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**Contracting Freedom: Race, Empire, and U.S. Labor Importation
Programs, 1942-1964**

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Abstract

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This dissertation reviews the historical interpretations of “guestworkers” that emerged with the creation of the labor importation agreements between the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean during and after World War II, to expose “guestworker” programs as a pivotal axis in the U.S. imperial framework of the twentieth century. Cast as facilitating individual salvation and international reciprocity, U.S. migrant labor importation policies with Mexico, Jamaica, Bahamas, Honduras, Barbados, and Puerto Rico emphasized the labor contract, bilateral agreements between nation-states, and equal rights, all of which appeared as advances from older labor arrangements forged under colonialism and slavery. Through various debates between and among U.S. government officials, leftist labor leaders, civil rights activists, and agribusiness employers, this dissertation examines how they all, in contradictory ways, celebrated and projected these labor programs as marking a new global age of freedom. This emergent rhetoric of freedom surrounding labor migrations to the United States facilitated, obscured, legitimated,

and extended global racial and colonial dynamics in the post-World War II era. To expose how empire and race drove the programs, each chapter places the labor programs within the context of their formative moments: U.S imperial interventions in Latin America in the nineteenth century, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, slavery and indentured servitude in the British Caribbean colonies, the U.S. labor and civil rights movements, and the movements for independence in the British West Indies. In viewing the co-constitutive logic of “guestworker” labor programs within these formative contexts, it reveals that the “break” from empire that the labor programs seemed to signify in the 1940s was hardly a break at all. It then addresses how “guestworkers” and their advocates struggled to compel the state to fulfill the “freedom” of the labor programs during the long civil rights movement. Within the daily struggles of migrant workers and anticolonial activists, we can begin to find glimpses of wider visions of social justice that challenged the mandates of the U.S. liberal state, beyond universal “freedom” as it is framed by “rights” under nation.

“Contracting Freedom” demonstrates that the racial formation of the U.S. “guestworker” was much more than a minor footnote to U.S. race relations, usually assumed to matter only along the West Coast with the advent of the Bracero Program. Instead, the “guestworker” proved central to the reconstruction of race, class, and nation during the mid-twentieth century, by upsetting and then recreating social and cultural dualisms that lay at the heart of American identities and imperial subjectivities: foreign and domestic, freedom and slavery, citizen and noncitizen, guest and alien.

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For my daughter, Aurelia

Introduction

On September 29, 1942, several hundred Mexican contract workers or “braceros” boarded a train to work in U.S. southwestern agricultural fields as an alleged part of the allied war effort during World War II. The Mexican Secretary of Labor, Francisco Trujillo Gurria, said to those on board, “each of you is to regard himself as a fighter for democracy, even if we cannot give you guns. You must not regard this trip to the United States as merely an economic opportunity for yourselves. You go to aid the common cause of our united war....” When the workers arrived in places like Stockton, California, and El Paso, Texas, Mexican consuls came out to greet them and exhorted them to give their best efforts to produce “food for victory.” U.S. radios and newspapers announced, “you can do your share by fighting as hard on the food production front as the American soldiers are fighting on the battle fronts of the world.”¹ A year later, in 1943, Jamaican and Bahamian workers loaded airplanes in the Caribbean to journey to the Eastern United States, Florida, and the Midwest for the same purpose, with the U.S. War Department lending its planes to transport the workers. As thousands of Jamaican men went to work in northern rural communities from Iowa to Connecticut, they also faced an enthusiastic welcome from locals, with military bands, invitations to church, access to country clubs, and more community-governed parties—hailed as heroes and fighters in the allied war effort.² This was a very successful government campaign that resulted in the importation and cyclical migrations of two million migrant workers from Mexico and hundreds of thousands of Caribbean

¹ Speech (Discurso) by Sr. Lic. Francisco Trujillo Gurria, Sec. del Trabajo y Provision Social, to a contingent of Mexican workers that went to the United States on May 13, 1943, Box 17, Folder 8, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries (EGP); Anne Roller Issler, “Good Neighbors Lend a Hand: Our Mexican Workers,” *Survey Graphic Magazine* 32, no. 10 (October 1943): 389-394, Box 24, Folder 9, EGP.

² For the public glorification of the Jamaican migrant laborer, see Cindy Hahamovich *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 58-63.

workers to the United States between 1942 and 1964, guestworker importation programs that still exist today under new guises and forms.³

These workers were the product of a series of binational agreements signed between the United States, Mexico, and the British colonial government in the Caribbean, agreements that allowed the U.S. to import labor from Mexico, Jamaica, British Honduras, Barbados, and the Bahamas to work in the farm fields of the United States. At a time when a perceived labor shortage threatened U.S. food production, the state proposed a form of hemispheric labor extraction and managed migration that would, according to all governments involved, produce enough food to ensure that the United States could win the war against fascism and racism, saving the world from slavery and oppression.⁴ Public officials considered the workers “guests,” “allies,” “neighbors,” and “friends,” journeying to the U.S. in mutual understanding and free will, as propagated through a language of reciprocal international ties, international agreement, and labor contract. The workers often recited these themes, articulating this discursive framework at “fiestas” or parties designed to welcome them into U.S. rural communities, proud to help produce “vital foods” as their patriotic mission. In May 1945, a group of Mexican contract workers informed President Harry S. Truman, “we dedicate ourselves to the war effort

³ The number of participants in each labor program fluctuated each year. For example, 38,345 Mexicans contracted in 1948, 445,197 in 1956, 177,736 in 1964. Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2, 232.

⁴ Office of War Information (OWI) Report, “A National Theme for Labor Day, 1942,” RG 208, Records of the Office of War Information, Box 616, U.S. National Archives (NARA). The Office of War Information made a huge celebration out of Labor Day in 1942, promoting the theme “free labor will win” to news and other media agencies. They maintained “free labor challenges the deluded Axis idea that Slave Labor can out-produce Free Labor. With a resounding promise that Free Labor will win, American Labor holds out the hand of hope to the enslaved nations of the world.”

and offer our humble cooperation in the global effort to defend the liberty of individuals and towns.”⁵

Yet workers quickly noted the incongruities that emerged from the labor programs on the ground. A contingent of Mexican braceros stated, they “would be happy to stay for work now that the war is over, but only with better salaries and protections, honoring compensation for accidents, edible food, medical attention, etc.” These same workers were critical of the labor programs because they were not permitted to put a Mexican flag next to an American flag at the entrance of the camp, as was done in other camps they had visited.⁶ Caribbean laborers were soon just as disenchanted with the language of freedom and reciprocal international ties as Mexican workers were. In a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, three Jamaican workers in Hubbardsville, New York declared, “according to our contract we were told we would start work on arrival. We are now pending for a period of eight days of which conditions are rather imperfect.” Six Bahamian workers stated, “we are strong men and willing to work and now we are not doing our part in the war effort situation in helping our boys overseas.”⁷ Others were more exact: “I have not worked for two weeks and I have a family in the Bahamas to support and I cannot earn \$2 a day...How in this world am I to live?” News reporters noted the fact that Bahamian workers lived in a “virtual slum” in the camps at Winchester, Virginia, where more than 1,000 congregated in “dingy gray shacks.”⁸ These were hardly the stories that U.S. government officials publicized regarding the labor programs and they reveal the underbelly of

⁵ Letter to President Truman, signed by multiple braceros, May 1945, Box 17, Folder 9, EGP.

⁶ Letter from the Mexican Labor Inspector, 1945, Box 17, Folder 9, EGP.

⁷ Letter to the War Food Administration (WFA), signed by six Bahamian workers at Cheriton, Virginia, 26 June 1944; Letter to President Roosevelt, 16 August 1944, RG 224 Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁸ Edward P. Morgan and the News, American Broadcasting Network, 26 September 1958, Box 51, EGP.

state domination that stood at the heart of the labor programs, which, for many of the workers, involved dispossession, displacement, and exclusion.

Although state officials tried to convince themselves and the public of the bilateral and reciprocal nature of the labor programs, placing the labor programs with the Caribbean and Mexico in comparative and relational historical perspective reveals a different story, a history of race and empire. For one, the U.S. government arranged the Caribbean labor programs with colonies of the British empire, by permission of the British Colonial Minister, to access colonial labor in the British West Indies (Jamaica, British Honduras, and Barbados). This proved to be the same source of labor that U.S. businesses like the United Fruit Company (1899) and U.S. state projects like the Panama Canal (1903-1914) had formerly taken advantage of at the beginning of the twentieth century. This labor was rooted in a long history of European colonialism on the Caribbean islands and shaped by the creation of an agricultural (sugar) economy that was dependent on enslaved labor. Yet U.S. officials legitimized the labor programs by using a national discursive practice that disavowed empire, of the past and the present. The means by which the United States achieved global dominance in the 1940s required a process of rationalizing U.S. state domination, not as directly oppressive, but as a means to bring equality, liberty, and democracy to the world. In the 1930s and 1940s, U.S. policymakers sought to build state institutions and practices that would induce other powers to join in and endorse their vision of order in the postwar world.⁹ The Good Neighbor Policy, the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations, all indicated a “new” diplomatic mission for the United States: anti-

⁹ The Bracero Program extended the “Americans All” campaign to Mexican laborers. See Leon Helguera, *Americans all, let's fight for Victory : Americanos todos, luchamos por la Victoria* (Washington, D.C.: UNT Digital Library, 1942). Available at: <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc426/>. Accessed 2 June 2012.

imperialism. The labor programs were indicative of the turn towards anti-imperialism, framed as they were by a language of reciprocity, bilateral agreement, and the broader war effort.

By World War II, “racial liberalism”—that is, the application of state organizations, laws, and legislation to promote racial equality—became part of a new vision for New Deal liberalism, as another strategy to address inequality through the expansion of federal authority. During the war, many civil rights activists began to associate the Nazi genocide of European Jews during World War II to racism existing across the world, demonstrating affinities between European fascism, U.S. racial segregation, and British colonial rule. This forced U.S. government officials and progressives alike to consider anti-racist policies and institutional arrangements that would counter such congruencies. Many proponents of liberal anti-racism developed a framework for race matters that portrayed “race” as a contradiction to national modernity, rather than as one of its structuring conditions, a contradiction which could be overcome through proper state intervention.¹⁰ For example, Gunnar Myrdal’s book, *An American Dilemma* (1944), commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation in 1937, took the view that U.S. democracy would triumph over racism, looking to an expansive U.S. state to rid the United States of racism through racial integration.¹¹ Within the context of an expansive New Deal state, federal officials

¹⁰ Mark Brilliant, “Reimagining Racial Liberalism: A View from mid-Twentieth Century California,” in *Making the American Century: Studies in 20th Century Culture, Politics, and Economy*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 165-170; Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121-189; Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neo-Liberalism: from Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *Social Text* 24, no. 8 (Winter 2006): 1-24; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Howard Winant, *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since WWII* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

¹¹ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944). Funded by the Carnegie Corporation in 1937, Myrdal sought to investigate U.S. race relations with a team of American social scientists specializing in race

and progressives thought to intervene in society through state power, to lessen racism so that it would not cause as much harm to those at the bottom rungs of the economy.

Mexican American civil rights activist and scholar Ernesto Galarza (1904-1984) demonstrates precisely how it was possible for the labor programs to be justified as anti-racist and anti-imperial state projects. Unbeknownst to most, Galarza initially advocated a Mexican labor importation program to Mexican and United States officials.¹² In 1941 and 1942, Galarza proposed a “Joint Mexican-U.S. Commission” for the management of Mexican migrant labor that would allow for the *joint development* of the economic and “human resources” of North Mexico and the Southwest as an “economic unit.” Even more expansively, Galarza believed that the commission could improve the welfare and living standards of people beyond Mexico and the United States. He stated, “I believe there is a possibility of setting up a way of approach and of suggesting a solution which will affect the welfare and lift the standard of living, not only of the Mexican in the Southwest, but of the migratory worker in other areas of *the Caribbean* and of South America.”¹³ At first glance, Galarza was the least likely of persons to have suggested the

relations. This book set the parameters for the study of race in the U.S. for the next quarter century, forming “the telos of American nationhood.” See also Singh, *Black is A Country*, 135-159.

¹² My goal is not to overstate Galarza’s role here. While Galarza helped to promote a Mexican labor importation program, I do not wish to suggest that he alone should be held responsible for the government’s initial commitment to establishing the Bracero Program. Galarza was an actor among many, influencing the discursive and cultural framework within which the labor programs formed.

¹³ U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens (Tolan Committee), *Resolutions to Inquire into the Migration of Destitute Citizens, To Study, Survey, and Investigate the Social and Economic Needs and the Movement of Indigent Persons Across State Lines*, 76th Congress, 3rd session, Part 10, December 11, 1940 and February 26, 1941 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 3885; U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, *A Resolution to Inquire Further Into the Interstate Migration of Citizens, Emphasizing the Present and Potential Consequences of the Migration Caused by the National Defense Program, Pursuant to H. Res. 113*, 77th Congress, 2nd Session, Part 33, May 22, June 11, 19, 1942 (Washington, D.C.:

implementation of a state-managed labor importation program. Galarza was a humanitarian labor leader and civil rights activist who spent most of his career combatting the abuses the Bracero Program (1942-1964). As a precursor to farm labor and civil rights leader César Chavez in California, he has become a Chicano/a icon for his efforts to document the many program violations of the Bracero Program, having written several books against the exploitative labor conditions that Mexican contract workers faced.¹⁴ In defending a Mexican migrant labor program, Galarza believed that state economic planning and social engineering could be used to lift Mexican migrants in the Southwest from poverty. He was confident that the U.S. state could manage the importation of Mexican laborers to the United States in an inclusionary way that would improve the livelihood of Mexican migrants both in the United States and in Mexico.

Galarza stood as an example of the ways in which progressive liberals and civil rights activists embraced the state as an arbiter of democracy to extend rights and protections to non-whites and non-citizens. His endeavors in defending and then tackling the inequalities produced by the Bracero Program provide a window into the politics of guestworker programs, the political subjectivities fostered and promised by liberal democracy, and the ways in which sympathy and benevolence have been integral to empire. While Ernesto Galarza's efforts against the injustices of the Bracero Program have been well documented, his role in proposing the Bracero Program has not been noted or even mentioned in the scholarship on Galarza's life. Galarza himself did not acknowledge his initiating role, even as the reality of it shaped his

Government Printing Office), 12432-12438.

¹⁴ Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields: Based on a Report Regarding Compliance with the Contractual, Legal, and Civil Rights of Mexican Agricultural Workers in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Fund for the Republic, 1956); *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story, an Account of Time Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California, 1942-1960* (Charlotte, NC: McNally, 1970), originally self-published 1964; *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Fields* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).

activism and life mission for nearly three decades thereafter. Steeped in the ideology of the New Deal and the Good Neighbor Policy (1933-1945), Galarza saw the labor importation program as a potential means to politically and economically include Mexican migrant laborers as part of the nation, envisioning the potential that the historical moment of the New Deal had created to effect social change. His life experiences point to the historical circumstances that shaped Galarza as an activist and intellectual, and explain how it might have been possible for him to advocate the establishment of a Mexican labor importation program.

Born to parents who worked as farm laborers in the small village of Jalcocotán, in the Mexican state of Nayarit, Galarza came to the United States in 1911 in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. Landing in Sacramento with his mother and uncle at the age of eight, he attended public schools in California while picking hops in the San Joaquin Central Valley. He eventually earned a scholarship to Occidental College in 1923, where he studied the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the political and social history of Mexico.¹⁵ Galarza then became the first Mexican American in the United States to attend graduate school at Stanford University, where he earned his M.A. in political science and history in 1929. Soon after graduating, Galarza expressed concerns over the plight of Mexican migrant agricultural laborers, which he had experienced firsthand in the San Joaquin Valley with his family. Mexican agricultural workers' unionization and political organization interested Galarza from early on in his career. In 1931, he published one of his first articles on Mexican farm labor in the United States, titled "Without Benefit of a Lobby" in *Survey* magazine that touched on the exploitative conditions faced by Mexican agricultural workers in the Southwest. In the article, Galarza blamed Mexican workers'

¹⁵ Richard Chabrán, "Activism and Intellectual Struggle in the Life of Ernesto Galarza, 1905-1984," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 7, no. 2 (1985): 135-152. Available online at the Ernesto Galarza Applied Research Center, University of California, Riverside: <http://egarc.ucr.edu/about.html>.

“squalid” circumstances on their inability to join unions, on the construction of their race as a “degenerate Indian stock,” and their lack of political clout.¹⁶ His experiences as a migrant farmworker had shaped his views.

After Stanford, Galarza received a fellowship to pursue a Ph.D. in history and public law at Columbia University. While pursuing his coursework at Columbia, Galarza and his wife, Mae Taylor, worked as educators at a progressive community school in Jamaica, Long Island called the Gardner School. Between 1932 and 1936, they served as co-principals, and then, as owners of the school. The progressive education movement was at its height in the 1930s, and it held education for democracy as one of its central tenets.¹⁷ Issues of pluralism and inclusion, as well as liberal democracy, shaped the educational landscape at the time; Galarza attempted to apply them in his role as an educator. Like other progressive educators of the 1930s, Galarza believed that democracy meant the active participation by all citizens in social, political and economic decisions that affected their lives.¹⁸ As a progressive educator, Galarza’s support of a more inclusive liberal democracy, and of the politics and theories of the New Deal, solidified and shaped his sense of self. Based on the careful social scientific collection of data on the electric power industry and its role in the development of the capitalist economy in Mexico, Galarza’s dissertation, “La Industria Eléctrica en México/The Electric Industry in Mexico” (1947), expressed his grounding in the New Deal application of scientific knowledge to social reform

¹⁶ Ernesto Galarza, “Without Benefit of a Lobby,” *Survey* (May 1931).

¹⁷ Paula Fass, “Without Design: Education Policy in the New Deal,” *American Journal of Education* 91, no. 1 (November, 1983): 36-64; Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Ernesto Galarza, “Problems of Education in the Western Hemisphere,” *Pan-American Union* (1939).

and the politics of Mexican development.¹⁹ Like other Mexican labor activists, intellectuals, artists, and politicians at this time, Galarza's dissertation championed "modernization" and "industrialization" as the cure for Mexican economic struggles. Many, including some of the most influential labor activists, believed that the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, such as agrarian reform, needed to be suspended so that industrialization could lead to social justice by wrenching Mexico from land-based inequalities.²⁰ From this perspective, Galarza's dissertation addressed the history of development problems and the economic repercussions of the electric power industry in Mexico, which he perceived as vital for the improvement of the nation.

Written in English and Spanish, for a Mexican audience, his dissertation asked: "What forms and modalities has an industry as advanced as electricity taken in a country transitioning from a feudal regime?" This interest in the development of the Mexican countryside from "feudalism" to industrialization would later inflect his arguments for a Mexican labor importation program, as he saw the labor program as a step towards the industrialization and modernization of the Mexican countryside.²¹

¹⁹ Electricity was a central interest of many New Deal progressives leading to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and other regional planning projects in the United States that centered on dams as a means to modernize the countryside. Galarza, "La Industria Eléctrica en México" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1947). Interviews with Ernesto Galarza, *The Burning Light: Action and Organizing In the Mexican Community In California* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1982), iii, 35.

²⁰ Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 112.

²¹ "Qué forma y modalidades ha tomado una industria de técnica tan avanzada como es la de la electricidad, en un país de regimen esencialment feudal en plena transición?" During and after WWII "development" became a new kind of colonialism that was rooted in facilitating decolonization, with "development" legitimizing the extraction of resources and productive capacity of Mexico in a way that the civilizing mission of colonialism never could. For more on why the rhetoric of "development" became popular among Mexican intellectuals in the 1940s, see María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Development and Revolution: Narratives of Liberation and Regimes of Subjectivity in the Postwar Period," in *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

While writing his dissertation, Galarza did research for the Foreign Policy Association in New York, and then became a member of the Pan-American Union (PAU) in Washington, D.C. With the Foreign Policy Association, Galarza became involved in solidarity work with other New Deal progressives of his generation for the Loyalists engaged in fighting fascism during the Spanish Civil War. He became a strong supporter of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, U.S. volunteers who served in the Spanish Civil War as representatives of democracy. He traveled throughout the United States, making public speeches and assisting in fundraising campaigns for the Loyalists, refining and grounding his belief and pride in U.S. liberal democracy that would shape his political vision for the rest of his life. Meanwhile, Galarza's associates at the Foreign Policy Association introduced him to members of the PAU. He left New York for Washington, D.C. to work in the Division of Intellectual Cooperation at the PAU in 1936.²²

The PAU (1890-) was an organization of states in the western hemisphere designed to promote commercial trade, peace, and the political "cooperation" of the United States and Latin American countries. The PAU was founded as a part of the ideological movement of Pan-Americanism (1880s-1940s), which sought to foster the liberalization of commercial exchanges between the nations of Latin America and the United States under the guise of collective defense, diplomatic equality, economic aid, and peacekeeping.²³ In 1937, Galarza applied his interest in education to Latin America at the PAU with a report entitled *Educational Trends in Latin America* (1937). In 1940, Galarza was promoted to PAU's newly formed division of Labor and Social Information, which involved extensive travel to Latin America in 1940 and 1941, just

²² Chabrán, "Activism and Intellectual Struggle in the Life of Ernesto Galarza," 35-152; Armando Ibarra and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Man of Fire: Selected Writings, Ernesto Galarza* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), xiii-xxiii.

