stanford University, 2012).

IRCA is also important because it led to the racial battleground that was California by the 1990s. As Mark Brilliant has explained, the fragmentation of “racial liberalism” in the state after the 1960s, and the ascendancy of the Republican Party there, made California the perfect place for conservative and reactionary experimentation.⁶ There, anti-immigrant forces forged a counter-offensive on ethnic and especially immigrants’ rights. And while a number of scholars like Robin D. Jacobson and Leo Chavez have explored the “new nativism” against the “Latino threat,” the connection between what happened in Washington in ’86 and what came to pass in California in ’94 has not been fully or adequately explored, and neither have its broader implications for the rise of a reactionary and xenophobic movement after the 1990s that began to use the “failure” of immigration reform and the Mexican American rejection of citizenship-based claims as a blunt instrument against immigrants and people of color more broadly.⁷

I argue that IRCA did not “fail” insofar as it did exactly what it was supposed to do, which was find compromise and to give something to everyone.⁸ Yet opponents of immigrants’ rights were able to claim that IRCA had merely encouraged “illegality.” Rather than accept it as an example of how laws require compromise, negotiation, and constant updating, IRCA became, in the polarized public imagination, simply a failure. And by framing it as a failure, the right was able to go after immigrants like never before. California

⁶ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

⁷ Robin Dale Jacobson, *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate over Immigration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998).

⁸ David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), ix.

was their first target, as the “new Ellis Island” and a place where Republicans had found tremendous electoral success.

In one sense, what happened in California was not a total disaster for the cause of immigrants’ rights and for Mexican Americans and Latinos. The debate over Proposition 187 revealed that by the mid-1990s, most Mexican Americans and Latinos had come to embrace the cause of the undocumented, something that was never a given. It was not uncommon to see Mexican Americans waving Mexican flags at anti-187 protests, a symbolic and defiant display meant to leave no doubt where they stood on the issue. And although Proposition 187 passed, it was quickly struck down. What’s more, the backlash against the racist law shifted broader attitudes in the state and at least in part, helped turn the state “blue.”

But here we find yet another blind spot in recent works on immigration and ethnic history: in fighting for immigrants’ rights and in joining their immigrant brethren in a struggle “without borders,” these activists ceded the vocabulary—and the political tools—of citizenship and civil rights to the reactionary right. The limits of this approach were evident by the time IRCA was signed and became even more glaring in the 1990s and at the turn of the new century.

So even as a growing pro-immigrant consciousness grew in Chicano, Mexican American, Latino circles, in statehouses and in Washington, Latinx immigrants became a bigger target and a more useful boogeyman than ever. Reactionaries and xenophobes, from Pete Wilson and the California Coalition for Immigration Reform to Minutemen vigilantes and Donald Trump, painted immigrants and their allies as dangerous foreigners who posed a threat to the health, economy, and way of life of the United States. In some ways, then, we

end—ironically—where we began, with the language of “What Price Wetbacks?” once again being used to denigrate, dehumanize, and delegitimize the lives and struggles of marginalized people in the United States. Only this time, it comes not from Mexican Americans, but from anxious Anglos, white nationalists, and even the White House.

None of this is to suggest that history moves in circular motion, of course. Attention to these ironies and contradictions should not be taken to mean that a certain history has been set in motion that must move now in a predefined course. As the actors in my dissertation show, the course of history is shaped by the actions and reactions of those who struggle to shape their own lives and the lives of those around them.

This story is still being written. The work of individuals, families, communities, activists, organizations, policymakers, and will continue to define this story. My hope is that the lessons in this dissertation—historical and political—help offer new and different ways of imagining the world, and that the world that emerges from these relationships and conversations is one that, in time, allows a future historian decades hence to write a story of triumph, the kind I had hoped to write.

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Ku Klux Klan Papers
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Theodore Hesburgh Papers

University of Texas-Austin
LLILAS Benson Latin American Collection
George I. Sánchez Papers
José Ángel Gutiérrez Papers
League of United Latin American Citizens Archives
Oliver Douglas Weeks Collection
Raza Unida Party Records
Dolph Briscoe Center for American History
Good Neighbor Commission Records
Henry B. Gonzalez Papers
Onda Latina Oral History Project
Texas Observer Records

The University of Wisconsin
Foreign Relations Archive

Wayne State University
United Farm Workers Information and Research Files

Abbreviations:

ACPFB Records: Records of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

ACR Collection: Anti-Civil Rights Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Biography

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