²³ See Philip Leonard Green, *Pan American Progress* (New York: Hastings House, 1942), 66-131; Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 165.

before he appeared before a series of congressional hearings to propose a Mexican labor importation program. Galarza took a distinct interest in labor in Latin America at this time, publishing multiple texts for the PAU including, *Labor Trends and Social Welfare in Latin America* (1937-1942).²⁴ Labor in both Latin America and the United States became central to Galarza's political mission at the PAU. The New Deal had resulted in the strengthening of labor unions, leading working communities to collectively challenge authority and bargain for labor rights and legislative change that would assure minimum work guarantees. Excluded from this picture was the community that Galarza had come of age in: the Mexican American community of the Southwest. Perhaps because of this, Galarza worked with A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to demand the desegregation of the war industries, resulting in the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in June 1941.²⁵

While an ineffective U.S. state organization, the FEPC signaled an early attempt to apply state power to alleviate racial inequalities in the United States. As a product of Executive Order 8802, the FEPC required that companies with government contracts not discriminate "on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin."²⁶ Galarza's proposal for a Mexican labor importation program in 1941 might have been a means to extend the protections of the FEPC to Mexican migrant workers. It was also a means to fulfill his duties as a member of an organization that sought to facilitate peaceful cooperation between Latin American countries and

²⁴ These reports focus on the economic recovery and development of Latin America. See for example, Ernesto Galarza, *Labor Trends and Social Welfare in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Pan American Union, Division of Labor and Social Information, 1941); *Educational Trends in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, Division of Intellectual Cooperation, 1937).

²⁵ Ibarra and Torres, eds. *Man of Fire*, xvii.

²⁶ President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802, "Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry," 25 June 1941, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, NARA. This order was issued only reluctantly by Roosevelt and never actually resulted in the desegregation of the military.

the United States. Galarza suggested that the FEPC consider the desirability of including the study of the conditions of employment of Mexicans in California in its program. Mark Etheridge, Chairman of the FEPC, approved Galarza's suggestion.²⁷ Galarza's suggestion of a Mexican labor importation program was part of broader collective actions toward anti-racist legislative change that marked the beginnings of the long civil rights movement.

As a key thread running through each chapter of this project, Galarza demonstrates how New Deal reformers forged a particular kind of liberal politics that celebrated the U.S. labor programs with Mexico and the British West Indies as marking a new global age of freedom. Galarza's interests at the PAU and the emergent politics of labor management that he participated in signaled a new epistemological framework for liberalism that both elided and extended U.S. racial and imperial dynamics of the early twentieth century into the postwar era. By liberalism, I mean a set of post-Enlightenment ideas and ideals committed to universal political rights and self-determination and sanctified by the nation-state through citizenship. Liberalism, according to Lisa Lowe, is "the branches of European political philosophy that include the narration of political emancipation [*or freedom*] through citizenship in the state, the promise of economic freedom in the development of wage labor and exchange markets, and the conferring of civilization to human persons educated in aesthetic and national culture...."²⁸ Because liberalism is a multi-faceted and flexible set of ideals that rationalizes state power differently, the type of racial reforms that emerged in the United States in the 1940s beckoned

²⁷ Memorandum for Dr. Rowe from Ernesto Galarza, 4 October 1941, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

²⁸ Italicized brackets my own. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) 3-4. Lowe is referring to liberalism as both economic and political, whether political freedom through citizenship in the state or economic freedom through exchange markets.

individuals to look to the U.S. government to overcome racial prejudice through policy and legislation.

At a moment that the U.S. state embraced official positions against racism, it also took a stand against colonialism by sanctifying the nation-state form. And, it was through the cooperation of nation-states, guided and managed by the U.S. state, that U.S. imperial rule was elided and extended across the Americas.²⁹ By imperial rule, I mean the expansion of U.S. state power and control over subject populations, whether within or outside of the “nation.” Modern nations and empires have served as the means through which capitalism functions, including by establishing laws and conditions for the movements of labor across the seas and continents. “Race” has been at the heart of these historical processes, defining and dividing nations, colonial subjects, and migrant workers around the world.³⁰ As anthropologist and cultural theorist Ann Laura Stoler has argued, histories of empire set the conditions of possibility for the uneven entitlement and racial formations in the modern world. They have produced new coercive measures to protect the common good, giving rise to new zones of exclusion and new sites of privileged exemption.³¹ The labor programs are one instantiation of how the disavowal of empire—and the simultaneous pursuit of state power across national borders—facilitated the active cooperation of nation-states to mobilize the Caribbean and Mexican populations as migrant workers.

²⁹ See Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press 2015), 6-15; Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

³⁰ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge Press, 1998) 7, 16, 124. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism : The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 2000), 10, 64-68.

³¹ Ann Stoler, “On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* (2006), 127-128, 135, 139-140.

While other scholars have focused on the labor programs as isolated events, “Contracting Freedom” places the contemporaneous U.S. labor importation programs with Mexico and the Caribbean in relation to one another and within different contexts, ultimately to reveal their racial and imperial underpinnings and practices. This dissertation builds on the work of Deborah Cohen, Cindy Hahamovich, Gilbert Gonzalez, Kitty Calavita, and others that focus on the Bracero Program or the Caribbean labor programs.³² This project engages a growing body of scholarship on relational racialization and the contentious politics of citizenship, race, and immigration in the United States, including the work of Natalia Molina, Mae M. Ngai, and Evelyn Nakano Glenn.³³ In placing the labor programs within the framework of postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, American studies, and U.S. history, my work aims ultimately to demonstrate the limitations and contradictions of state-centered approaches to social justice and to point to other kinds of political possibilities.

³² Scholarship on the Bracero Program also includes Henry Anderson, *The Bracero Program in California* (New York: Arno Press, 1976); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (Routledge, New York, 1992); Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); María Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience: Eliteloire versus Folklore* (Los Angeles : UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, 1979); Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Ronald L. Mize, “Power (In)-Action: State and Agribusiness in the Making of the Bracero Total Institution,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 50 (2006), 76-119; Ana Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); and more.

³³ Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Evelyn Nakano-Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

The first chapter focuses on the historical context of U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean from the 1880s to the 1930s, particularly in the form of corporate investments and military occupations.³⁴ I contrast these earlier interventions to the rhetorics and practices American officials deployed during the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II. Beginning in the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt renounced and disavowed U.S. imperialism in Latin America, creating the Good Neighbor Policy in response to popular movements against U.S. imperialism across Latin America and the Caribbean. By reviewing the lasting legacies of U.S. imperial discourses and practices—from the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary to the Good Neighbor Policy and the Banana Wars—I trace the critical shifts and persistent continuities in U.S. relations with Latin America that at once disrupted and reconstituted imperial rule. In that broader context, many Mexican, Jamaican, and other Caribbean workers had served essentially as a colonial labor force in their places of origin—Mexicans as miners and petroleum workers for American and European corporations in Mexico, Caribbean workers as farm laborers on U.S.-owned sugar, coffee, and tobacco plantations on British colonies.³⁵ The labor programs of the 1940s extended that role to the agricultural fields of the United States, serving to obfuscate the continuity of the U.S. empire and to legitimize the extraction of resources and labor from Latin America.

Chapter two then shifts the focus to the U.S. West, to explore the intimate links between the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the importation of Mexican laborers in 1942.

³⁴ See Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007); Lester Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934* (University Press of Kentucky, 1983); Harvey Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

³⁵ Gilbert González and Raul Fernández, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nation, and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Through different congressional committee hearings headed by Representative John H. Tolan (California), which began in 1940 as a venue to investigate the welfare of Dust Bowl migrants, I explore how the U.S. entry into World War II shifted government officials' strategies and priorities in finding new sources of labor.³⁶ As agricultural employers clamored for new workers to fill the wartime labor shortage, Tolan and his colleagues, including Galarza, turned their attention to Mexican workers and Japanese Americans, whose incarceration in concentration camps ironically had contributed to the labor shortage in the first place. Both in the Tolan Committee hearings on the mass importation of Mexican workers and in the Tolan Committee hearings on the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans, U.S. officials and social reformers developed an overarching language of equality, state protection, and national security. In reality, Mexicans migrants faced low wages, poor housing, and exploitative work conditions while Japanese American citizens encountered expulsion from their homes and incarceration in desolate concentration camps. From these camps, the War Relocation Authority asked Japanese Americans to work as farm labor in the sugar beet fields through the Work Corps, enlisting Japanese Americans into a "labor program" of their own.

The U.S. state's simultaneous adoption of mass incarceration and mass labor importation, I argue, exposes the violence at the heart of state-sponsored and state-managed labor programs. The rhetoric of "military necessity" and "national security" used to justify both state projects generated racialized boundaries between the "foreign" and the "domestic." In attempting to enfold Mexicans and Japanese Americans into the benevolence of state protection and social welfare, the Tolan Committee ironically cast both as "foreign" subjects, for immediate

³⁶ The House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, known as the "Tolan Committee," held hearings in February and March 1942 regarding Japanese "evacuation and in May and June 1942 regarding Mexican labor migration.

incarceration (in the case of the Japanese) and eventual deportation or repatriation (in the case of Mexicans). At the same time, in a war for “democracy,” the U.S. state had a vested interest in projecting and framing these agricultural laborers as “free” and “voluntary” workers. Placing the story of Mexican migrants and Japanese Americans together, I argue, ultimately underscores the degree to which violence and coercion, rather than freedom and consent, structured the recruitment of agricultural laborers during World War II.

Chapter three elaborates on the ambiguous contradictions of coercion and freedom that activists like Galarza deployed for and against the Bracero Program, focusing on the interconnected histories of slavery and the labor contract. At the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. government forbade the importation of foreign contract workers as a form of “slavery” with the Alien Contract Labor Law (Foran Act) of 1885. By the 1940s, U.S. officials had come to sanction the recruitment of contract workers from Mexico and elsewhere, positioning the U.S. state as the arbiter and protector of freedom through its authority to exclude *and* import foreign workers. To trace the colonial roots of these labor programs and policies, I provide a genealogy of contract law, demonstrating a similar process that took place in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when the British empire used the labor contract as a symbol of voluntary choice to import indentured labor from India to the Caribbean. It was in the context of slave emancipation in the British West Indies that government officials began embracing or rejecting contract labor as “free” or “slave,” at first within the British empire and then to other locales around the world. That broader history of the labor contract, I argue, illustrates how colonial officials’ declaration of “universal” rights under contract often translated into new systems of labor exploitation and colonial domination. In marking the contract as a metaphor for

slavery or freedom, colonial officials resolved the contradictions between the demands of capital for cheap labor and the liberal state's promise of universal freedom and protection.

The contract, in turn, became a means to exclude foreign contract laborers from the bounds of U.S. citizenship while transforming them into goods to be transferred from one nation-state (or colony) to another. As much as the architects of the World War II labor programs wished to distance themselves from racism and colonialism—in fact, they were ostensibly fighting a war to combat both—their insistence on new beginnings belied deep historical connections to discourses and practices of slavery and free labor that they could not escape or overcome. Instead of turning to the slave/free paradox to frame and critique the labor programs, as Galarza and others did after World War II, I stress how the logics of that paradox have sustained the free/unfree continuum and the commodification of laborers.

Chapter four investigates Mexican workers' reactions to the moral language used by government officials and labor advocates to illustrate how they invented their own terms to understand the labor programs and the labor contract. While many embraced liberal subjectivity under contract and took pride in their role as laborers in the United States, it did not take Mexican migrants long to recognize the incongruity between the liberal promise of contract freedom and the daily reality of exploitation and contract violations. Attacking the contract proved to be their first line of defense when it came to critiquing the programs. They protested contract violations by withdrawing their labor from the fields, appealing to labor representatives in the United States, and sharing their stories with newspapers in their home countries. In many workers' minds, the freedoms and protections promised them by the U.S. and Mexican governments through the labor contract marked the antithesis of freedom. In addition to demanding the enforcement of contract stipulations, many braceros—alongside Galarza and

other labor organizers—demanded other rights, such as representation in a labor union. When agricultural employers responded continually by using braceros and undocumented migrants as strikebreakers, Galarza and the California farm labor movement eventually distanced themselves from braceros, in the name of protecting “labor standards for all workers.” By the early 1950s, many braceros came to the conclusion that the contract was a hoax and generated social practices and cultural productions that critiqued and exceeded the mandates of U.S. and Mexican states. In the meantime, U.S. labor and civil rights movement leaders’ appeals to the state to enforce the contract and U.S. immigration laws served to fortify and justify racial divides between citizens and aliens, between the “foreign” and the “domestic.”

Chapter five focuses on the struggles of British West Indian contract workers within the context of the anticolonial national independence movements in the Caribbean and the black freedom movement in the United States. The promise of liberal protections and rights through the labor programs, I argue, expanded the U.S. state’s influence over the Caribbean, in ways that some anticolonial activists welcomed as a means to gain national independence. Like Galarza and the Bracero Program, those striving for state reforms and social change helped to launch U.S. labor importation programs with the British West Indies. Those affiliated with the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (AACC) looked to the United States to assist and facilitate the transition from colonial subjection to national independence through foreign aid and economic development, which the labor programs were ostensibly designed to advance. Once the British colonies gained independence in the 1960s, the labor programs continued—as a means to improve local economies and to secure votes for nascent political parties—and served to deepen and legitimize U.S. presence across the Caribbean.

Chicano civil rights and labor rights leader Ernesto Galarza is a recurring figure in the chapters that follow, for his career personified the different contexts and perspectives on the Bracero Program that my dissertation explores. Even though Galarza viewed himself as an anti-imperialist, his political beliefs and shifting subjectivities unwittingly contributed to the legitimation of the U.S. empire by framing guestworker programs, first, as a humanitarian enterprise and, later, as a system of bound labor. Without questioning his intentions, I use Galarza's political choices and rhetorical strategies to probe the limits and contradictions of liberal democracy—its promises of state protection and national inclusion. From proposing a state-sponsored labor program to calling for its end, Galarza remained hopeful of the U.S. state's capacity to enact and engender freedom, a hope that growing ranks of contract workers from Mexico and the Caribbean recognized as nothing more than a false promise. In these workers' struggles, we might begin to see what Lisa Lowe calls "a past conditional temporality"—that "there were other conditions of possibility that were vanquished by liberal political reason and its promises of freedom, and it suggests means to open those conditions to pursue what might have been."³⁷ That is my hope for "Contracting Freedom."

³⁷ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 175.

Chapter One

(Re)Formulating Empire: The Good Neighbor Policy and Former U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean

At a February 26, 1941 congressional hearing, Ernesto Galarza, then Chief of the Division of Labor and Social Information of the Pan-American Union (PAU), declared, “I want to suggest that the time has come for the creation of a joint international agency, composed of representatives of the United States and Mexico, to develop and carry out a long-term program of resettlement, rehabilitation, and regulation of migrants between the two republics.” As an official of the PAU from 1936 to 1947 Galarza envisioned “socially progressive international action,” on behalf of both the Mexican and United States Governments, through bilateral collaboration. When he first proposed the Bracero Program in 1941, he believed “this [labor] program would be based upon the normal needs of agriculture north of the border, the further development of the land program of Mexico, the utilization of Mexican land resources, possibly United States capital or a joint international fund, and the technical knowledge and skill of citizens of both Mexico and the United States who understand this problem from every angle.”³⁸ Galarza also suggested that the joint international commission to manage Mexican labor migration should function under the auspices of the PAU, perhaps under his leadership.³⁹ In Later that same year (August 1941), Galarza wrote to Mexican Ambassador Francisco Castillo Nájera, suggesting a commission to manage Mexican migrant labor before U.S. officials had

³⁸ U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens (Tolan Committee), *Resolutions to Inquire into the Migration of Destitute Citizens, To Study, Survey, and Investigate the Social and Economic Needs and the Movement of Indigent Persons Across State Lines*, 76th Congress, 3rd session, December 11, 1940 and February 26, 1941 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 3885.

³⁹ “Memo on Migratory Labor in the Americas for the CIO,” From Galarza to the CIO, 3 January 1945, Box 17, Folder 11, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries (EGP).

even begun discussions with Mexico regarding a Mexican labor importation program. Nájera approved, replying to Galarza, “your project for the foundation to improve the condition of Mexicans in the United States is the most constructive, practical, and farsighted step towards solving a serious problem.” It would also “unquestionably contribute towards our common aim of closer ties between Mexico and the U.S....thus we shall make Pan-Americanism a living thing.”⁴⁰ For Galarza, a labor importation program seemed a potential means to extend certain rights to Mexican migrant laborers, with enormous potential for the national inclusion of Mexican workers as “legal” sojourners within the United States.

On August 4, 1942, the U.S. and Mexican Government signed a “joint” agreement to import workers from Mexico into the United States, which would become known as the Bracero Program.⁴¹ As Galarza and other New Deal government officials had suggested, the agreements covered several general principles, as well as specific problems such as racial discrimination, transport, wages, deductions, and housing. As Galarza had hoped, consent, binationalism, and collective agency lay at the heart of each of these agreements. Central to Galarza’s vision for the extension of “rights” to Mexican citizens was the historical moment of the New Deal, World War II, and the Good Neighbor Policy. The New Deal had fostered a strong belief in social change through U.S. government agencies, social change based on the relief of poverty and the recovery of the economy during the Great Depression.⁴² Concerned with ameliorating the

⁴⁰ Letter to Galarza from Francisco Castillo Nájera, Ambassador of Mexico, 10 September, 1941, Box 5, Folder 11, EGP.

⁴¹ Agreement Between the United States of America and Mexico, signed at Mexico City August 4, 1942, for the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States, as Revised on April 26, 1943, by an Exchange of Notes Between the American Embassy at Mexico City and the Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Box 19, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

⁴² For more on the New Deal see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Press, 1955); Alan Brinkley, “The Concept of New Deal Liberalism,” in *The End of Reform*:

uncertainties of the market place and the effects of unfair practices in education, business, and labor, New Deal liberals were dedicated to implementing progressive programs during the 1930s and 1940s. They looked to social science to map problems and ascertain government policy-based solutions to the depressed economy, and its resultant social inequalities. However, the New Deal's social reform measures were deeply problematic in that they promoted racialized, class-bound, and gendered understandings of migrant laborers' status.⁴³ Galarza's focus was different and "new" in that he actively sought to expand the New Deal's vision for social reform, extending it to racialized Mexicans in the Southwest.

Within the context of the Good Neighbor Policy (1933) and World War II, Galarza's efforts towards an inclusionary state labor migration program that would aid and uplift the Mexican population seemed to make sense. By the 1940s, Pan-Americanism and cultural co-existence had become the dominant discourses of reform in U.S. artistic, scientific, educational, and political circles, especially those that Galarza participated in. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy (1933-1945) toward Latin America emerged as part of this intellectual moment of pan-Americanism. The Good Neighbor policy, as a precipitate and example of Pan-Americanism or political alliance among all "American" nations, promised a

New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Robert S McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1984); Gerald D. Nash, *The Crucial Era: The Great Depression and World War II, 1929-1945* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, Inc., 1998); Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order: 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013).

⁴³ On the experiences of Mexican Americans and Mexican Immigrants during the New Deal, see Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican-Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974); Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); and Camille Guerin- Gonzáles, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

new society: one in which neighboring countries would engage in reciprocal exchanges characterized by equality of law and mutual respect, to aid in the common economic development of the hemisphere. Above all, the Good Neighbor Policy was a disavowal of U.S. imperialism in Latin America, as well as a promise to adhere to peaceful and cooperative hemispheric relations. During World War II, anti-imperialism became the hallmark of New Deal diplomacy, forming the legal core of the United Nations charter, as well as a number of regional alliance organizations like the Pan-American Union, as the United States formally declared the end of empire.

The vocabulary U.S. officials constructed to make meaning out of the labor importation programs made the control of labor mobility in Mexico seem a natural response to the crises of the war, not a logical outgrowth of former U.S. imperial interactions with Latin America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. As the Director of Labor at the PAU, Galarza took the labor crisis seriously, highlighting the “joint” nature of a Mexican labor program agreement, envisioning its promise to reverse former U.S. diplomatic trends in Latin America. In disavowing race and empire within the labor programs, U.S. officials and activists reconstituted race while providing logical justification for the expansion of U.S. state power. The labor programs therefore did not constitute a break from former U.S. imperialism during the Good Neighbor Policy, the New Deal, and World War II. In fact, former U.S. interventions in the 1880s to the 1920s had caused a lack of subsistence in Mexico in the first place, forcing workers to sell their labor power for a wage, which led to labor arrangements that were more compatible with the imperatives of U.S. capitalist industry and production.⁴⁴ These interventions constituted a powerful force, reshaping the kinds and quantities of commodities produced and the technologies and labor relations

⁴⁴ Frederick Cooper, *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 31.

required to produce them. The destruction of local economies through U.S. investments resulted in the creation of a supply of “free wage labor” that moved of its own free will, labor needed by U.S. financial leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery. Through “free labor” mobility, U.S. officials and private corporations in the Caribbean and Mexico found workers supposedly without occupation, enslavement, or force, through the command of bodies and resources that “freely” moved themselves.⁴⁵ Turning to U.S. imperial interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century can reveal the imperial connections that the labor programs elided and advanced in Latin America and the Caribbean. Rather than signal a break from empire and “race,” as Galarza had suggested, the labor programs were the culmination of a particular stage of how the U.S. empire articulated and entrenched itself in and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

United States Labor Mobility and World War II

During World War II, U.S. officials expanded state power to mobilize U.S. labor into the defense industries, which marked an unprecedented application of state power for the control of labor mobility, setting precedent for the formation of the labor programs.⁴⁶ The federal government sought to mobilize labor for the “war effort,” mainly to increase resource extraction of war essential materials and to increase labor output for the defense industries and farm fields

⁴⁵ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press 2015), 102; Steve Stern, “Introduction,” *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and The Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America*, Frederick Cooper et al., eds. (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 31.

⁴⁶ See James Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Paul A.C. Koistinen, *Arsenal of World War II: The Political Economy of American Warfare* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); Alan Milward, *War, Economy, and Society, 1939-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

in the United States. The wartime mobilization of labor required the creation of new government institutions to manage labor, as workers moved from one part of the United States to another in commitment to the “war effort.” With the drafting of soldiers for war, the United States government feared a shortage in labor, especially in the farm fields. The Lend-Lease program of 1941 in which the United States began to supply Europe with food, oil, and war materials exacerbated concerns over labor. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal cabinet therefore established a number of institutions by executive order to manage labor mobilization, including the War Manpower Commission (WMC), which sought to balance the needs of agriculture, industry, and the Armed Forces. Members of the War Department, Department of Agriculture, Department of Labor, the War Production Board, Selective Service System, and the United States Civil Services worked together through the WMC to ensure effective mobilization and placement of manpower.⁴⁷ Agriculture was only one facet of this labor mobilization campaign. The U.S. escalated its war industries and hubs, creating an expanded military state apparatus. By the war’s end, nearly 15 million Americans would have taken advantage of the war economy, with the largest movement coming from the Southern states.⁴⁸ These labor movements were related to real economic development that government leaders actively sought as a result of the crisis of the Great Depression.

In July 1941, a Department of Agriculture report titled “Agriculture’s Plans to Aid in Defense and Meet the Impacts of War: A Summary of Reports of State Agricultural Planning

⁴⁷ See, for example, RG 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, including the records of the Office for Agricultural War Relations; RG 174, General Records of the Department of Labor (DOL); RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission (WMC) at NARA.

⁴⁸ James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How The Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 23.

Committees,” recommended integrating the agricultural economy with the total defense effort. It suggested “a national unified farm labor program, including all Federal, State, and local agencies interested in labor, should be set up to inventory farm labor supplies and demand by areas or regions, to exchange information between states...to ensure security and desirable working conditions for farm labor.”⁴⁹ Officials created a “Food for Freedom” program, and gave loans to growers, the point of which was to “increase food production and to make our present and future standard borrowers self sufficient.” The idea was to unite U.S. agriculture and the U.S. government as part of the national “self-interest” through a farm labor program that offered a purchase program, an acreage adjustment program, a soil conservation program, and a labor mobilization program, all of which required scientific research through the services of the agricultural land grant colleges. The “Food for Freedom” program was linked to the “Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program,” to supply labor to U.S. farms. At its peak in 1945, U.S. officials recruited and placed between 2.5 and 3 million farm workers. The War Manpower Commission, the Farm Security Administration, and the War Food Administration (WFA), were held responsible for farm labor migration management, with millions of government dollars allotted to each organization. For example, by an act approved on April 29, 1943, the U.S. Department of State appropriated twenty-six million dollars for the use of the newly created WFA in conducting the Emergency Farm Labor Supply program. The same law gave the WFA responsibility for recruiting and placing interstate and foreign labor. General supervision was vested in the WFA, which created an Office of Labor to generate local responsibility for the interstate and foreign labor aspects of the program. The county extension agent of the Office of

⁴⁹ Department of Agriculture Report, “Agriculture’s Plans to Aid in Defense and Meet the Impacts of the War,” 23 July 1941, RG 96 Records of the Farmers Home Administration, including the Records of the Farm Security Administration and the Resettlement Administration, Entry 3, Box 3, NARA.

Labor was a key figure in inter-county movement of laborers because he had the authority to approve or disapprove such movements. The county extension agent also reported annually on farm labor activities within his own county, which was then processed into national data for scientific research by the agricultural land grant colleges.⁵⁰

Looking far and wide to mobilize an agricultural labor supply, U.S. officials of the WFA, WMC, and FSA at the local, state, and national level, first sought to employ U.S. citizens in the farm fields, looking to women and school-aged children for labor. The Department of Agriculture created The Woman's Land Army of America, The United States Crop Corps, and the Victory Farm Volunteers (for teenagers in school) in response to the government campaign for labor mobilization. At the level of the individual home, Americans made "Victory Gardens," or food gardens for defense to reduce pressure on the public food supply. By 1942, other popular sources of agricultural labor included Prisoners of War from Germany, conscientious objectors, Navajo Indians, and, Japanese "evacuees." During the war, the U.S. government interned nearly 380,000 German Prisoners of War, which they contracted for labor to a variety of private industries, including, mining, railroads, and logging. For three years, from 1943 to 1946, over 100,000 prisoners of war worked in every aspect of agricultural and food production in nearly every state, mostly for small or mid-sized family run farms in small guarded labor camps; not the large-scale agricultural corporations that most braceros were employed by.⁵¹ Growers also employed incarcerated Japanese Americans as "volunteer" laborers through the War

⁵⁰ See Preliminary Inventory Number 51, Records of the Office of Labor of the WFA, NARA. The Farm Labor Program include the following: The Recruitment and Placement Division, the Women's Land Army division, the Victory Farm Volunteers division, and the Labor Utilization division.

⁵¹ Barbara Schmitter Heister, "The 'Other Braceros': Temporary Labor and German Prisoners of War in the United States, 1943-1946," *Social Science History* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 239-271.

Relocation Authority. While WFA officials also employed a small number of conscientious objectors to the war, they encouraged growers to “turn your attention to regular sources of labor provided by the administration, under instructions of the State Director of Selective Service.”

The regular sources of labor included “1. Surplus farm labor from other sections of the United States, 2. Volunteers from cities and schools, 3. Imported labor from nearby American countries, 4. Prisoners of war, and 5. Loyal American-born Japanese in Evacuation camps.” Lastly, a WFA monthly narrative report indicates that the WFA transported, for agricultural labor, 300 Navajo Indians off of reservations, and into Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, where the WFA also employed 22,000 Mexican contract workers and 3,000 or more incarcerated Japanese Americans, as of June 1944.⁵²

The sheer array of laborers that the U.S. sought to employ in agriculture was impressive, as the United States government invested every last person on the “home front” with the responsibility for the defense of the nation. In a speech titled “We Must Produce Plenty,” U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard stated:

By winning our American battle of farm production we will help to make it possible once again for men in all parts of the earth to live in comfort and in tolerance and in freedom. As long as true democracy exists, the world will not be safe for looting and slavery. Democracy stands in the way of 20th century barbarism. Democracy will not give an inch.

The application of state power for agricultural labor management led to a centralized staff, a modern agricultural college, and expanded professional training for officers at every echelon

⁵² WFA Monthly Narrative Report, 12 July 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor (WFA), Entry 6, Box 22, NARA; Letter from Eugene King, Farm Labor Assistant of Cooperative Extension Work in the Department of Agricultural and Home Economy, State of Michigan, to the Assistant Deputy Administrator of the WFA, 18 June 1943, RG 224, Entry 1, Box 14, Folders 5-10, NARA; Report, Federal Regional Advisory Council for Defense, Health, and Welfare, Region XI, RG 96, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, including the Records of the Farm Security Administration and the Resettlement Administration, Entry 3, Box 3, NARA.

involved in the food production effort. When domestic workers proved insufficient, these officers looked to other countries for additional labor. Within the context of World War II, the labor importation program with Mexico and the Caribbean became just one part of the labor mobilization campaign that government officials entitled the “Emergency Farm Labor Supply Programs.”

At the same time that federal officials attempted to mobilize the labor supply through a central government apparatus, growers admonished the Department of Agriculture (DOA) that they suffered from a labor shortage in the farm fields and that, in spite of the government’s best efforts, they still did not have enough manpower to help “win the war.” Proclaiming a desire to fulfill their patriotic duty, many growers desperately felt the need for more labor so that they could participate in the campaign for increased food production. Growers sent multiple letters to the DOA, WMC, Department of Labor, the Attorney General, and other government officials requesting labor from Mexico and the British West Indies both before and after the inception of the labor programs.⁵³ They responded with exaggeration to the elaborate propaganda campaign created by the Office of War Information (OWI) and by Secretary of Agriculture Wickard, to urge farmers to produce more and to set higher production goals, stressing “food will win the war.” In a report sent to news agencies, the Office of War Information (OWI) encouraged U.S. media to “point out that the farmer’s work is no less important than that of those engaged in

⁵³ Hundreds of requests for labor by individual growers and growers’ associations in 1941 and 1942 can be found in Record Group 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission (WMC), at the National Archives and Records Administration. For example, Cecil H. Miller of the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation wrote to Donald M. Nelson, Chair of the War Production Board (WPB) requesting Mexican labor. He stated, “Arizona requests labor, joined in with Texas, California, New Mexico, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, and Idaho....There is only one place to secure the labor and that is through Mexico. We cannot alter the fact nor the circumstance that makes it mandatory that the United States produce the implements and requirements of war,” RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission (WMC), Entry 171, Box 15, NARA.

turning out planes, tanks, or guns—that our armed forces need butters as well as bullets to do their best—that no fighting men can deliver if they are fighting on less than full stomachs.”⁵⁴

The governmental propaganda campaign resulted in an intense lobbying campaign by growers who had formed cooperatives and associations to pressure Congress and the Department of State to allow them access to more labor, if not domestic then foreign, to fulfill their patriotic duty to produce more food for the war.

Galarza took advantage of the political moment surrounding farm labor in the United States to argue for the benevolent U.S. management of Mexican labor migrations. Once the U.S. and Mexican governments initiated the labor importation program in August 1942, Galarza argued that the workers “are truly *soldiers of the harvest*, and are justly proud of the fact that they are performing an *indispensable duty* on the home front,” maintaining that “our communities should realize these men are more than workers. They are *emissaries of good will* sent to us by one of *our allies*—an ally whose friendship and assistance we need.”⁵⁵ What Galarza did not see at the time was that the labor importation programs were also informed by former U.S. financial and military interventions in Latin America, from 1865 to 1940, which had been the cause for Mexican labor migrations to the United States in the first place. If we examine these U.S. interventions in Mexico and the Caribbean, we can see that they set the conditions for the creation of the labor importation programs during World War II, such that the labor programs

⁵⁴ The OWI also produced a series of propaganda films to mobilize farm labor. Report, “Farm Labor Campaign,” Office of War Information. An OWI bulletin, produced and distributed by the Department of Agriculture, stated, “Food is a “Weapon of War,” and the labor shortage is therefore a “legitimate wartime emergency,” RG 208, Records of the Office of War Information (OWI), Entry 298, Boxes 1532, 1557, and 1563, NARA.

⁵⁵ Italics added for emphasis. Ernesto Galarza, “A Study of the Problems of Mexican Nationals in the Nine Camps of the Cucamonga, Upland, Ontario, and Chino Districts of San Bernardino, California,” *Labor and Social Relations in Latin America* (Summer 1944), available in Box 17, Folder 8, EGP.

signaled not an end to empire, but, rather, its continuation. After all, U.S. interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean from 1865 to 1933 had set the stage for U.S. officials and agribusiness interests to look to these regions for a racialized and mobile but “free” labor supply in the first place.⁵⁶

Like World War II, the Good Neighbor Policy was also essential to the formation of the labor program agreements with Mexico and the British West Indies. At his inaugural address on March 4, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the policy of the “Good Neighbor,” stating, “In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the Good Neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the *rights* of others.”⁵⁷ At the seventh Pan-American convention in Montevideo, Uruguay in December 1933, both he and his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull maintained, “no state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another” and renounced armed intervention in the region. They then signed a treaty declaring that intervention in the affairs of independent Latin American states would be deemed illegal. Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles openly admitted in a speech in 1935 that former governmental actions had resulted in:

Peculiar manifestations of American foreign policy which have given special impetus to the charge against the United States that its aims have been imperialistic, that its actions have been notorious for a complete disregard of the sovereignty and independence of the republics lying within that area, and that such a policy has been in flagrant violation of the general precepts of international law.

Secretary Hull further argued that the U.S. “military occupations” of Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic had “contributed to open animosity against the United States....not only

⁵⁶ See Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Viking University Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ Italics added for emphasis. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *First Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1933, available online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14473>.

have we incurred lasting enmity and resentment of the citizens of those nations in which we have intervened, but we have built up a wall of misunderstanding and prejudice between ourselves and the great republics of the South.”⁵⁸ The United States’ new objective, according to Welles, became the “liquidation as soon as possible of the errors committed in the past...”⁵⁹

With these promises of equality, reciprocity, and anti-imperialism in mind, Mexico agreed to the Bracero Program, believing in the possibilities presented by the Good Neighbor Policy. President Avila Camacho of Mexico (1941) stated of the policy, “The differences that may exist among our countries are superseded and blended in with the mutual and lofty aspiration to establish a continental life of assured *friendship* and *reciprocal respect* in which reason shall predominate over brute force and *peaceful cooperation* over mechanized destruction.”⁶⁰ According to Mexican foreign ambassador Ezequiel Padilla, “These two forces that gnawed at the very heart of true democracy—social injustice within the United States [i.e., racism], imperialism that destroyed the prosperity and confidence of the American peoples—show, by their common origin and simultaneous disappearance, that they are the bitter fruits of an evil system and not a product of the national consciousness of the United States.”⁶¹ Together, U.S. and Mexican officials attempted to reimagine Mexico via the Good Neighbor Policy, as an equal of the United States, capable of industrial modernization, liberal democracy, and scientific development through U.S. aid and tutelage.

⁵⁸ “Statement by the U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull at the Seventh International Conference of American States,” in Thomas M. Leonard, ed. *Encyclopedia of Latin America: The Age of Globalization*, vol. 4. (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2010).

⁵⁹ Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles, “Good Neighbor Policy in the Caribbean: An Address by the Honorable Sumner Welles before the Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, July 1935,” (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1935).

⁶⁰ Henry Wallace, Ezequiel Padilla, Eduardo Salazar, *Pan-American Friendship: Speeches* (Mexico Dept. of State for Foreign Affairs, Bureau of International News Service, 1941).

⁶¹ Italics added for emphasis. *Ibid.*, 49.

The Mexican government, actively involved in its own project of liberalism, framed its own hierarchies and divisions of labor in the name of the Mexican nation-state. The Mexican government had its own mottled history towards agricultural labor, in attempts to either include peripheral indigenous populations within the centralized claims of the nation-state through land ownership, or exclude them through indigenous land expropriation.⁶² By the twentieth century, a discourse of “modernity” justified claims that the Mexican state made on indigenous lands, as the state appropriated indigenous land for its own purposes. The labor mobility of Mexican labor was therefore as much the product of forces internal to Mexico as it was a product of U.S. financial intervention in Mexico. By the late nineteenth century, U.S. and Mexican railroad, mining, petroleum, and agricultural interests had taken over large swathes of rural land formally held communally by subsistence farmers, forcing them to move elsewhere for wage labor. They purchased rural land with the permission of local *hacendados* and political leaders. Traveling on the railroads established by U.S. and Mexico financial interests, many Mexican farm workers worked on the railroad or migrated to urban areas for work as wage laborers. In Mexico, when unemployment proved too high to survive in urban areas like Mexico City, workers often moved to Northern Mexico to work in extractive industries. Others migrated for work in the United States, leading to decades of cyclical migrations of Mexican workers to the United States that culminated in the Bracero Program.⁶³ In the case of Panama, the Panama Canal Company and

⁶² Jose Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cosmica* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), originally published in 1925; Christopher Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003); Gilbert M. Joseph, *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁶³ Gilbert Gonzalez and Raul A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migrations* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 34-35; Arthur Corwin and Lawrence Cardoso, “The Study and Interpretation of Mexican Labor Migration: An Introduction,” and “Vamos al Norte:

other U.S employers recruited unemployed black laborers (former slaves) from the British West Indies, setting the stage for a series of Caribbean labor migrations to Panama and other parts of Central America for work on the Panama Canal, and on U.S. owned fruit and sugar plantations, then to the United States. These interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean from 1865 to 1933 set the stage for U.S. officials and business interests to look to these regions for a racialized mobile labor supply.⁶⁴

Former U.S. imperialism in Latin America, 1865 to 1940

Prior to the benevolent mission and anti-imperialist message of the Good Neighbor Policy, a series of diplomatic structures born from the Monroe Doctrine (1823) defined U.S. anti-imperialism. Written by President James Monroe and Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, among others, the Monroe Doctrine sought to prevent European imperial intervention in the Western Hemisphere. As Secretary of State Adams told his audience during a Fourth of July oration in 1821, “America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher of freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”⁶⁵ The Monroe Doctrine essentially stated that any European attempts to colonize Latin America would be viewed as an act of aggression towards the United States and was an explicit call for anti-colonialism. President Monroe stated, “the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be

Causes of Mass Mexican Migration to the United States,” in *Immigrants and Immigrants: Perspectives on Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978), 3-24; Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States 1897-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980). Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 96-107

⁶⁴ For more on the growth of direct foreign investment and the uprooting of people, see Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁶⁵ John Quincy Adams, Speech on Independence Day, 4 July 1821, United States House of Representatives. Available online at the University of Pennsylvania: <http://millercenter.org/president/jqadams/speeches/speech-3484>

considered as subjects for colonization by any European powers.” After Latin America’s independence movements from Spain, the United States declared its opposition to potential re-colonization and to empire. To its interpreters, the Monroe Doctrine meant a break from empire. If the United States were to be an empire at all it would be “an empire of liberty,” a phrase coined in 1780 by Thomas Jefferson to spread “freedom” through westward expansion just before the Louisiana Purchase. The Monroe Doctrine set the foundation for U.S. foreign policy in the Western hemisphere through the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.⁶⁶

Rather than a grand strategy of coercion and militarization, conquest and occupation, the Monroe Doctrine created the myth that the United States was not an imperial power, and in fact condemned empire at different historical moments and to varying degrees even at the height of westward expansion and Native American genocide and forced removal. One of the unstated goals of the Monroe Doctrine was to distinguish U.S. national power from European imperialism. In struggling to differentiate and identify the United States apart from the British Empire after the American Revolution, U.S. officials rallied the nation around an ideology of anti-imperialism. That is, unlike the British Empire, the United States would have no standing armies, heavy taxes, large bureaucracies, colonies, or practice forms of conquest that might subject colonial populations to U.S. bureaucracies as in the British imperial system. Yet if the Monroe Doctrine served as an enlightened call for a new world order premised upon non-intervention, it also served as an explicit justification for U.S. imperial intervention, should Europe attempt to recolonize Latin American countries.⁶⁷ As the document stated, “we should

⁶⁶ Stewart Brewer, *Borders and Bridges: A History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2006), 41.

⁶⁷ It is also important to note that the slave trade was essential to the Monroe Doctrine, which was written to protect the illegal slave trade after Parliament had deemed slavery illegal in 1807. The British Royal Navy was actively anti-slave trade and the United States sought to protect

consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere, as dangerous to our peace and safety.”⁶⁸

In essence, the Monroe Doctrine was a unilateral call for U.S. “protection” over the entire Western hemisphere without the military or economic strength to support such an ambitious policy, especially in the face of European colonial power.⁶⁹ In 1845, U.S. President James K. Polk called for aggressive economic expansion into the U.S. West at his inaugural address, providing the justification for the United States conquest and annexation of half of Mexico with the Mexican-American War of 1846. Polk explained that expansion was part of America’s Manifest Destiny, requiring the United States to venture into Mexico.⁷⁰ After the U.S. Civil War in 1865, the United States further intervened in Mexico by persuading Napoleon III to withdraw French military support from Maximilian von Hapsburg in Mexico. Starting in March 1861, the French occupied Mexico while President Benito Juárez was in office, in response to his inability to pay the debt Mexico owed to the French. The French intervention in Mexico, according to many U.S. statesmen, constituted an ideological and political challenge to the Monroe Doctrine. Using the Monroe Doctrine as justification, the United States intervened in Mexico through finance capital, pouring loans and concessions into Mexico to support the Mexican government

American-owned Cuban slave estates, fearing that if the British gained influence, it would halt the sugar slave plantation economy there. The call for non-intervention was thus not designed to protect statehood, but to protect U.S. investments in the Caribbean on behalf of elite U.S. investors. See Steven Chambers, *No God but Gain: The Untold Story of Cuban Slavery, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Making of the United States* (New York: Verso, 2015), 120-123.

⁶⁸ Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18th Congress (The Monroe Doctrine), 2 December 1823, available online at: <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=23>

⁶⁹ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 5, 17, 248. The British empire was large and more powerful in 1820 than it had been in 1776, and it governed two thirds of the world’s colonial territories.

⁷⁰ James K. Polk “Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1845. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project,” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25814>.

against the European occupation. The infusion of U.S. finance capital into Mexico set the stage for future investments in other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷¹

By the 1870s, U.S. imperialism had in part become a grand strategy of economic control, an exchange of dollars for railroad construction in Latin America, as part of the pursuit for areas in which to invest, manufacture cheaply, find consumers, and practice “free trade.” As U.S. Secretary of State “Jingo” Jim Blaine (1881, 1889-92) stated, “while the great powers of Europe are steadily enlarging their colonial domination in Asia and Africa, it is the especial province of this country to improve and expand its trade with the nations of America.”⁷² Blaine and other U.S. officials wanted Latin America to depend on U.S. “free” markets, not “colonial” European markets. In reality, U.S. practices were not a deviation from European practices but variations on them that drew inspiration from British colonialism. For example, U.S. westward expansion entailed colonial rule over new territories that were not only similar to, but also modeled on the colonial regimes Britain had previously constructed for the thirteen colonies. Even further, both states rhetorically preferred non-territorial rule over peripheral areas, creating empires of clients and subordinated allies using a discourse of “free trade” and economic liberalism, over and against European mercantilism.⁷³

⁷¹ For more on U.S. investments in Latin America, see Mira Wilkins, *The Maturing of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from 1914-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Josh deWind, *Peasants Become Miners: The Evolution of Industrial Mining Systems in Peru, 1902-1974* (Garland Publishing, 1987); Dan LaBotz, *Edward L. Doheny: Petroleum, Power, and Politics in the US and Mexico* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991); Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatan, Mexico, and the United States, 1880-1924* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1987); Emily Rosenberg, *World War I and the Growth of the United States Predominance in Latin America* (Garland Publishers, 1987).

⁷² Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

⁷³ Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 25, 66.

The U.S. Minister to Mexico, Thomas Corwin, provides an illustration of the U.S. preference for economic liberalism when he argued for the United States to use the French invasion as an opportunity to direct Mexico's development. To "right" the expansionist wrongs of the Polk presidency, which had led to the annexation of Mexican territory, Corwin sought to strengthen self-government and economic liberalism in Mexico by proposing an \$11 million loan to Mexico to repay foreign creditors and expel the French from Mexico. He stated, "The United States are the only safe guardians of the independence and true civilization of this continent." Corwin thought his loan treaty would lay the foundation for future commercial agreements and transit concessions to U.S. railroad developers.⁷⁴ Corwin believed that the United States needed to direct Mexican development, as he stated, "The United States are the only safe guardians of the independence and true civilization of the continent."⁷⁵ In addition, Matías Romero, Juárez' Secretary of Finance and Ambassador to the United States, actively pursued such U.S. loans and investments in exchange for armaments from the United States, to remove the French. José María Jesús Carbajal, Juárez supporter and governor of Tamaulipas, also granted a series of bonds that were discounted by sixty percent and backed by guarantees of 106,000 acres of agricultural, oil, and mining lands in Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí.⁷⁶ Several political officials also helped the Juárez administration to acquire weapons, including President Ulysses S. Grant, who transferred large quantities of arms and ammunition to Mexico. With U.S. "aid," Mexico resisted the French occupation in 1867, restoring the republic. Mexican officials then sought to commercialize and modernize the rural Mexican landscape by making Mexico friendly

⁷⁴ Sexton, *Monroe Doctrine*, 143-145. Dollar diplomacy was not new in the early 1900s, even though President Taft coined the phrase in 1909.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷⁶ Jason Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico Since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11-16.

to U.S. investments, a project which many Mexican leaders actively entertained for the benefit of their own liberal state-building projects.⁷⁷

No political leader in Mexico demonstrates the support of economic liberalism better than Mexican President Porfirio Díaz. His political regime, the Porfiriato (1876-1910), signaled a new period of U.S. influence and power in Mexico, as aggressive capitalists moved forward with commitments to banking, technology, resource exploitation and land ownership in Mexico. Díaz wanted to nationalize and modernize Mexico and extend its markets.⁷⁸ In 1876, Mexico's railway consisted of only 400 miles of tracks. Under Díaz, the railroad rapidly expanded as he offered concessions to major railroad companies. Mexico also became a major source of raw materials production for the United States. Díaz's support of U.S. financial investments in Mexico led to increased labor migrations across Mexico. The Porfiriato was notorious for privatizing indigenous land, industrializing agriculture, and commercializing the hacienda in the rural Mexican countryside, all with the help of foreign capital and with the goal of modernizing Mexico. In an effort to combine privatization and industrialization, his administration expanded the abilities of outside companies to demarcate and acquire indigenous lands by undoing the legal processes by which indigenous people held lands communally. He forced the sale of indigenous lands in vast quantities to powerful Mexican property holders and foreign investors, changing the Mexican landscape. While locals contested the purchases, Mexican authorities

⁷⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁸ For more on the process of "modernization" in Mexico, see Mark Overmeyer-Velásquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaco, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Gilbert M. Joseph and Allen Wells, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán, 1876-1915* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996).

approved the transactions and denied their complaints, forcing indigenous populations to choose between performing labor in estate agriculture and migrating for employment.⁷⁹

As privatized haciendas expanded into modern plantations, indigenous people became increasingly dependent on landowners. Through debt peonage, landowners provided loans to workers, drawing them into a labor relationship where they could never pay off their loans, leading to indentured labor. Whereas *hacendados* had obligations to pay wages and give workers a share of goods produced, these relations were distorted in the system of larger plantations. Many indigenous subsistence farmers became landless wage earners, dislocated from their communities and forced to work for wages to purchase food under the Porfiriato. As a result, Mexican *campesinos* migrated north, to engage in other tactics to survive in the new “modern” economy created under Díaz, many working on the railroad or in the mines of northern Mexico. Díaz’s efforts demonstrate how the project of constructing a Mexican-nation state overlapped with the U.S.-state project of expansion into Latin America. These overlapping Mexican and U.S. state projects resulted in the continued labor mobility of indigenous populations who sought purportedly “free labor” as a survival mechanism to feed their families. While an element of choice presumably informed their movements, most of their labor migrations were hardly chosen. By 1910, the Mexican Revolution itself also propelled an exodus from Mexico to the United States as everyday Mexicans sought to escape the sheer violence, terror, and bloodshed that took place in their communities. As the Mexican economy collapsed under Díaz’s reign, the rise of hunger and epidemics increased, all of which led people to take drastic measures to survive. Such measures often involved fleeing the country to avoid starvation and violence or to prevent sons and daughters from being recruited into the military to

⁷⁹ Hart, *Empires and Revolution*, 172, 200.

enter the deadly crossfire of civil war. The revolution itself resulted in the influx of more than a million Mexican immigrants to the United States from 1910 to 1930 for work in agriculture, railroads, and mining.

Once in the United States, refugees of the Mexican Revolution inflamed an already robust anti-immigration movement there. Both U.S. organized labor and restriction leagues worked together to prevent Mexican migration to the United States.⁸⁰ Yet, just as immigration restrictionists lobbied for anti-immigration laws, U.S. agriculture and mining companies frightened the public and Congress with threats to food production, lobbying against immigration restriction. Such opposition to Mexican migration to the United States eventually led to Mexican Repatriation (1929-1939), when President Hoover's administration, in concert with local officials, members of the labor community (AFL), and federal authorities in the Department of Labor (DOL), set out on a formal campaign to deport and repatriate nearly 450,000 Mexicans back to Mexico.⁸¹ Both U.S. and Mexican governmental and private agencies together devised a repatriation scheme, seeking to ease unemployment in the United States as a result of the Great Depression.⁸² As Mexico coaxed Mexicans in the United States to voluntarily return to Mexico, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration set out a plan that involved intimidation raids, propaganda in newspapers, and related efforts intent on creating a climate of fear to encourage Mexicans to

⁸⁰ Ricardo Romo, "Responses to Mexican Immigration, 1910-1930," in *Beyond 1848: Readings in the Modern Chicano Historical Experience*, ed. Michael Raúl Ornelas (New York: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1993), 115-135.

⁸¹ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 213-214; Francisco E. Balderrama Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Camille Guerin-Gonzalez, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (Rutgers University Press, 1994), 77-110.

⁸² Dennis Nodín Valdés, "Mexican Revolutionary Nationalism and Repatriation During the Great Depression," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 4 (Winter 1988): 1-23; Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States*, 148.

leave of their own volition. Local citizens led public repatriation committees, fueling most of the campaign in the United States. Mexican consular officials, while protesting abuses, cooperated with local repatriation programs, arranging with Mexican customs officials to lower duties for personal goods, and with railroads to offer free transportation from the border to the interior. They established a *Comité Pro-Repatriación*, one of several such organizations Mexican consuls helped to establish throughout the United States.

The ideology of Mexican revolutionary nationalism that emerged shaped the Mexican state's views on repatriation in the 1930s, as they considered repatriation to be a project of state protection and material assistance, both of which were consistent with Mexican revolutionary ideals and with United States "Good Neighborly" ideals that would emerge by 1933. In the 1930s, a reconsolidated Mexican government had sought to incorporate the idealism of the revolution with the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRI). President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) created an extensive land reform in the state, as did President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), when he implemented the land, labor, and educational reforms of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. Land redistribution constituted a center piece of Cárdenas' policies across Mexico, as *campesinos* received *ejidos* (collective landholdings), credit, and technical support. Cardenista reforms also included the creation of industrial projects, structured as cooperatives, to help modernize the countryside. Such actions won Cárdenas a strong allegiance among the poor, seemingly demonstrating that the state could serve to protect the interests of marginalized workers in the Mexican countryside. In supporting Mexican Repatriation, the Mexican government seemed to fulfill revolutionary nationalist ideals. Mexican government preferred to use the term "repatriation" rather than "deportation," in the 1930s, to encourage a re-population of the Mexican countryside while discouraging further migration to the United States. Their

patriotic vision of Mexico exalted Mexico's agrarian, indigenous past. In essence, repatriation sanctified the nation-state on both sides, as state authorities collaborated to refuse Mexicans access to U.S. citizenship and labor.⁸³ With Mexican repatriation, the Mexican government again became an active participant in the U.S. and Mexican government project of labor mobility, setting the stage for the 1940s labor programs.

This logic of Mexican repatriation is, in fact, precisely what allowed the labor importation program to emerge in Mexico in the 1940s with the Bracero Program. Again, as in the case of Mexican repatriation, one U.S. state project overlapped with a Mexican state project, to control labor migrations to and from the United States, resulting in a "binational" program that would ensure both population exclusion and labor mobility as it suited United States and Mexico's business and labor needs. In response to Mexican revolutionaries' critiques of U.S. imperialism, Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry in Mexico in the 1920s, kicking out international oil companies and seizing their land and facilities. Cárdenas argued that the government, led by the National Revolutionary Party (PRI), would guide the Mexican government through the control and management of industry on behalf of the nation, giving rise to a modern, technologically advanced industrial Mexico. Building on the grievances against U.S. investors that had been fomenting since the Mexican Revolution, he promised a different Mexico, owned by Mexico. In nationalizing oil reserves, he created PEMEX (Mexican Petrol), the national oil company, forcing U.S. corporations like Standard Oil to leave Mexico, bringing about a dramatic shift in the economy. In many ways, Cárdenas's nationalization of U.S. businesses forced the Good Neighbor Policy in the 1930s as much as local turmoil had during the Mexican Revolution, since President Roosevelt wished to continue U.S. trade and investments

⁸³ Valdés, "Mexican Revolutionary Nationalism," 7-11.

with Mexico during the economic crisis of the Great Depression. To prevent the nationalization of other industries, and allow the United States continued access to Mexican resources and markets, U.S. officials rhetorically reversed decades of U.S. policy with the Good Neighbor Policy. The Good Neighbor Policy signified the withdrawal of U.S. troops, a repudiation of empire, and a change in diplomatic policies towards Mexico and other parts of Latin America.⁸⁴

The Good Neighbor Policy's seeming reversal of decades of U.S. imperial intervention served to justify continued U.S. financial intervention in Mexico. While President Cárdenas had nationalized oil in Mexico, he did not do the same for agribusiness, resulting in further upheaval in the countryside. Popular protests accompanied the government's every attempt to abandon social reforms after Cárdenas, as rural dwellers fought to preserve or make good on the efforts of the revolution. After the end of Cárdenas's presidency in 1940, a nationalist government sought foreign investment, especially from the United States, giving generous concessions to private enterprise once again. President Miguel Alemán (1946-52), for his part, gave generous concessions to the private sector—including businessmen who often occupied prominent government positions. Through an alliance with foreign enterprise, a group of millionaires began to emerge, including Alemán himself. The Mexican government not only supported further U.S. financial intervention in the 1940s under the Good Neighbor Policy, it also supported rural labor mobility through the U.S.-proposed Bracero Program. President Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-46) believed that unskilled rural Mexican men were an inferior race who could acquire the qualities, skills, and wages necessary for Mexico to advance socially and technologically only by being exposed to elements of more developed countries like the United States. He thought that rural Mexican men's mastery of skills "improved the character of the

⁸⁴ Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007), 30.

Mexican people,” advancing Mexico’s social and technological development. As such, temporary U.S. contract labor would modernize them and indirectly influence the economy of the Mexican countryside.⁸⁵ In the end, the Good Neighbor Policy generated even more U.S. intervention and the massive movement of capital and labor, which were linked to former imperial practices. The Mexican Revolutionary Party, Mexican Repatriation, and the Good Neighbor Policy each sanctioned the nation-state through binationalism, while disavowing decades of violence and upheaval in the countryside resulting from U.S. imperial interventions, enabling future labor migrations.⁸⁶

Former U.S. Imperialism in the Caribbean and Central America, 1865 to 1940

Outside of Mexico, a very similar process of U.S. financial investment and population displacement took root in the Caribbean and Central America. By the 1880s, the United States had invested tens of millions of dollars in Latin America for trade in bananas and sugar as export crops. By 1900, U.S. investors who had dominated the Mexican economy, now sought to do the same in Central America and the Caribbean. By 1897, Mexico led Latin America as the largest direct recipient of U.S. investments totaling \$200 million by 1897. Cuba followed close behind with over \$30 million in US investments. Total U.S. investment in the West Indies and Central

⁸⁵ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 2011), 31-39, 79; Ana Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 19.

⁸⁶ These further interventions and concessions came at a heavy costs to workers. The state abandoned the *campesinos* in favor of agribusiness, with devastating effect on the Mexican countryside. In turn, *campesinos*, rail workers and oil workers mounted powerful protests against the government to preserve the social clauses mandated by the 1917 constitution. Even as the PRI increasingly implemented an economic order that privileged business interests and foreign investment, popular groups fought back every step of the way by consistently challenging the state. See Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University press, 2008), 5-9.

America amounted to \$60-70 million. Most of the investments were in agricultural enterprises, particularly sugar planting in Cuba and banana growing in Central America.⁸⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States succeeded the European powers as the main economic and political force in the Caribbean, providing the means to build the sugar, banana, and coffee industries there. U.S. agricultural companies became the dominant growers in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. By the 1920s, U.S. owned companies produced most of the world's sugar. "Free trade" and market exchange thus reflected the economic domination of Latin American and Caribbean by the United States and served as the means to expand U.S. empire's reach.⁸⁸

The United States did not stop with financial intervention but rather interpreted the Monroe Doctrine to justify the direct military occupation of Central America and several states in the Caribbean, as well as the acquisition of colonies in 1898. In 1896, William McKinley became president and made several promises about U.S. expansion, including the annexation of Hawai'i and Cuba, a canal through Nicaragua, which would become the Panama Canal, and the removal of all European nations from the hemisphere, on the grounds of bolstering U.S. and Latin American military security.⁸⁹ One of the first military interventions occurred in Cuba, with the Spanish-American War (1898). By 1894, the United States had already developed and dominated the sugar industry in Cuba. Many Cubans believed that if they extricated themselves from Spain, they could have more access to the profits from sugar revenues pouring into the

⁸⁷ David Healy, *Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean, 1898-1917* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 14; Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 63-66.

⁸⁸ Steve Stern, *Confronting Historical Paradigms*, 30.

⁸⁹ Brewer, *Borders and Bridges*, 73.

United States, creating a more positive existence as an independent nation.⁹⁰ In 1868, Cuba revolted against Spanish control in the Ten Years' War, seeking independence. By 1895, José Martí led a new revolt for independence in Cuba, as founder of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. When the *U.S.S. Maine* blew up in Havana harbor, U.S. Congress decided on war. By this point, the Cuban rebellion against the Spanish had become a spectacle in the U.S. imaginary. The U.S. Congress decided it was the humanitarian duty of the United States to end it, and declared a war of liberation (not of conquest) to lay the foundation for a new republic in Cuba. In April 1898, Congress declared Cuba independent and attacked the Spanish in both the Philippines and Cuba. The stated mission of the army was to defeat Spain and Spanish authority on the island, not expand U.S. territory.⁹¹

In what became a war for expansion, the United States government acquired the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico as colonies. Because the United States had stated in the Teller Amendment that it would not establish permanent control over Cuba, it seemed the war was not a war over empire.⁹² Officials felt compelled to make an exception out of Cuba, disavowing any imperial intentions with the Platt Amendment (1901). As McKinley stated, his intention was “to secure in the island the establishment of a stable government, capable of maintaining order and observing its international obligations ensuring peace and tranquility and the security of its citizens as well as our own.” By 1902 Cuba was independent in name only. In

⁹⁰ Brewer, *Borders and Bridges*, 73; Ada Ferrer, “Cuba, 1898: Rethinking Race, Nation, and Empire,” *Radical History Review*, 73 (January 1999): 22-46.

⁹¹ Lester Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 11.

⁹² The Teller Amendment stated the United States “hereby disclaims any disposition of intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said islands except for pacification thereof...” In other words, the goal was solely to defeat Spain, not to establish colonies. The Teller Amendment did not apply to Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, which became colonies. Republican Congressional Committee, *Republican Text Book for the Campaign of 1898* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Company, 1898), 330-383.

1899, President McKinley named Leonard Wood governor of Cuba and instructed him to “prepare” Cubans for independence. According to the Platt Amendment, Cuba had to grant the United States the “right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence [and] the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty.”⁹³ Wood’s goal was, therefore, to bring “democracy” to the island by establishing U.S.-style political parties. To facilitate “democracy,” Wood sought to further develop Cuba using U.S. capital as a precondition for Cuban independence. With the Platt Amendment, the United States again disavowed empire, essentially dictating Cuba’s domestic and foreign affairs, while turning Cuba into an economic colony of the United States.⁹⁴

By December 6, 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt was convinced that the United States would have to act as constable of the Caribbean by establishing the “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine. In an annual message to Congress, the corollary made the United States into an international policeman while explicitly denying empire, stating: “It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any projects as regards to other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship.” If it “keeps order” and “pays its obligations” it “needs no interference from the United States.” According to the Roosevelt Corollary, “chronic wrongdoing” may ultimately “require intervention” and the “adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in

⁹³ Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Cuba Embodying the Provisions Defining Their Future Relations as Contained in the Act of Congress, Approved March 2, 1901, and signed May 22, 1903, RG 11, General Records of the United States Government, NARA.

⁹⁴ Langley, *Banana Wars*, 35; Brewer, *Borders and Bridges*, 78.

flagrant cases of such wrongdoing, to the exercise of an international police power.”⁹⁵

Roosevelt’s corollary stated that the United States would intervene as a last resort to ensure that other nations in the Western Hemisphere fulfilled their obligations to international creditors and did not invite “foreign aggression” to the detriment of the “entire body of American nations.” He expanded the Monroe Doctrine, arguing that the United States had a responsibility to “preserve order” and “protect life” in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Roosevelt also adopted the catchphrase “speak softly and carry a big stick,” which he applied to Latin America and the Caribbean. Although he insisted his purpose lay in upholding law and order in places where local governments could not, Roosevelt used the “big stick” in Cuba at different intervals (1902-1903, 1906-1909), in Panama (1903), in Central America (1906-1907), in Venezuela (1902-1903), and in other Latin American countries. The United States military temporarily occupied these regions to “maintain order” through a series of military bases in the Canal Zone and in Cuba. Officials also administered the customs offices of the Dominican Republic (1916-1924) and Haiti (1915-1934). The Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam were not excluded from U.S. interventionist policy and marked earlier examples of this style of U.S. imperialism, which was explicitly racist. The “chronic wrongdoers” who required the administration of Roosevelt’s “big stick” policy were exclusively identified in the U.S. imagination as non-white. The creation of “stability” and “civilization” were intermixed with ideas of “racial progress and development.” The terms of “stability” and “progress” bestowed on Latin American countries gave name to the “backwardness” that U.S. financial leaders saw in

⁹⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, “Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine,” 6 December 1904, Annual Message Before Congress.

Latin America, providing justification for whatever action or intervention the United States deemed necessary to exert.⁹⁶

Again, “free trade” remained essential to the United States’ mission in Latin America and the Caribbean. U.S. officials came to believe in a centralized yet flexible and expanding financial order, run by state experts, as fundamental to a modern corporate order and progressive societies in Latin America, in obeisance to the Roosevelt Corollary. As President William Howard Taft proclaimed in 1912, “The diplomacy of the present administration has sought to respond to modern ideas of commercial intercourse. This policy has been characterized as substituting dollars for bullets. It is one that appeals alike to idealistic humanitarian sentiments, to the dictates of sound policy and strategy, and to legitimate commercial aims.” It was through “dollar diplomacy” that U.S. military and finance interests had restructured Latin American economies defaulting on foreign loans, took over their customs houses, or brought in financial investments in the form of concessions to replace European financial interests. As Taft further stated:

The United States has been glad to encourage and support American bankers who were willing to lend a helping hand to the financial rehabilitation of such countries because this financial rehabilitation and the protection of their customhouses from being the prey of would-be dictators would remove at one stroke the menace of foreign creditors and the menace of revolutionary disorder.⁹⁷

In the end, the United States promoted its own version of “liberty” in Latin America, appearing to eradicate “despotic” modes of governance there while promoting Latin American’s “capacity

⁹⁶ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 48-49.

⁹⁷ William Howard Taft, *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs*, 1912. Note, the phrase “dollar diplomacy” covered a variety of meanings and processes but was initiated by President Roosevelt and flourished under President Taft and his successors. For Taft, it was a cornerstone of progressive foreign policy that embodied a dream of rising living standards for all boosted by larger volumes of traded goods and predictable financial infrastructures, as well as the progressive expansion of state power in Latin American and the Caribbean, guided by experts. Rosenberg, *World War I*, 1.

for self-government,” which should necessarily rely on maintaining the United States’ vision of “order and progress.” As a result, national “liberty” did not contradict colonial rule but, rather, accommodated both colonialism as territorial rule (or military occupation) and colonialism as the expansion of imperial finance and trade. Instead of replacing earlier forms of colonialism with liberal free trade, “free trade” became the vehicle for continued usurpation, expansion, military occupation, and labor exploitation.⁹⁸

After the conquest of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the next largest U.S. intervention in the Caribbean and Latin America occurred in the Panama Canal. Fearing and suspecting future German intervention in the region, the United States sought to control a route through the canal as a security measure.⁹⁹ With the Panama Canal, Roosevelt set a precedent by which to build on in the Caribbean to ensure U.S. interests, by temporarily seizing control of the Panama government and dictating policies friendly to American business. The U.S. Platt Amendment in Cuba had provided a model by which to treat the Caribbean, ensuring the right of the United States to intervene to preserve Caribbean “independence.” It took ten long years (1904-1914) for the United States Panama Canal Company to complete the project. To find sufficient labor to build the canal, the U.S. government established offices in the Caribbean to begin recruiting labor for the construction project. Impoverished sugarcane workers in the West Indies, whose ancestors had been bought and sold in the Atlantic slave trade, often signed up to migrate to Panama in search of better laboring conditions. Over 20,000 West Indians, mostly from Barbados, migrated to Panama to help construct the U.S. canal.¹⁰⁰ After the completion of

⁹⁸ Lisa Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 15.

⁹⁹ Brewer, *Borders and Bridges*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2014).

the Panama Canal Zone, many of these laborers who had migrated for work there stayed on as maintenance workers because they could not afford to return home. The Panama Canal set a cycle of migration for British West Indian workers, many of who left the islands to work as laborers for canal construction, then as maintenance workers, and also as agricultural workers for U.S.-owned companies in Central America and other parts of the Caribbean.¹⁰¹ For British West Indians, the Panama Canal, sugar, and banana industries only cemented the conception of extra-regional migration as one of the best avenues to economic and social betterment. U.S. officials of the Panama Canal considered these laborers, many former slaves or the descendants of slaves, “free” wage laborers granting the workers agency and “choice” in their migrations when, in fact, depressed sugar economies on the islands (economies that existed as a result of slavery), had forced them to look elsewhere for work.

From 1901 to 1914, when the United States formally completed construction of the Panama Canal, the United States exercised considerable authority over Latin America in foreign policy, using national security as a rhetorical tactic for imperial rule. With the security of the Caribbean now a major concern of U.S. government and military leaders, a series of military interventions known as the “Banana Wars” took place from the turn of the twentieth century to the inception of the Good Neighbor Policy (1934).¹⁰² These wars occurred in countries including Venezuela, Panama, Honduras, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Haiti, lasting until implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy. The Roosevelt Corollary had explicitly made the

¹⁰¹ See Frederick Douglass Opie, *Black Labor Migration in Caribbean Guatemala, 1882-1923* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 66-68; Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

¹⁰² “The Banana Wars,” began with the Spanish American War in 1898 and with the building of the Panama Canal. They involved more U.S. military interventions than I can detail here. For example, I am expressly leaving out the story of the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, Mexico in 1914, and the Honduras in 1907.

United States into an “international police power” in 1904, the role of which was to inculcate respect for U.S. rule. This strategy went beyond “safeguarding” the Panama Canal and meant policing governments that the United States believed incapable of policing themselves.¹⁰³ The Banana Wars meant the creation of governments in the Caribbean and Latin America that would accomplish an orderly society of law-abiding people who did the United States’ bidding, as per the Platt Amendment. The goal was to keep competing European colonial powers out of Latin America. For example, when Germany considered occupying Venezuela in 1901 to ensure repayment of their loans, the United States sent a blockade to the area to prevent Germany from creating a foothold, then set out to settle Venezuela’s finances in 1902, ignoring outright the sovereignty of Venezuela.¹⁰⁴ Intervening economically to control Venezuela’s finances was considered “progress,” but it placed the management of a “competent” official from outside. Once “progress” had been achieved, the U.S. government promised that the doors would be opened to foreign investment leading to economic and social development.

U.S. officials worked with private business interests (including U.S. banks) to create diplomatic policies, linking security and peace to the integration of Caribbean economies into a free market capitalist system while drawing the Caribbean into the economic orbit of the United States.¹⁰⁵ These officials often framed such imperial pursuits as liberating and humanitarian. They celebrated white societies such as those found in the United States and the British Empire as advanced practitioners of nation building and civilization, helping to uplift debtor nations in

¹⁰³ Langley, *The Banana Wars*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Brewer, *Borders and Bridges*, 71, 80-82; Healy, *Drive to Hegemony*, 71, 103, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Cyrus Veaser, *A World Safe for Capitalism: Dollar Diplomacy and America's Rise to Global Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 6-19; Healy, *Drive to Hegemony*, 23, 111-113, 149, 178; Langley, *The Banana Wars*, 28; Philander C. Knox, “The Monroe Doctrine and Some Incidental Obligations in the Zone of the Caribbean,” address before the New York State Bar Association, 19 January 1912.

Latin America that lacked the “manly” qualities of discipline and self-control that western nations had achieved. Roosevelt, for instance, preached that it was the “manly duty” of the United States to exercise an international police power in the Caribbean and to spread the benefits of Anglo-Saxon civilization to inferior states populated by inferior peoples.¹⁰⁶

U.S. officials celebrated these financial and military interventions as a form of assistance to debtor nations in Latin America. At the heart of U.S. military interventions in the Caribbean and Central America lay a concern over the security of the United States’ multi-million dollar commercial and business investments in the region. The trade in bananas alone brought profit to the United States, income United States officials and agribusiness did not wish to lose to Europeans. By the turn of the twentieth century, nearly 100 different small companies formed for the sole purpose of shipping bananas and other tropical fruits from Central America and the Caribbean back to the United States. Multiple banana importers merged together to form a trust known as the United Fruit Company (UFCO). In time, the UFCO became such a powerful monopoly that its annual income was greater than the entire national revenues of most of its Latin American host countries.¹⁰⁷ These fruit companies bought enormous tracts of land in Central America and Caribbean for the cultivation of bananas. By the mid-1930s, UFCO operated plantations in Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic with more than 3.5 million square acres of land. These banana plantation owners became well known for dictating

¹⁰⁶ See Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Brewer, *Borders and Bridges*, 20; Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

conditions to politicians in the host counties and for their aggressive tactics in acquiring land.¹⁰⁸ Often with approval of local politicians, fruit companies installed basic infrastructure like railroads and ports, all in the service of their industries.

Whether in the case of gunboat or dollar diplomacy, U.S. government policies towards Latin America created a network of Caribbean migrations to the United States, resulting in decades of cyclical migrations, just as U.S. diplomacy had in Mexico. U.S. fruit companies recruited black West Indian workers from the start to fill low paying jobs and develop Central American and Caribbean agriculture, just as they did in Panama for the construction of the U.S. Panama Canal. U.S. contractors had begun hiring these workers to lay track through the Central America in the early 1880s. The earliest went to Guatemala as contract laborers for railroad construction projects, working for the International Railroad of Central America (IRCA) and later the United Fruit Company (UFCO). Black workers performed similar railroad work in Costa Rica, Panama, and other parts of Latin America, but eventually came to dominate jobs in the banana and sugar industries of the Caribbean. Because workers in Cuba turned to direct action after population displacements resulting from U.S. corporate interventions, the United States began to import black Haitian and Jamaican workers into Cuba to undercut the work force. Between 1911 and 1921, 22,000 Jamaicans migrated to Cuba, attracted by jobs on sugar plantations. By 1919, 34,000 West Indians arrived, and constituted one third of the work force in the sugar cane fields in Cuba. U.S. investments in Cuba soared to over one billion dollars by the early 1920s, effectively placing control of Cuba's sugar, mining, and transportation industries in the hands of American corporations. Cubans came into direct conflict with U.S. corporations, as

¹⁰⁸ Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

port workers and sugarcane workers struck against companies over putatively “free” wages as “free labor.”¹⁰⁹ As in the case of Mexico, improved access to transportation contributed to the mobility of (mostly) black immigrants across the Caribbean basin.¹¹⁰ Migrant workers were indispensable (Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Panamanians, Mexicans) in the quest for an imperial infrastructure of U.S. financed trains, shipping lanes, naval bases, treaty ports, and, in this case, banana plantations.¹¹¹

Therefore, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed the liquidation of U.S. imperialism with the Good Neighbor Policy in 1933, not much had changed in terms of U.S. imperialism. What Roosevelt suggested was not new, but rather had been building for the last thirty years in Latin America and the Caribbean, as previous interventions in Latin America suggest. With the Bracero Program, the U.S. and Mexican states proclaimed that both states had truly surpassed imperialism, and existed to defend democracy and “freedom.” Such proclamations had long been used to justify U.S. interventions in Latin America, leading to the rise of Mexican migration to the United States, in the first place. The rise of Mexican migration to the United States resulted in a dependence on Mexican labor, setting the stage for a longer pattern of state control over Mexican labor that culminated in the Bracero Program. The only difference was that the state structure to implement these liberal “freedoms” of the nation-state was now several times larger than it had ever been before. On the part of U.S. officials, the Good Neighbor Policy signaled a realization that military and economic interventions in Latin America had resulted in local turmoil that prevented the effective employment of U.S. economic and military power. While the policy rhetorically signified the liquidation of empire in Latin

¹⁰⁹ Thomas O’Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Opie, *Black Labor Migration in Caribbean Guatemala*, 2, 90-91.

¹¹¹ Jacobsen *Barbarian Virtues*, 7.

America, it was also a strategy designed to maintain and strengthen U.S. power in the hemisphere, by ensuring the continued renewal of open markets and labor mobility in Latin America.

That the U.S. Good Neighbor Policy was not exactly new becomes apparent when examined from the perspective of the history of the Pan American Union (PAU), an organization that had long served the purpose of expressing benevolent intentions, while condoning U.S. access to “free” markets in Latin America and the Caribbean. Created by U.S. Secretary of State Blaine in 1890, the PAU sought to adopt a more active interventionist approach for the United States in Latin America under the Monroe Doctrine. Established as the International Union of American Republics, it was designed to promote cooperation among countries of Latin America, to reach agreements on various common commercial and juridical problems through a series of annual conferences. While emphasizing multilateralism, solidarity, and democracy, such conferences were, in fact, designed for dispute resolution and pacification of those Latin American countries that were not interested in backing U.S. economic interests. After all, Blaine created the PAU in 1890 within the broad context of a decades-long escalation of U.S. economic interests in Latin America and the Caribbean basin, and a rising demand for markets, bases, mining operations, and a canal.¹¹² At the turn of the twentieth century, Pan-Americanism transformed the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine into an ideology of “mutual cooperation” among Latin American states. The PAU indicated that there were multiple forms of U.S. imperial engagement in Latin America, and not all of them were economic or military led. The PAU made Latin America more legible and apprehensible for the vast public created by

¹¹² Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues* 41.

corporate capitalism and mass consumer culture.¹¹³ William E. Curtis and William A. Reid, the first directors of the International Bureau of the PAU, sought to stimulate and circulate knowledge about the region in the United States, for better commercial interactions between north and south. To this end, the PAU started a series of publications regarding Latin America and facilitated international conferences for U.S. scientists while the Carnegie Endowment for Peace arranged goodwill tours in Latin America. The circulation about Latin America led to a new impulse to bridge the gap between the United States and Latin America. The PAU pioneered efforts to create an “information industry” with pamphlets, handbooks, reports, and more. U.S. universities organized Latin American collections, while public libraries arranged reading clubs and courses on Latin America. The expansion of U.S. investments in Latin America required the acquisition of new knowledge about Latin America, to assert that good, moral empire was valid—even as it enabled U.S. expansion.

A product of the progressive era, the PAU resulted in U.S. companies entering on a global mission to bring other countries the material production and industrial welfare programs of the United States. Members of the PAU served as ambassadors of the United States, legitimating U.S. capital, expertise, ideas, and values in Latin America.¹¹⁴ The PAU was so effective that by 1911, Anglo-Americans owned most of Mexico’s oil industry, which had become the third largest petroleum producer in the world.¹¹⁵ By the late 1920s, the U.S. had established control over crucial raw materials and transit routes, gained military expertise, and invested billions in Latin America. When viewed from the perspective of the PAU, the Good

¹¹³ Ricardo D. Salvatore, “The Enterprise of Knowledge: Representational Machines of Informal Empire,” in Gil Joseph, eds. Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.–Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 93.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-80.

¹¹⁵ Jacobsen, *Babarian Virtues*, 41-50.

Neighbor Policy that emerged in the 1930s was not new, but part of the renewed search for investment (free trade) opportunities abroad and a display of U.S. hegemony over the region. As a mask for imperialism, the PAU reimagined U.S. actions as essentially anti-imperial and a form of economic aid and assistance, whereby everyone would prosper. The PAU was productive for empire, as it informed imperialism with a moral purpose. Not surprisingly, the duties of U.S. anti-imperialism required the United States government to intervene in world policies; for such a world required the United States to aid and develop other countries, which would supposedly prevent imperial aggression. As a member of the PAU, Galarza's efforts toward defending a labor importation program in the 1940s, unbeknownst to Galarza, was a logical outgrowth of the supposed anti-imperialism of the PAU that had emerged at the turn of the twentieth century.

Conclusion: A New Productive Logic for U.S. Imperialism?

Scholar and educator Ernesto Galarza went to work with the Pan American Union in 1939, at the height of the Good Neighbor Policy with Mexico. A staunch proponent of the Good Neighbor Policy, as his research in Latin American education suggests, he co-wrote a pamphlet for the American Red Cross entitled *American Neighbors* (1940) that aimed at educating U.S. citizens on Latin American cultures.¹¹⁶ Soon after the publication of this pamphlet, Galarza attended the Tolson Committee hearings in February 1941 and May 1942 to suggest an international coalition to carry out a long-term plan for the “resettlement, rehabilitation, and regulation” of Mexican migrants. Framing his argument around the need to aid and uplift Mexican migrants and develop and industrialize Mexico, Galarza contended that their migrations should be controlled through proper government intervention, advancing a discourse of government protection, social welfare, and equality. What Galarza did not know is that the anti-

¹¹⁶ Ernesto Galarza, Herbert Eugene Bolton & Delia Goetz, *American Neighbors* (Washington, DC: The American National Red Cross, 1940).

imperial language he used to justify a Mexican labor importation program disavowed a history of U.S. imperial intervention in Latin America that spurred labor migration in the first place. His anti-imperial motivations were not new, but a product of the imperial agenda that had long been set by the PAU. When we examine the case of Galarza's first labor organizing campaign in the California farm fields, the history of U.S. empire becomes apparent, revealing a finely woven cloth of imperial connections that had long cemented U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 1946, Galarza resigned from the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C. to organize farm workers in California and champion the cause of Braceros in the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU). Galarza now sought to tackle the very problems of inequity, exploitation, and abuse that he had helped to create in initially advocating the Bracero Program. The first grower Galarza targeted for farm labor unionization in California was Joseph DiGiorgio (1874-1951), an agribusiness leader who had made his wealth off of the backs of British West Indian laborers. At the turn of the twentieth century, DiGiorgio imported British West Indians to work on his banana plantations in the Caribbean and Central America. The fruit company that DiGiorgio owned, the Baltimore Fruit Exchange, was a major competitor with the United Fruit Company during the early 1900s. In 1923, DiGiorgio entered into partnership with the Vacarro Brothers, who established their own banana company, which later became Standard Fruit Company on the Honduran coast. Together, they formed the Mexican American Fruit and Steamship Company, which later became the Standard Fruit and Steamship Company. In 1932, DiGiorgio sold the UFCO to Standard Fruit Company (later Dole Foods). After profiting immensely from British colonial labor, DiGiorgio sought to diversify his investments, by purchasing nearly 40,000 acres in California, near Bakersfield, to grow grapes for wine. In 1933,

DiGiorgio went into the wine business and became the largest grape, plum and pear grower in the world, worth \$18 million in 1946. He and his nephew, Robert DiGiorgio, sought to apply the same processes of labor and resource extraction in California that DiGiorgio had established in Central America, using British West Indian labor.¹¹⁷ Instead of looking to the Caribbean for labor, DiGiorgio employed so many braceros that Galarza decided to target DiGiorgio. When Galarza tried to include braceros in a series of strikes, those who joined him were threatened with deportation or expelled from the country. Furthermore, DiGiorgio employed new braceros as strikebreakers, a tactic that Galarza was unable to prevent. Galarza professed, “the state was literally flooded with braceros while we were on strike and before the strike and after the strike.”¹¹⁸ DiGiorgio was so successful at using Mexican contract workers and undocumented workers as strikebreakers, that the strike failed after thirty months in 1950.¹¹⁹

There are several connections to be drawn here, including the fact that the labor programs resulted in U.S. agribusiness leaders, in collusion with the U.S. federal government, continuously looking to Latin America and the Caribbean for a surplus labor supply. Business leaders’ initial attempts at investments and agricultural opportunities in Latin America and the

¹¹⁷ “The Di Giorgio Fruit Corp. Completes Huge New Banana Line-Up,” *The Chicago Packer*, 10 March 1928; Pamphlet, “The Di Giorgio Story,” by Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation, San Francisco, California (1959), accessed online at <http://www.borregospringschamber.com/borregohistory/people/DiGiorgio/1959-DiGiStory.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Ernesto Galarza, *The Burning Light: Action and Organizing in the Mexican Community in California*, interviews conducted by Gabrielle Morris and Timothy Beard in 1977, 1978, and 1981 (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Libraries, University of California, Berkeley, 1982), 16.

¹¹⁹ Galarza’s battle against DiGiorgio was not resolved until 1958. For more on the DiGiorgio strike, see Deborah Cohen, *Braceros*, 145-160; Ernesto Galarza, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1970); Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-business in California, 1947-1960* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977); Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement Before the UFW* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 195-200.

Caribbean had resulted in cycles of migration to plantations and mines throughout the hemisphere. Instead of spurning imperial practices of labor extraction, domination, and profiteering, U.S. business leaders such as DiGiorgio, found new ways to allow for continued resource extraction, labor mobility, and profit seeking in the name of anti-imperialism. It therefore seems an oddity that Galarza would have initially supported such a program. Such was the power of the new anti-imperial discursive political culture that Galarza actively helped to craft during World War II, in which state power seemed the natural response to global inequity, the abuses of capitalism, and the injustices of colonialism.

The reality of program violations on the ground was not a contradiction to the new set of meanings and practices regarding the laborers. Rather, the vocabulary that Ernesto Galarza assisted in facilitating allowed for these processes, enabling the racial logics of global capitalism, and the violence inherent to the programs, by eliding and diverting attention away from them. The government's rhetoric of reciprocity, bilateralism, and equality obscured the process of race and empire, as if racial difference had disappeared. These conditions allowed violence to advance precisely through the rational disavowal of race, even as the workers became racialized as "foreigners," "braceros," or "Mexican Nationals." Within these politics of disavowal and recognition, there was more to imperialism and colonialism than profit and hope of further profit, or of territorialism and conquest. There was a commitment to the constant circulation and recirculation of imperialism as "anti-imperialism," which allowed men and women to accept the notion that people that live in Latin America and the Caribbean should be used as a source for agricultural labor.¹²⁰ In rationalizing the programs through a disavowal of racism and imperialism within the context of the Good Neighbor Policy, the New Deal, and World War II,

¹²⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 10.

Galarza and other New Deal liberals assisted in the reconsolidation of imperialism and “race,” even as they were convinced of their own benevolent mission. As a result, they connected laborers in Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States in a way that former U.S. imperial interventions had not. Through the disavowal, the labor programs sanctified U.S. state power and U.S. imperialism, assisting in the creation of new meanings and justifications for the state-management of labor. By examining the Bracero Program within the context of Japanese Incarceration during World War II, the racialized and violent outcomes of liberal state power can be further exposed to show how the new framing of U.S. anti-imperialism was productive for empire.

Chapter Two

Securing Labor: The Creation of a Mexican Labor Importation Program in the Context of the Incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1941-1942

In September 1941, Galarza wrote a reminder letter to members of the Tolan Committee, suggesting that the possibility that farm labor may become scarce during the war in the southwestern states brought to the fore “the need to consider the establishment of an international agency to develop a long-term policy on the migration of labor from Mexico.”¹²¹ By May 1942, Representative John H. Tolan asked Galarza to join him in a series of congressional investigations into the workability of a Mexican labor importation program.¹²² However, a few months earlier in February and March 1942, Tolan had administered a series of congressional investigations regarding the “ways and means” of Japanese American “internment” or incarceration. The Tolan Committee congressional hearings provide an important window into understanding how U.S. officials initially framed and defended the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the Bracero Program together in 1942, as benevolent and paternalistic state projects and expressions of state protection and freedom. While potential for the national inclusion of Mexican migrants and Japanese Americans existed at the hearings, hearing members instead blurred and clarified the lines of “foreign” and “domestic,” with Japanese Americans and Mexican migrants on the other side of the divide. In the process of figuring out the Bracero Program and the incarceration of Japanese Americans together, Tolan Committee members helped to configure and reinforce the “alien” status of Japanese Americans and Mexican

¹²¹ Memo attached to Letter addressed to Miss Mary Dublin, House Committee on National Defense Migration (Tolan Committee), from Ernesto Galarza, 20 September, 1941, Box 5, Folder 6, Pan-American Union Correspondence, 1941-43, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries (EGP).

¹²² Letter to Ernesto Galarza, Chief of the Division and Social Information of the Pan American Union, from John H. Tolan, Chairman of the “House Committee Investigating National Defense Migration,” Washington, D.C., 8 May 1942, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

migrants. What resulted was a full-scale effort to remove Japanese-American farm competition and to profit from a temporary and exploitable racialized caste of laborers.

While the Tolan Committee stressed the humane and democratic procedures by which Mexicans and Japanese Americans would be treated as human beings equal to American citizens, both witnessed something else entirely. Mexican migrants faced low wages, poor housing conditions without sufficient sanitation facilities, and exploitative working conditions in the farm fields of the Southwest. Japanese American citizens faced forced expulsion from their homes on the Pacific Coast and imprisonment in criminal detention camps in the desolate regions of Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Arizona. Once there, incarcerated Japanese Americans were asked to work as imported farm labor in the sugar beet fields, making the incarceration of Japanese Americans its own sort of state-managed farm labor migration program. In 1942, President Roosevelt established the “War Relocation Work Corps” as part of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) by Executive Order 9102, to provide work opportunities to Japanese Americans that would give them a chance to “earn a living,” “contribute the maximum to the Nation’s production,” and to the “war effort,” just as the Bracero Program would for Mexicans.¹²³ Members of the Tolan Committee hearings configured the incarceration of Japanese Americans and a Mexican labor program together, using the same liberal political and epistemological logic of equality and “rights.” This construction of “rights” seemed to extend national belonging, social welfare, and state protection to Mexicans and Japanese Americans,

¹²³ Milton Eisenhower, “War Relocation Work Corps: A Circular for Enlistees and Their Families,” The War Relocation Authority, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), available at InternmentArchives.com. This document states: “To Americans of Japanese Ancestry: The democracies of the world are joined in a fight until it is won.... To help you as much as possible, to assist you in establishing new wartime homes, and to make certain that you will have ample opportunity to earn a living and contribute to the Nation’s production, the federal government has undertaken a planned, orderly relocation program.”

with the United States government figured as a source of democratic promise.

However, the violent and emotional realities faced by Japanese Americans and Mexican migrant laborers existed in direct contrast to the benevolent framing of these labor arrangements. As one Bracero stated, “The boss I worked for.... robbed us of our pay, because he used crooked scales for weighing the cotton we picked. I came here to try to support my family, but I have had a hard time with what I make.”¹²⁴ “We come here like animals rentados (rented animals), not like men,” explained another. “We are not animals. We are human beings who have suffered much to come to the United States and work...I think we should not come to the United States, where we are treated badly, abused, and looked down upon.”¹²⁵ Japanese “evacuee” Michiko Nishiura won first place of the Butte Oratorical contest with her 1944 speech “how the evacuation affected me,” in which she stated, “American democracy was not at all what we had cherished it to be—it was meant only for a certain group of people; not for all Americans, not for us Americans. This is the way evacuation affected me. It was my belief in American democracy that was challenged....”¹²⁶ Having experienced the Bracero Program and incarceration firsthand, these individuals pointed to the ironies and contradictions that framed their realities as prison inmates and agricultural laborers.

The Tolán Committee hearings therefore signaled a new code for understanding race, labor, and citizenship in the United States, a code that provided a foundation for the importation of “foreign” agricultural workers to the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. This code presumed that the liberal ideals of the U.S. nation-state were incompatible with

¹²⁴ Henry Anderson, “Fields of Bondage: The Mexican Contract Labor System in Industrialized Agriculture,” mimeographed typescript (1963): 34.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²⁶ Newspaper clipping, RG 208, Records of the Office of War Information (OWI), Entry 84, Box 7-8, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

“empire.” With the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the Bracero Program, U.S. officials and labor activists viewed U.S. federal power as a source of political change and racial progress, believing that federal intervention could prove beneficial to Japanese Americans and Mexicans at this time. Their arguments, structured as they were through the disavowal of racism and imperialism, prevented them from seeing the racialized and violent outcomes of state power and its role in propagating national and imperial structures of domination. Instead, Japanese American imprisonment and a state-managed Mexican labor migration seemed to signal benign modes of “defense” migration during World War II, not expressions of U.S. racism and imperialism. The rhetoric developed by Tolan Committee members to justify Japanese American and Mexican was therefore productive for empire and productive for race, even as it disavowed race and empire.

Tolan and Galarza played pivotal roles in this overlapping moment in the creation of the ideological infrastructure of incarceration and labor importation, making the hearings an important site that demonstrated the linked relationship between the two in the minds of New Deal liberals. They engaged the possibilities generated by the war and the Good Neighbor Policy as progressives advocating their own visions of democracy, racial equality, and social welfare. While they were not the direct architects of the labor programs, the hearings that they took part in were one venue by which we can disentangle the emerging rhetoric that provided the scaffolding for the initial U.S. labor importation program, the Bracero Program. The ideas that they generated through the hearings became the mainstay and cornerstone for government organizations, such as the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the Department of Agriculture (DOA) and the War Manpower Commission (WMC), for farmers, and for local communities in understanding race and labor in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Galarza and

Tolan therefore became key figures in the formulation and exercise of state power (and, therefore, empire) at a critical moment in the formation of the “American Century.”

Ernesto Galarza: An Effort Toward the Inclusion of Mexican Migrants

It was in this context that Galarza attended the Tolán Committee hearings in February 1941 to suggest an international coalition to carry out a long-term plan for the “resettlement, rehabilitation, and regulation” of Mexican migrants. At the hearing he proclaimed, “friendly, cooperative action has been taken by the governments of the United States and Mexico with regard to the exchange of goods, the adjustments of boundaries, and the flow of water, but never with regard to the flow of working men, women, and children.” This lack of interest in cooperative and good neighborly action had resulted in “socially undesirable conditions,” including overcrowding, slum areas, depressed wage scales, social and racial discrimination, and heavy case-loads on relief agencies.¹²⁷ These problems were responsible for Mexican Repatriation (1929-1939), when the United States government expunged thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to Mexico during the Great Depression. In fact, Galarza rooted his argument in a new type of repatriation, arguing for “a program of repatriation which would be economically sound and socially desirable,” noting that the repatriation that had been tried in the past failed because it did not provide Northern Mexico with “the economic means for establishing the returning Mexicans on productive land.” As he claimed, previous attempts at

¹²⁷ Statement of Ernesto Galarza, Chief of the Division of Labor and Social Information of the Pan American Union, “Before the Select Committee of the House of Representatives to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens,” 9 December 1940, Box 6, Folder 2, EGP; U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens (Tolan Committee), *Resolutions to Inquire into the Migration of Destitute Citizens, To Study, Survey, and Investigate the Social and Economic Needs and the Movement of Indigent Persons Across State Lines*, 76th Congress, 3rd session, Part 10, Washington Hearings, December 11, 1940 and February 26, 1941 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 3883-3886.

repatriation had resulted in “nothing more than the indiscriminate dumping of human beings below the border.... Inevitably many of these people would attempt to return to the United States, and the whole cycle [of migration] would be repeated.”¹²⁸ Framing his argument around the need to aid and uplift Mexican migrants and develop and industrialize Mexico, Galarza contended that their migrations should be controlled through proper government intervention, advancing a discourse of government protection, social welfare, and equality.

To rationalize such a controlled movement of human beings, Galarza fused New Deal politics with the Good Neighbor Policy. At the February 1941 hearing, Galarza argued, “the problem [of Mexican migration], is one of international good will and friendly inter-American relations as well as of agricultural economics and social welfare.”¹²⁹ The commission he proposed at the hearings to manage Mexican labor migrations would be a scientific New Deal effort, to “establish rational, just and humane methods for the distribution of workers to the end that both the needs of agriculture and the interests of the workers might be more adequately met and *protected*.” Galarza felt that Mexican labor migration was a serious problem that could be repaired by an orderly plan of state research, analysis, and legislation that would ensure the protection and social welfare of Mexican migrants through the extension of rights (equality). A joint commission to establish a labor migration program was a potential means of extending the benefits of New Deal policies and liberal democracy to Mexican migrant workers in the United States, citizens and non-citizens alike. However, Galarza emphasized, such a program depended on “adequate state financing” and setting migrants up with basic health and educational services,

¹²⁸ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 10: 3884-3885.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

which ought to be provided by the state. It would also need sound policy decisions that could work to effectively govern cycles of human migration to the United States.¹³⁰

To such ends, the overarching goal of the joint commission Galarza proposed at the February 1941 Tolson Committee hearing was to provide general standards of wages, housing, and health care that would “rehabilitate” the Mexican population in both Mexico and the United States, to equalize the economic playing field. It would also “carry out a number of activities relating to educational work among Mexicans,” to give them a chance to learn English so that they could “understand the labor contracts which [they] sign,” “accurately interpret laws and ordinances,” and learn about “routine immigration matters.”¹³¹ To effectively govern cycles of Mexican migration, Galarza argued, “methods should be developed by which the workers would be cared for in transit and standard conditions of housing and living on the job be assured them.” These methods would become an effort towards national inclusion and the extension of rights to Mexican migrants, so that “Mexican workers in the southwest can be enabled to receive the benefits of certain federal laws, especially those relating to wages and hours and housing.”¹³² Furthermore, the workers would be allowed to organize collectively as laborers, have a representative attend meetings of the joint commission, and be given an opportunity to “present grievances, to negotiate, [and] to bargain collectively on a fair and equitable basis.”¹³³ Galarza further upheld that organized labor should participate in the program from the outset. Not only would Mexican workers be protected by the state, with the administration of policies and funds to ensure their social welfare, they would be treated as equals with American laborers, with the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Memorandum for Dr. Rowe, from Ernesto Galarza, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP, 4 October 1941.

¹³³ Statement of Ernesto Galarza, “Before the Select Committee....,” 9 December 1940, Box 6, Folder 2, EGP, 9.

ability to join domestic labor unions and effectively organize against capitalism's inequities. To Galarza, the liberal state afforded the most effective means to achieve racial equality.

Several months passed after the Tolan Committee hearings in February 1941, without a word on Galarza's suggested commission or the implementation of a policy towards Mexican migrant labor. Galarza wrote a reminder to the Tolan Committee in September 1941, suggesting "the need to consider the establishment of an international agency to develop a long-term policy on the migration of labor from Mexico."¹³⁴ In October 1941, he designed an administrative strategy for this agency, in a report titled "Summary of proposals with regard to the future importation of workers from Mexico into the United States."¹³⁵ He recommended a procedure to implement a Mexican labor importation program, advising that the Pan American Union (PAU) make the suggestion of the labor migration program to the Mexican government. The PAU would then set up a joint conference including officials from the United States and Mexican governments, the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the PAU.¹³⁶ The purpose of the conference would be to "come to agreement on principles of administration and supervisory responsibility." In spite of these attempts to garner support for his suggestions to U.S. Congress,

¹³⁴ Memo to Miss Mary Dublin, House Committee on National Defense Migration (Tolan Committee), from Ernesto Galarza, 20 September, 1941, Box 5, Folder 6, Pan-American Union Correspondence, 1941-43, Ernesto Galarza Papers (EGP).

¹³⁵ Ernesto Galarza, "Summary of Proposals with Regard to the Future importation of workers from Mexico into the United States," October 1941, Box 6, Folder 2, EGP.

¹³⁶ The ILO was the international organization that governed the migration of workers across countries in Europe, where "guestworker" programs were already common. See ILO Studies and Reports, Series O, No. 5, *The Migration of Workers. Recruitment, Placing and Conditions of Labour* (Geneva, 1936); International Labor Conference, 24th Session, Geneva 1938, Report II: *Recruiting, Placing and Conditions of Labour (Equality of Treatment) of Migrant Workers* (Geneva, 1938).

it was not until May 1942 that Galarza was to hear back from Tolan.¹³⁷ Tolan was distracted from replying to Galarza by another wartime “problem” garnering his attention after Pearl Harbor: the incarceration of Japanese Americans in prison camps far removed from their homes on the West Coast.

The Tolan Committee: Configuring Japanese American Exclusion and Incarceration

Representative John H. Tolan, a Democrat from Oakland, California, was a New Deal liberal who had entered Congress in 1935, heading the committee that began in 1940 as the “Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens” after the Dust Bowl. A lawyer engaged with some of the same progressive ideals that Galarza held, he viewed Galarza’s solution to migrant farm labor’s exclusion and exploitation as a worthy one, but was forced to delay any legislative action due to a more looming problem in California: the perceived “Enemy Alien Problem.” President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which authorized U.S. military commanders to:

Prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded....The Secretary of War is hereby authorized to provide for residents of any such area who are excluded therefrom, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary, in the judgment of the Secretary of War or the said Military Commander.¹³⁸

While Executive Order 9066 did not refer directly to Japanese Americans, the policy’s target was Japanese American citizens and it provided the military authorization to expunge Japanese citizens and noncitizens from the Pacific Coast. Roosevelt had assumed as correct the judgment

¹³⁷ Letter to Ernesto Galarza, Chief of the Division and Social Information of the Pan American Union, from John H. Tolan, Chairman of the “House Committee Investigating National Defense Migration,” 8 May 1942, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

¹³⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9066: Authorizing the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas,” February 19, 1942, available online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=61698>.

of western command General John L. DeWitt, who argued after Pearl Harbor that Japanese imprisonment was a “military decision based on military necessity.”¹³⁹ Tolan initiated the hearings a few days after the order, stressing the potential security risk that the Japanese presented: “It is possible that the entire Pacific Coast may be evacuated. They tell me back in Washington that it is not only possible but probable that the Pacific Coast will be bombed. That has come to me from men who are supposed to know,” he stated.¹⁴⁰

This assumption regarding the military necessity of the incarceration of Japanese Americans structured the Tolan Committee’s hearings in February and March 1942, with the hearings serving as a platform for those advocating for the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. Politically powerful elements dominated the hearings, including the mayors of San Francisco, Portland, Los Angeles, and Seattle, and those (mostly agribusiness) groups that had an obvious and acknowledged economic interest in the removal of Japanese citizens. Instead of questioning and evaluating the president’s decision, they suggested the threat posed by resident Japanese and the necessity of forced removal, ignoring the citizenship rights of American-born Japanese. Like President Roosevelt, they believed that espionage and fifth column activity by the Japanese in Hawaii had been central to the success of the Japanese at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, even though there was no actual evidence to back this claim.¹⁴¹

Tolan was aware from the beginning of the crisis in citizenship that incarceration would create.

¹³⁹ Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972).

¹⁴⁰ U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens (Tolan Committee), *A Resolution to Inquire Further into the Interstate Migration of Citizens, Emphasizing the Present and Potential Consequences of the Migration Caused by the National Defense Program*, Pursuant to H. Res. 113, 77th Congress, 2nd Session, Parts 29, 20, 31: Problems of Evacuation of Enemy Aliens and Others from Prohibited Military Zones, February 21 and 23, 1942, 11053.

¹⁴¹ Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), 118.

At the beginning of the hearings, Tolan explained, “the nation must decide and Congress must gravely consider the extent to which *citizenship*, in and of itself, is a guaranty of equal rights and privileges during time of war. Unless a clarification is forthcoming, the evacuation of the Japanese population will serve as an incident sufficiently disturbing to lower seriously the morale of vast numbers of foreign-born among our people.”¹⁴² If citizenship lay at the heart of incarceration, Tolan left it up to his committee to debate how “evacuation” could take place in a manner that would guarantee the equal rights and privileges of Japanese American citizens. Tolan’s goal was therefore to manage this crisis in citizenship arising from the removal of Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast, as he tried to resolve his commitment to progressive ideals with the exigencies of war. If the incarceration of Japanese Americans was inevitable, how could it then be used to fulfill the cause of freedom and equality in a war for democracy? President Roosevelt himself embodied this contradiction and central question, when he promised after Pearl Harbor, “We will not, under any threat, or in the face of any danger, surrender the guarantees framed for us in the Bill of Rights.”¹⁴³

With Tolan’s question in mind, virtually all of the witnesses testified that evacuation was required for the safety and protection of the Japanese themselves; that it was *primarily for* their protection and the protection of American citizens in the military designated areas.¹⁴⁴ As Governor Culbert Olson of California proclaimed, “Any evacuation proposed is not prompted by race hatred, prejudice or selfish business interests, but is contemplated only for military

¹⁴²John H. Tolan, House Report No. 1911 and 2124, *Report of the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, House of Representatives, On the Need for a Single Procurement Agency to Effect All-out War from Military Areas*, 77th Congress, 2nd session, March 19, 1942 and May 13, 1942, 15, 21-22, 25.

¹⁴³President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “We Hold These Truths: the Rights To Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” over combined radio stations from Washington D.C., December 15, 1941, in *Vital Speeches of the Day* 8, no. 6 (1942).

¹⁴⁴McWilliams, *Prejudice*, 119.

protection....Those [Japanese] whom claim American citizenship should realize that the action we suggest is as much a protection for them as for the communities from which they are moved.”¹⁴⁵ Many were convinced that the only way to fully “protect” the Japanese was to create a federal agency that would safeguard the property of Japanese. On February 28, Tolan sent a telegram to the president, urging that such a custodian agency be created. He stated, “I think it imperative that the appointment of an alien property custodian and also coordinator for enemy alien problems precede or at least coincide with announcement of [executive] order.... that coordinator should be an experienced administrator, trained at handling community and family relationship problems, including safety, health, and welfare.”¹⁴⁶

No one demonstrated this desire for Japanese protection and social welfare more than Carey McWilliams, then chief of the Division of Immigration and Housing in the “Little New Deal” government established in California. He had worked closely with Representative Tolan’s former “House Committee on Inter-State Migration” from 1940 to 1941, and had induced the Tolan Committee to hold hearings on the incarceration of Japanese Americans in California.¹⁴⁷ However, McWilliams did not oppose the incarceration of Japanese Americans while in office. As he later confessed, “I was drawn into the controversy that raged around me. In fact, I became an active participant in it.”¹⁴⁸ McWilliams was also optimistic about the structural transformation that could come from a state managed Mexican labor importation program, demonstrating firsthand the overlapping logic that structured both the incarceration of Japanese

¹⁴⁵ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 30: 11624.

¹⁴⁶ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 30: 11635.

¹⁴⁷ Peter Richardson, *American Prophet: The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 107; Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice*, viii.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Carey McWilliams, *The Education of Carey McWilliams* (Simon & Schuster, 1979), 101; Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939).

Americans and foreign labor importation. In his 1939 publication *Factories in the Field* McWilliams exposed the violence of industrialized agriculture in California, just as John Steinbeck's novel *Grapes of Wrath* had that same year. Like Galarza, McWilliams saw the labor program as an important step towards social reform in agriculture because it would turn worker mobility over to the government and stabilize the agricultural landscape through a set of laws governing wages, hours, and working conditions.¹⁴⁹ The transformation in labor relations that McWilliams imagined would result from a Mexican labor program could protect future workers and end the violence that had characterized California agricultural production.

Like other officials at the hearing, McWilliams used the language of “protection” in his testimony before the Tolan Committee on March 7, 1942, when he stated, “I am confident that large numbers of citizens of Japanese descent are loyal to the United States....I believe that they, and certainly the citizens among them, are entitled to full protection....” McWilliams focused on preventing public confusion and economic dislocation during the forced removal of Japanese Americans, as well as protecting the property of the incarcerated to ensure their rehabilitation after the war. It “would not only give the unfortunate victims a sense of needed relief, but make them feel that they are living in a country where human dignity and human values are more than mere phrases mouthed by politicians,” he argued.¹⁵⁰ In essence, mass incarceration would demonstrate that the equality, freedom, and democracy constructed as part of U.S. national ethos in a “war for democracy” was a reality that could be imposed through proper government execution. Above all, it would prove, as McWilliams stated, “democracy can work efficiently,

¹⁴⁹ McWilliams also hoped that the importation of labor would facilitate farm labor organization, since the workers would come already organized. Don Mitchell, “Battle/Fields: Braceros, Agribusiness, and the violent reproduction of the California Agricultural Landscape During World War II,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 36 (2010): 149-151.

¹⁵⁰ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 31: 11790-11792.

effectively, and with consideration for the welfare of the people who brought it into being, which differentiates it from autocracy and makes it worthy of any sacrifice.”¹⁵¹ This language of democracy and welfare became the central legitimizing argument of U.S. government officials when it came to the incarceration of Japanese Americans.

Underlying the Tolan Committee’s language of democracy, protection, and wartime necessity was the historical disdain for Japanese Americans that had characterized their treatment in California since the early twentieth century.¹⁵² Japanese expulsion was a racially based policy rooted in the historical precedent of anti-Asian exclusion and the “yellow peril.” The origins of this racial discourse emerged with the entry of Chinese migrants to California for work on the gold mines, in the agricultural fields, and on the transcontinental railroad. A system of migratory labor begun with the Chinese continued with the Japanese after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, with Asian labor forming the backbone of California agriculture.¹⁵³ The state, in collusion with growers and labor activists, continuously turned Chinese and Japanese migrants into a permanent force of cheap and temporary migrant labor through a series of exclusionary immigration acts. When Japanese workers became feared as a new source of labor competition after the Chinese Exclusion Act, the U.S. federal government initiated the Gentlemen’s Agreement (1907), preventing Japanese workers from acquiring passports. The Alien Land Laws (1913) then federally prohibited Asian workers from owning agricultural land. These laws passed not to drive out the Asian workers but to force them to remain workers, not land owners, making their presence vulnerable and impermanent. The *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) case

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 64, 259.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 18-32. Also see Timothy J. Lukes and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Japanese Legacy: Farming and Community Life in Santa Clara Valley* (Cupertino: California History Center, 1985).

unquestionably asserted that Japanese persons were not “free white persons,” and could not be eligible for citizenship. The Immigration Act of 1924 set up a national quota board to determine the number of immigrants that could enter the United States from each country and Asians were not counted. Through each of these cases and acts, the state claimed Asian workers “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” making it impossible for them to become farm landowners themselves.¹⁵⁴ When these legislative actions shrank the number of Japanese farm workers in the 1920s and 1930s, growers began to look to Mexico and the Philippines for an abundant supply of labor to augment the Japanese labor supply. Agricultural employers soon realized that social, political, and economic forces combined to render Mexicans as powerless as they had the Chinese a generation before. They were able to avail themselves of a large pool of Mexican labor that was continually augmented by new undocumented migrants through a process of making them “illegal.”¹⁵⁵

For nearly a century prior to Pearl Harbor, white supremacists had built a foundation for racial ideology about the Chinese and Japanese on the West Coast through social isolation, overt and covert racial discrimination, and a series of exclusionary policies and acts, culminating in the incarceration of Japanese Americans. With Executive Order 9066, the federal government yet again supported the claims of vocal businessman and community groups and singled out a particular group of people, basing their exclusion on racial grounds. In fact, racial considerations structured the argument of “military necessity.” As U.S. Army General DeWitt stated, “The

¹⁵⁴ Yuji Ichioka, *Issei: The World of the First Generation of Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Eiichiro Azuma and Yuji Ichioka, eds., *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006); Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁵⁵ Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 68; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Japanese race...is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on U.S. soil have become ‘Americanized,’ the racial strains are undiluted....It therefore follows that along the vital pacific coast over 112,000 potential enemies of Japanese extraction are at large today.”¹⁵⁶ While participants at the Tolan Committee hearings emphasized that incarceration was designed to “protect” Japanese Americans as citizens, their discursive practices masked the fact that expulsion stripped them of their citizenship, forced them into prison camps, and made them all “enemy aliens.” In addition, the Tolan Committee hearings revealed that incarceration was intimately linked to farm labor and agribusiness, which had structured the Japanese experience in California since the beginning of the twentieth century. While nearly all witnesses at the hearing agreed that the incarceration of Japanese Americans was inevitable, they also expressed fears regarding the shortage in farm labor that such an expulsion might create. As McWilliams stated, “indiscriminate evacuation may seriously and unnecessarily affect our food supply....”¹⁵⁷ These concerns were pronounced at the beginning of World War II, especially considering the pressure placed on farm production during the war by U.S. officials. Given the ideological connection between war and agricultural labor, the drafting of farm laborers into the military, the migration of farm laborers into the defense industries, and the fact that thousands of Japanese farm laborers had been removed from the Pacific Coast, it is no surprise that others also raised similar concerns of an agricultural labor shortage.

Yet California growers and their advocates at the hearings promised that no such problem would arise. J. Murray Thompson, Chief of the Economic Section of the Agricultural

¹⁵⁶ “Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast,” 1942, Headquarters Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Office of the Commanding General, Presidio of San Francisco, California, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Office, 1943), as found at The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco.

¹⁵⁷ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 31: 11791.

Adjustment Administration in California, noted that although Japanese American citizens produced about “200,000 acres of vegetables in 1940, or about 40 percent of the California vegetable acreage,” “we in agriculture will strive to maintain as much production as possible....”¹⁵⁸ The Manager of the Associated Produce Dealers and Brokers of Los Angeles insisted that “the removal of all Japanese from southern California will not cause any serious dislocation in the feeding of this community.”¹⁵⁹ The head of the Agricultural Department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce similarly emphasized, “The essential supplies of the more important vegetable crops, such as lettuce, tomatoes, cauliflower, cabbage, will not be appreciably shorted insofar as this market is concerned, in my opinion.”¹⁶⁰ Others were more blatant in their intentions. As the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Salinas stated, “if all Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them in two weeks, because the white farmers can take over and produce everything the Jap grows.”¹⁶¹ There is no doubt California growers sought to profit from the removal of Japanese citizens from their farms. In 1941, the total value of Japanese American farm holdings in California has been estimated at nearly \$100 million, their truck crops for fresh market valued at \$85 million or 32% of the total for the entire country.¹⁶² They had quite literally turned the deserts of the San Joaquin Valley into lush and profitable agricultural fields and orchards.

At the Tolan Committee hearings, it became clear that growers, via their political associations or cooperatives, sought to eliminate Japanese American competition. As the

¹⁵⁸ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 29: 11194-11195.

¹⁵⁹ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 29: 11007.

¹⁶⁰ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 30: 11681.

¹⁶¹ Statement by Austin E. Anson of the Shipper-Grower Association, *Saturday Evening Post*, May 9, 1942.

¹⁶² Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 29: 11194.

manager of the Associated Produce Dealers and Brokers of Los Angeles maintained at the hearings:

I have talked to many wholesale growers of vegetables for the local market who have either gone out of business in the past 10 years or greatly reduced their operations due to Japanese competition.... A comprehensive system of associations set up for these small Japanese farmers has enabled them to regulate market supplies and reduce prices at will, to the point that the competing white grower has been forced out of production.¹⁶³

He suggested that white growers take over their farms in place of the Japanese. This connection was not lost to other witnesses at the Tolan Committee hearings. As an Oakland attorney testified, “effort should be made to determine whether there is any connection between the clamor for the dispossession of the Japanese farmers and the desire of these clamoring interests to get possession of Japanese farms and the elimination of Japanese competition.”¹⁶⁴

California growers not only wanted to stamp out Japanese competition, they wanted to use incarcerated Japanese Americans as a source of cheap and expendable farm labor after they had usurped their farms. It was obvious at the hearings that many growers wanted to remove the Japanese from business ownership and entrepreneurship and to profit from their labor by placing them exclusively in dependent, low wage agricultural work. The Chief of the Economic section of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, J. Murray Thompson, suggested that “evacuees” be resettled on land near farms under military supervision. He suggested that they could then be “accessible to areas [in California] requiring agricultural labor, particularly ‘stoop’ labor. These evacuees could be hired in groups at the going wage.” He argued that this “might free some Filipino and Mexican labor for farms located in the more strategic military areas.”¹⁶⁵ T. M. Bunn of the Salinas Valley Vegetable Exchange noted that his farmer’s association had spent

¹⁶³ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 29: 11007.

¹⁶⁴ Statement by Clarence E. Rust, Attorney at Law, “On Enemy Evacuation,” Tolan Committee Hearings, Exhibit 9, Part 29: 11254.

¹⁶⁵ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 29: 11195.

\$25,000 on a labor camp in Salinas that could be used to house Japanese “evacuee” laborers. He stated, “with this efficient Japanese help, we feel we can be of great assistance to the Government in the producing of food stuffs during the national emergency, providing, of course, that this set-up is such that militarily it will not be inimical to national defense.” He also noted that several farmers of his association were willing to take advantage of this situation and “colonize farm areas in Idaho, New Mexico, and Nevada,” to make use of the removed Japanese American farm-owners.¹⁶⁶ In sum, white growers wanted the farms that Japanese Americans operated.

The mass incarceration of Japanese Americans epitomized the endless quest for cheap labor that agribusiness leaders in California had sought since the 1850s. The rapid expansion of a modern business mentality among these farmers in the late nineteenth century had led to an interest in organizing themselves to promote greater efficiency and control over production. They formed associations devoted to advancing the economic interests of California’s rural population, and these new organizations, such as the Southern California Fruit Exchange (1893), protected the interest of those invested in particular crops. By 1920, growers’ cooperatives were an established feature of commercial agriculture in California. They argued that high labor costs would pose a threat to their profitability and economic well-being. They saw farm labor only as a factor of production and sought through any means possible to reduce the costs of labor to the lowest levels possible and displace competition.¹⁶⁷ The racist mentality of growers that legitimized their endless search for profit remained evident at the Tolan Committee hearings. As T. M. Bunn confessed outright, “Unless we can use oriental help we cannot farm these lands

¹⁶⁶ Tolan Committee Hearings, Exhibit 26, Part 30: 11284-11285.

¹⁶⁷ Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields*, 126, 185-199, 305-306; Cletus Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 17-27.

economically and efficiently. We are fighting this war to hold and further secure cheap labor. So if we can't secure it in California, we will commence to look elsewhere.”¹⁶⁸

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard confirmed and supported the “war” to “further secure cheap labor.” His chief concern was increasing farm production, as in his “food can win the war” campaign. In January 1942, he called a meeting of representatives of the Departments of War, Labor, Navy, Justice, and Treasury, alarmed over investigative reports from his agents on the West Coast who were concerned about the fate of the Japanese and the threat to food production. These representatives urged him to take action, concluding that incarceration was being legitimized by a propaganda campaign to eliminate Japanese farm competition. In spite of their warnings, Wickard felt that the fears of the general public ought to be taken into account, imagining a large agricultural reservation in the central valleys of California on which the Japanese could carry on their normal farming operations after being removed from all strategic areas. These agricultural reservations would, Wickard believed, “protect” the Japanese from individual cases of racial violence after Pearl Harbor. As for the agricultural lands in the coastal areas that the Japanese had tilled, Wickard suggested that Mexicans be brought in to replace them, just as they had after the Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907.¹⁶⁹ Instead of rejecting the tactics of growers in their endless quest to profit from white supremacy, Secretary Wickard concurred that forced expulsion was necessary to maintain the status of Japanese as exploitable agricultural labor. If the Japanese could not supply sufficient labor in California, then growers, backed by the U.S. government, would have to look to Mexico

¹⁶⁸ Tolan Committee Hearings, Exhibit 26, Part 30: 11284-11285.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Claude Wickard to Stimson, January 16, 1942, RG 16, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, quoted in Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, 47-48.

for a new source of labor that would be, like Japanese Americans, racialized as naturally suited to the task.

The Tolan Committee Investigates a Mexican Labor Importation Program

It was in the context of the incarceration of Japanese Americans that Tolan agreed to evaluate Galarza's suggestion of a Mexican labor program less than three months later, through another series of Tolan Committee hearings. On May 8, 1942, Tolan wrote to Galarza, inviting him to his hearings while noting, "we are prepared to recommend that a joint commission be established with properly designated representatives of the two governments to sit continuously for the duration of the war to administer the importation and return of such Mexican labor whenever the actual need for this importation shall have been demonstrated."¹⁷⁰ While completing the Tolan Committee Report on the incarceration of Japanese Americans, new demands for imported Mexican farm labor arose on the West Coast in addition to the demands already made in Texas and the Midwest at the earlier hearings. Growers across the country stressed the necessity of a labor importation program to increase valuable food supplies for Wickard's "food for victory" program and Roosevelt's Lend Lease program.¹⁷¹ In 1941 and 1942, they flooded the Department of Labor with formal applications for laborers, and also sent letters to their representatives in Congress requesting the use of imprisoned Japanese as farm labor.¹⁷²

At the May and June 1942 Tolan Committee hearings, growers in attendance stressed the importance of using both incarcerated Japanese labor and imported Mexican labor. A grower in Oregon stated, "We believe the move to allow Mexican laborers to limited entrances into this

¹⁷⁰ Letter to Ernesto Galarza, From John H. Tolan, 8 May 1942, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

¹⁷¹ The media made public the labor shortage. See, for example, the article, "California Crops Rot in the Fields and on the Vine for Want of Farm Labor," *Life Magazine* (June 1942).

¹⁷² Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 216.

country to assist in the labor shortage should be permitted. We believe the Japanese should be not only permitted but compelled to assist in harvest operations where they will not endanger the Nation's safety."¹⁷³ These growers had already asserted public pressure on the president, the Tolan Committee, and their congressmen for Japanese expulsion, but their success in pressuring for the elimination of Japanese American farmers stimulated an already desperate demand for manpower on the West Coast. They argued for a Mexican labor importation program to fill the gap in farm labor left by Japanese Americans after they had been expunged from the land.

Government bodies and elected officials in Washington, influenced by southwestern growers to believe that there was an agricultural labor shortage, had already initiated a debate on a Mexican labor importation program. While field reports from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), United States Employment Service (USES), and the Department of Labor indicated that the labor shortage was artificial in some states, members of Congress set that evidence aside because of the political clout of growers. On April 30 and May 4, 1942, the Department of Agriculture convened an interagency conference with the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the INS, the USES, the Board of Economic Welfare, the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs of the State Department, the Office of Agricultural War Relations, the House Committee on National Defense Migration, the War Relocation Authority, and the War Production Board. Preparations were made for Mexican labor importation at the conference and, in late May, USES certified the need to import 6,000 workers as contract laborers.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Letter to Oregon District House of Representatives, From: John C. Duckwall, Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 33: 12532.

¹⁷⁴ Mae Ngai, "Braceros, Wetbacks, and the National Boundaries of Class," in Marc Rodriguez, ed. *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 217.

Even though these other government agencies had already held a conference regarding the feasibility of a Mexican labor importation program, Tolan stressed that the point of the May 22 hearing was to “initiate a discussion of the standards which might be satisfactory to the Mexican government and which the Government of the United States... would be willing to guarantee.” Tolan was influenced by Galarza to hold a hearing to ensure that the importation program would represent a “joint effort” to establish “rational, just, and humane methods for the distribution of Mexican migrant workers to the end that both the needs of agriculture and the interests of workers might be more adequately met and protected.”¹⁷⁵ Galarza saw the possibility of state-enforced racial equality that the hearing presented, upholding that the labor importation program was not simply “a matter of bringing workers to the Southwest, but a matter of the adjustment and the solution of certain cultural problems, problems of friction and of ill feeling that have grown up between our two peoples.”¹⁷⁶ Galarza named “race” as the central problem faced by Mexican migrant workers, a problem that could be overcome through state-managed labor migrations. He emphasized that the Mexican workers were subjected to dual labor standards in the United States; they were “paid less for the same kind of work American citizens do,” and they were subject to “very serious discrimination in the matter of seniority.” These negative social experiences and barriers occur “because he happens to be of a very dark color.”

¹⁷⁵ Memo from Galarza, Re: “a brief elaboration of my suggestion to Rep. Tolan that his Committee consider the advisability of establishing a joint international United States-Mexican commission on migration.” Box 5, Folder 6, Ernesto Galarza Papers (EGP).

¹⁷⁶ U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, *A Resolution to Inquire Further Into the Interstate Migration of Citizens, Emphasizing the Present and Potential Consequences of the Migration Caused by the National Defense Program, Pursuant to H. Res. 113, 77th Congress, 2nd Session, Part 33, May 22, June 11, 19, 1942* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 12433.

Galarza upheld that these “negative social experiences” could be overcome through the drafting of “proposals for the economic and social rehabilitation of Mexican migrants.”¹⁷⁷

Tolan explicitly endorsed Galarza’s argument: “Well, I don’t know that I can disagree with your statements; I think they are a good deal along the lines of my own thoughts. Speaking for myself personally, I think if Mexican laborers come into this country, they should have their standards, they should have their status,” Tolan said. “Why, between Mexico and the United States, the human equation is the last thing to be touched, I don’t know.... So we have not done well in our own country so far as that is concerned and we can’t be very proud of it.”¹⁷⁸ Even further, Tolan restated Galarza’s reasoning,

It is a peculiar thing, we have many agreements with the Mexican Government regarding boundaries and practically everything else excepting the flow of human beings from one country to another. As far as I know, there is no treaty or agreement of that kind between two Governments. There should be.... It seems to me it should be understood between the two Governments on what basis they are coming in, and that they should be taken care of as well as we are taking care of our own people.¹⁷⁹

Like Galarza, Tolan inferred that the labor importation program would be the first time both governments would consider how to achieve the equality of Mexican workers with U.S. workers, resolving the problem of racism by extending standards of treatment and worker protections that had never before been offered to Mexican migrants.

¹⁷⁷ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 33: 12434-12435.

¹⁷⁸ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 33: 12430.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. It is important to note that the inclusion of certain protections and the anti-discrimination clauses in the agreement were not solely the result of pressures the Mexican government exerted on the U.S. government. The diplomatic exchange of notes between the U.S. government and Mexico demonstrated that these rights and protections were U.S. propositions, as well. The hearings demonstrated that before meeting with Mexico, U.S. government officials were cultivating contract “standards” for the laborers, in line with the Good Neighbor Policy and U.S. labor leader’s requests. This proves that standards were not written into the contract simply “to allay the Mexican Government’s fear of exploitation and discrimination.” Otey M. Scruggs, “The Bracero Program Under the Farm Security Administration, 1942-43,” *Labor History* (1962), 150.

Tolan embraced Galarza's idea towards reform with a different set of assumptions, though. His New Deal committee of congressmen had led him to an interest in migrant labor affairs during the Great Depression and the consequences of the Dust Bowl. When Galarza wrote Tolán a letter recommending a "joint commission" to "rehabilitate" Mexican migrant farm labor in the Southwest, Tolán saw an opportunity to expand the purpose of his committee, extending its benefits to Mexican migrants. Pearl Harbor had intervened, forcing his committee to shift the scope and nature of its inquiries while allowing Tolán and his fellow committee members to see both Japanese Americans and Mexican migrant labor in tandem. While Tolán's goal had been the federal protection of rights of both Japanese Americans and Mexicans in the United States, the underlying logic of the incarceration of Japanese Americans forced him to reevaluate his agenda. What was once Tolán's "Committee for Destitute Citizens" became the "Committee on National Defense" in 1942. It was at that moment of national defense that Tolán's support of Galarza's arguments came to fruition. Galarza had sought the implementation of federal power towards protection and social reform, but Tolán had melded this language of "protection" and social welfare to national security instead.

The rhetorical slippage between social welfare and national security at the moment of convergence between Japanese American Incarceration and Mexican labor importation, while promoting the welfare of Japanese Americans and Mexican migrants, expanded the state's capacity to control foreign subjects in the name of "security." The language governing the labor importation program took on a life of its own, beyond what Galarza had ever anticipated. The incarceration of Japanese Americans and the Mexican labor importation program initially challenged the question of whom to identify as foreign and domestic, placing the Tolán Committee in a position to manage new possibilities for a more inclusive citizenship. In that

potential moment in the confounding of the foreign/domestic divide, Galarza imagined a space beyond racial and national borders through the extension of certain citizenship rights for Mexican migrant laborers through a contract labor importation program. However, the labor program, as a national security matter, became a means to preserve racial and national borders, while expanding state power over others and justifying that power through race. Even though Galarza and the members of the Tolan Committee emphasized that the labor program was fundamentally about social welfare, it meant the welfare of some (documented migrants) over the welfare of others (undocumented or “illegal” migrants). The federal government’s prerogative to segregate the “loyal” from the “disloyal,” the “foreign” from the “domestic,” and the “legal” from the “illegal” produced racial divides at the heart of national security. In essence, the overlap of social welfare and national security led to a reification of race, with race resolving the ambiguities and borders inherent in mass incarceration and labor importation.

The overlap of social welfare and national security, set in the historical context of farm labor in California, enabled the reproduction of Mexican and Japanese Americans as agricultural or “stoop” labor, a racial term. Not only did the agency that managed Japanese evacuation (WRA) attend the Mexican importation hearings, Tolan Committee members discussed Japanese evacuee labor in tandem with Mexican imported farm labor. In his opening at the May 22 hearing, Tolan emphasized that it was up to his committee to “broaden the bases for our discussion beyond the question of this initial request for 6,000 Mexicans, and even beyond the question of the importation of Mexican workers.” Tolan argued that the “problem of labor supply” and “mobilizing the labor supply for war production” was “bigger” than Mexican labor importation, and that the Mexican labor program would only temporarily alleviate the

problem.¹⁸⁰ Tolan advised discussing the importation of Mexican labor “in this larger setting,” should the Mexican government refuse to allow such an importation of Mexican workers. The larger setting he envisioned was the one created by the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Tolan argued, “Japanese Americans now being removed from the west coast should be used to supplement our agricultural labor supply, and specifically should be used in the sugar-beet industry. All of these matters are actually part of the larger problem of mobilizing labor supply for war production.”¹⁸¹ Japanese or Mexican farm labor, it made no difference to Tolan, as long as the wartime necessity of national security was left unimpaired.

By as early as April 1942, days after the army began to systematically force Japanese Americans to leave their homes, agricultural interests were already requesting the release of “evacuees” so that they could be used as farm laborers. Persistent requests from sugar beet producers finally got an initial group of fifteen “evacuees” released from the Portland assembly center to harvest beets in Eastern Oregon.¹⁸² To this end, President Roosevelt established the “War Relocation Work Corps,” to provide work opportunities to Japanese Americans so that they could “earn a living,” “contribute the maximum to the Nation’s production,” and to the “war effort.” Milton Eisenhower, head of the WRA, encouraged incarcerated Japanese citizens to consider the Work Corps: “the democracies of the world are joined in a fight that will be fought until it is won. In this fight, all Americans are making difficult sacrifices. How each individual, how each group meets a particular trial will measure his devotion to the nation.” He upheld that “enlistment is entirely voluntary, and will give you an opportunity to serve your community.”

¹⁸⁰Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 33: 12414.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 81; Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, 101.

Above all, it would “demonstrate to the world” that this nation, “grim in the fight it is waging, can at the same time be tolerant, patient, and considerate in handling this human problem of wartime migration and resettlement.”¹⁸³

According to members of the Tolan Committee, the labor programs and Japanese imprisonment did not simply “protect” Mexicans or Japanese for the cause of democracy during wartime, but also ensured the protection of the American farm laborer. The concern of most Tolan Committee members was that the importation of Mexican labor would be detrimental to American wage standards and welfare programs, which could be avoided if Japanese Americans were used first. If Japanese Americans could not supply a sufficient labor force for U.S. farms, and the INS expressed concern that insufficient numbers would volunteer their labor, then safeguards and standards ought to be implemented to import Mexican labor. The protection and social welfare of the Mexican migrant laborer would mean the protection and social welfare of U.S. citizen laborer. Galarza contended at the hearings, “the United States agencies really pushing for one group of farmworkers, would tend to level up the standards for all agricultural labor. Those of us who have a Mexican background could see no happier event than the use of Mexican workers as an instrument for the improvement of the standard of living of all agricultural labor.”¹⁸⁴

The Department of Labor expressed the same sentiment at the hearings, blending the concern over the social welfare of Japanese Americans and Mexican migrants:

We feel that the Japanese workers should be used insofar as it is possible to use them, because of the demoralization that is bound to take place among those workers unless they are brought into a job relationship. The sooner that we can use them effectively, the better.... If the Employment Service has found that we cannot get their labor, then we

¹⁸³ Pamphlet, *War Relocation Work Corps* (Washington, D.C.: War Relocation Authority, 1942), RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 1, NARA.

¹⁸⁴ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 33: 12452.

should not let our crops spoil. However, if we bring in Mexican workers, we should be sure that those workers are protected and not exploited.¹⁸⁵

It would thus protect imprisoned Japanese from being demoralized, and protect the Mexican workers from exploitation. As the Department of Labor suggested, Mexican workers should have a set of labor standards and adequate machinery to enforce them, as should Japanese workers. Committee members then advocated for certain standards for incarcerated Japanese farm workers and Mexican farm workers, including the stipulation that the prospective employer should pay the transportation to and from work sites, provide adequate housing and prevailing wages, and recruit labor through the USES, which would determine the number of workers each farmer would be assigned. Furthermore, they emphasized that both Mexican labor (implicitly) and “evacuee” labor (explicitly) would only be utilized on a “voluntary” basis.

In 1942 alone, ten thousand incarcerated Japanese “volunteered” to do seasonal agricultural work on leave from “Relocation Centers.”¹⁸⁶ Their labor was considered insufficient such that, after the hearings, the Mexican labor importation program seemed the best solution to Tolan Committee members. Tolan forwarded their recommendations via a report sent to U.S. Congress and to the WMC, which would become one of the organizations responsible for managing the Mexican labor importation program. This report was informed by the Tolan Committee hearings, as well as by the recommendations of Reid Robinson, President of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).¹⁸⁷ The report upheld that no recruiting of Mexican workers in the United States would take place unless a specific need was certified by the USES, appeasing the labor

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 12429-12430.

¹⁸⁶ Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, 101.

¹⁸⁷ Letter to Paul V. McNutt, War Manpower Commission, from Reid Robinson, President of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, Denver, CO, 20 May 1942, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

union's concern that "foreign labor" might be used to displace "domestic labor." The report also covered various protections such as anti-discrimination measures, transportation, health services continuity of employment, and living standards. Later adopted by the WMC and Farm Security Administration (FSA), U.S. agencies assigned to manage the labor importation programs, the report ensured that both domestic U.S. and Mexican imported labor were fully "protected."¹⁸⁸

In August 1942, by exchange of diplomatic notes, the United States and Mexico made an agreement for the importation of temporary contract laborers from Mexico to the United States. The binational contract agreement, signed August 4, 1942, covered several general principles, as well as specific problems such as transport, wages, deductions, and housing. The first provision specified that Mexicans contracted to work would not be subject to military service. The second provision specified that "Mexicans entering the United States as a result of this understanding shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind in accordance with the Executive Order 8802 issued on June 25, 1941." The third stipulation, influenced by Article 29 of Mexican Federal Labor Law guaranteed the workers transportation and repatriation, and the fourth stipulation upheld that "Mexican nationals entering the United States Agreement shall not be employed to displace other workers, or for the purpose of reducing rates of pay or other standards previously established."¹⁸⁹ The second and fourth provisions of the agreement, while both protective measures, nonetheless demonstrated the disavowal of racism embedded in the agreement. As the second stipulation of the Bracero Program contract agreement stated, "Mexicans entering the

¹⁸⁸ Letter to Reid Robinson from D.W. Tracy, Department of Labor, 20 May 1942, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

¹⁸⁹ Agreement Between the United States of America and Mexico, signed at Mexico City August 4, 1942, for the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States, as Revised on April 26, 1943, by an Exchange of Notes Between the American Embassy at Mexico City and the Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Box 19, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, NARA.

United States as result of this understanding shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind in accordance with the Executive Order 8802 issued at the White House June 25, 1941.” This provision emerged out of the struggles of civil rights activists in the United States, like A. Philip Randolph, who had protested segregation in the military. Issued reluctantly by President Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802 institutionalized the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), a commission that required that companies with government contracts not discriminate “on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin.” This contract stipulation could be seen as a wish fulfilled for Galarza, who had earlier suggested that the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) consider the desirability of including the study of the conditions of employment of Mexicans in California in its program.¹⁹⁰

Firestorms Erupt: “What Had Been a Small Flame of Racial Prejudice Became a Raging Fire”¹⁹¹

In spite of the U.S. labor agreement with Mexico, the Bracero Program catalyzed some of the most exploitative experiences for Mexican migrant farm labor in the United States, resulting in decades of poverty and exclusion. Due to the clout of U.S. agribusiness, U.S. Congress weakly enforced the law and purposely ignored violations of the program ranging from violations of basic human rights to the deliberate recruitment of undocumented workers. From the beginning, U.S. agribusiness lobbied against government regulation and monitoring of living conditions, minimum wages and various other safeguards put in place on behalf of migrant laborers. Growers wrote to their state representatives, lamenting that the program stipulations were too restricting and state representatives responded to their demands. One wrote to U.S. secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, “I had thought the original purpose of the negotiations

¹⁹⁰ Memorandum for Dr. Rowe from Ernesto Galarza, 4 October 1941, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

¹⁹¹ McWilliams, *Prejudice*, 3.

between our government and Mexico was to aid our farmers in finding agricultural workers necessary for the achievement of production goals for victory established by the Department of Agriculture. If the program is to be tied up with a program for the regulation of work and rates of pay for domestic farm labor, it will not be of any value.”¹⁹² Most growers considered the clauses in the contract to be mere recommendations, and, given the exigencies of the war, necessarily broken. In spite of the protective regulations, the machinery put in place was not sufficient to assess violations and reprimand growers who did not fulfill their side of the labor contract. The FSA was drastically under-funded and provided, for example, “two inspectors, head quartered at Portland, Oregon, [to be responsible for monitoring] all the Braceros working in Utah, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Montana.”¹⁹³ Those few Mexican labor inspectors and consuls that did exist noted the “illusion” of the importation “as a force against the war and as an alliance.” One Mexican labor inspector claimed that growers “see it only as cheap manual labor....they prefer Mexicans because, as foreigners and rural people, many have no experience with labor unions. The farmers have a police force that is strong, organized, and violent. There is also racial prejudice.”¹⁹⁴

The Bracero Program and the incarceration of Japanese Americans demonstrated the limitations to U.S. citizenship in the supposed extension of “legality” and “rights” to Mexicans and Japanese Americans. After their expulsion from the Pacific Coast, many Japanese Americans argued for the reinstatement of their constitutional rights as U.S. citizens. They

¹⁹² Letter From Carl Hayden of the U.S. Senate to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, 22 August 1942, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 171, Box 14, NARA.

¹⁹³ Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 53.

¹⁹⁴ Letter, “Sobre la permencia de nuestros braceros en esta zona después de la terminación de sus contratos....” From Andrés Duarte, New York Mexican Labor Inspector, To the Secretary of Labor and Social Provisions in Mexico, 7 November 1944, Box 17, Folder 9, EGP.

looked to the U.S. Constitution for the restoration of their rights and guarantees, demanding the freedom, liberty, democracy, and protection that it promised to all U.S. citizens while recognizing their exclusion from it. At the Tule Lake concentration camp, one Japanese American noted, “No we are not dual citizens. But in the first place if we are citizens, how come we are in these camps?” Another considered, “I’m supposed to be a citizen of the United States. At the time of registration, I asked them how far my citizenship went....What security have we? If this can happen now, why can’t the same thing happen in five years?”¹⁹⁵

Japanese Americans were well aware that the language of national “military security” did not mean security for them, exposing the contradictions between race and liberal democracy. They recognized that U.S. “national security” considerations dismissed their rights and had nothing to do with protecting them but, rather, resulted in their exclusion from U.S. society. A young man stated after incarceration had officially ended, “We’d like to sit in Tule Lake [concentration camp] for a while. We don’t want to relocate. The discrimination is too bad. I see letters from the people on the outside. There are fellows in Chicago who want to come back [to camp] but who are not allowed to.”¹⁹⁶ Those who felt the consequences of national security looked to their own community in the concentration camps for security, through efforts towards their own self-protection.¹⁹⁷ When the WRA announced its decision to close the concentration camp at Poston, Arizona on January 2, 1946, many refused to leave, fearing the racial discrimination they would face going back to their home communities Japanese Americans took matters into their own hands by forming a collective organization to make demands on the WRA.

¹⁹⁵ For other responses from incarcerated Japanese Americans that did not hinge on citizenship, see Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Koreans in WWII* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011). These quotes are from Dorothy Swaine Thomas and Richard S. Nishimoto, *The Spoilage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 97.

¹⁹⁶ Thomas and Nishimoto, 93.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

This community council attended the WRA's "All Center Conference" at Salt Lake City to stage their demands and present resolutions to the WRA. Maintaining their pride that they are "model, civilized nationals that conform to national law," they insisted that the Poston camp remain open as may be needed and that those relocating be offered assistance and guarantees.¹⁹⁸ "By forcible evacuation," they announced, "the foundations we had created by years of toil were almost completely wiped away....due to [our] present economic status, fear of violence, and discrimination from the outside, etc. the majority [of us] are not in a position to make plans either for relocation or for return to [our] former homes on the west coast...." Realizing that the WRA had offered them neither protection nor security and feeling insecure towards the changes and modifications formerly made in WRA policy, they created their own agency to shape policy.¹⁹⁹

Soon after the release of Japanese Americans from the concentration camps, Tolan Committee member Carey McWilliams, who had reluctantly supported the incarceration of Japanese Americans at the hearings, published a book entitled *Prejudice: Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance* (1944), when the incarceration of Japanese Americans was still a live issue. He took part in two radio debates in California, in which he took the position that the Japanese should never have been "removed" in the first place.²⁰⁰ "It caused great injury and damage....to a large group of law abiding enormously useful and industrious persons, two thirds of whom were citizens of the United States and entitled to the full protection of rights guaranteed by the constitution." He further stated, "It was a product of racial bias; that is, under wartime pressure and the shock of the attack on Pearl Harbor, latent prejudices mounted to the surface

¹⁹⁸ Richard S. Nishimoto, *Inside an American Concentration Camp: Japanese American Resistance at Poston, Arizona* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995), 175.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-207.

²⁰⁰ McWilliams, *Prejudice*, viii.

and precipitated a harsh and disastrous policy decision.”²⁰¹ As McWilliams looked back on 1942, he upheld that “instead of total mass evacuation resulting in a measure of greater calm and more vigorous concentration on the war, the opposite happened. What had been a small flame of racial prejudice became a raging fire.”²⁰²

The “firestorms” that resulted after the Tolan Committee hearings were unforeseen by Galarza and Tolan. Their lives and careers in the context of the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the nascent Mexican labor importation program reveal that it is through the disavowal of racism that race gets reproduced at this time. In other words, the application of federal power to prevent racial discrimination can also result in explicit expressions of racism that have far reaching implications in the history of race and citizenship. The racism and exclusion that resulted from the incarceration of Japanese Americans and the Bracero Program were a product of the enticing power of a liberal state and an unthinking adherence to a New Deal cause that was fueled by a tradition of race and labor in the West. While Galarza had used the New Deal in an attempt at a more inclusive vision of democracy, at the same time, a unified band of California agribusinessmen, mirroring their counterparts in the South, sought to pressure lawmakers to safeguard racial segregation and build a nation-state fit to manage capitalism. Both visions melded during the program’s inception, and instead of certain rights and protections being extended to Mexican migrants, they were again excluded from the U.S. nation-state. Even as Japanese Americans were promised similar rights and protections, they were excluded from citizenship as foreign “enemy aliens,” disenfranchised, stripped of land and property, and then asked to return to the farm fields as tractable and temporary labor. While possibilities had opened for a more inclusive treatment of Mexican migrants, and for the Tolan Committee to

²⁰¹ Ibid., vii.

²⁰² Ibid., 3.

resist Executive Order 9066 in Congress, mass expulsion and the re-racialization of both Mexicans and Japanese as agricultural “stoop” labor instead resulted.

The discursive overlap between national security and social welfare played a central role in that outcome, which Galarza demonstrated at the May 22 hearing: “there is a recognition of the fact that this is a *defense* problem, not only for the United States but for the hemisphere; and that if ways and means can be found to lift this problem out of its traditional form and put it on a higher level, both from the standpoint of production and of human welfare, I believe the Mexicans would be willing to recognize the need to cooperate with the United States to assure a sufficient supply of labor.”²⁰³ Galarza was aware of the ideological power this moment of “defense” and security had to affect policy change, and used that power to push forward his own activist agenda. Like other civil rights activists of his era, he saw possibilities in the moment of war to use the state as a possible site of social change. While his vision may have been more progressive than others at the Tolan Committee, it was still reflective of this broader moment in which New Deal labor advocates and officials sought to expand state power and state control. Galarza was so steeped in the liberal imagination that he could not grasp its contradictions, or even endeavor to question whether the use of expanded state power was the best means to affect social change.

Galarza was shocked by the blatant contract violations that took place after the implementation of the programs, and felt responsible to the workers in the program he had helped to create. He spent the next two decades pressuring the U.S. government to first enforce contract policies of the Bracero Program, and, in the 1960s, to end the program.²⁰⁴ As a

²⁰³ Tolan Committee Hearings, Part 33: 12434.

²⁰⁴ However, when Galarza wrote *Strangers in Our Fields, A Report Regarding Compliance with the Contractual, Legal, and Civil Rights of Mexican Agricultural Contract Labor in the United*

precursor to farm labor and civil rights activist Cesar Chávez in California, he has become a Chicano cult hero for his activist work in attempting to unionize farm labor there (1948-1964) and for his work documenting the many program violations of the Mexican labor program. During his career as an activist, he noted that braceros were contributing to the formation of millionaire land-owners who avoided paying higher wages by “hiring braceros, freezing prices, and making a fortune off of the sweat of braceros.”²⁰⁵ The incongruities of the labor program were not lost on the workers themselves. A Mexican migrant laborer stated, “we were fighting for democracy but we are treated like slaves.” Whether the two were related was not a question Galarza and many other liberals of his era could yet attempt to ask.

States in 1956, he erased his own role in initially advocating the program as a source of protections and rights for Mexican migrant workers. In *Strangers*, Galarza noted that it was Mexico that had argued that the program “should be conducted with close and scrupulous regard for the rights of the Mexicans to be transported to labor in the north. . . . The protection of the Mexican bracero was to be guided by the principles of Mexican social legislation. He was to enjoy, as far as possible, working conditions comparable, if not equal, to those guaranteed all Mexican workers in their national constitution.” Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields: Based on a Report Regarding Compliance with the Contractual, Legal, and Civil Rights of Mexican Agricultural Workers in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Fund for the Republic, 1956), 10.

²⁰⁵ Letter to Jose Hernandez Serrano From Ernesto Galarza, 3 February 1950, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

Chapter Three

Free or Slave: Freedom and Slavery in the Construction of Foreign Contract Labor

Labor activists and supporters have long insisted that guest worker programs are “close to slavery,” if not the epitome of slavery itself. In the 1963 words of activist Henry Anderson, a friend of Ernesto Galarza, “the distinguishing characteristic of the *bracero* system is that it is a captive labor system. . . . [except] we no longer buy slaves; we rent them.” This language mirrored that of writer Truman E. Moore, who referred to agricultural migrant labor in the United States as a new form of slavery in his 1965 book, *The Slaves We Rent*.²⁰⁶ In 1964, Galarza wondered aloud, “is this indentured alien—an almost perfect model of the economic man, an ‘input factor’ stripped of political and social attributes that liberal democracy likes to ascribe to all human beings and ideally—is this *bracero* the production man of the future?”²⁰⁷ Organized labor’s opposition to contract labor was echoed by many activists and liberals in the 1940s through the 1960s: the *bracero* was a “legal slave” and a “rented slave.” Aiming to evoke sympathy for the workers, the use of slavery and concentration camps as metaphors had the effect of constructing *braceros* as a foreign element completely and entirely outside of the U.S. labor force and liberal modernity.²⁰⁸ This characterization of guestworker programs as a slave labor force continues even today with the work of scholars and of civil rights organizations like

²⁰⁶ Truman E. Moore, *The Slaves We Rent* (New York: Random House, 1965).

²⁰⁷ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California, 1942-1960* (Santa Barbara: McNally Press, 1964), 16.

²⁰⁸ Mae Ngai, “Braceros, ‘Wetbacks,’ and National Boundaries,” in *Repositioning North American Migration History*, ed. Marc S. Rodriguez (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 243. Also see Ann Stoler, “On Degrees of Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* (January 2006): 125-146, on how compassion and pity produce and condone empire.

the Southern Poverty Law Center, an agency that recently published a report titled, *Close to Slavery: Guestworker Programs in the United States*.²⁰⁹

The metaphor of slavery used to classify U.S. foreign contract labor importation programs by their critics has a rich and ambiguous history in the United States, one rooted in the language of “contract.” The ambiguities of contract labor have historically made the contract into a discursive device that embodies both freedom and slavery in different contexts and in different moments. In fact, debates surrounding the Bracero Program between the 1940s and 1960s reflected and reproduced a longer genealogy of debates over contract and over slavery and freedom. While the architects of the Bracero Program in the 1940s rhetorically referred to the contract labor importation agreement as the epitome of freedom and democracy and the antithesis of racial exploitation and slavery, critics and advocates of labor claimed that the Bracero Program was a new form of slavery. These debates rested in a specific legal genealogy, from slave emancipation to nineteenth century laws regarding contract “coolie” labor in the British Caribbean colonies. This legal genealogy was later reflected in the U.S. immigration restriction acts from the 1860s to the 1920s, including the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Foran Act (1885). Each of these legal instantiations constructed foreign labor as either “slave” or “free” during specific moments of state expansion, contributing to a racial genealogy designed to categorize non-white workers as unfree, as slaves, as “peons,” or as “coolies,” with the state designated the regulator of freedom. By the 1940s, the state became an arbiter of freedom, not only inclined to exclude in order to protect the “freedom” of domestic workers, but discursively ensuring the freedom of foreign workers through the importation of workers and the regulation

²⁰⁹ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Close to Slavery: Guest Worker Programs in the United States*, A Report by the SPLC, 2005. Mae Ngai mentions this language in her book, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 161.

of the foreign labor contract. In the expansion of state power during the New Deal, the state went from outlawing foreign contract labor with the Foran Act (1885) to condoning and managing it with the “Emergency Farm Labor Program Agreements” with Mexico and the British Caribbean colonies.

The shift was directly linked to the ambiguities of the labor contract, which made it a convenient device for resolving tensions generated between the demands of capital and the promise of democratic freedoms and protections. Lisa Lowe has explained, capitalist imperatives for cheap labor have often been at odds with and contradictory to the liberal nation-state, which requires a unified culture of a national citizenry bound by race, language and culture.²¹⁰ The dialectic of “slavery” and “freedom” resolved these tensions between capital and nation, and allowed the state to racially exclude human beings from the benefits of liberal citizenship and transformed them into goods to be transferred from one state (or colony) to another via the labor contract.²¹¹ The contradiction between capital and nation drove slavery and also generated tensions that were resolved through slave emancipation and then through various immigration acts in the 1860s through 1920s, which were designed to protect the “nation” against “slavery.” In each of these moments, the fuzziness of what it meant to be “slave” and

²¹⁰ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 12-14.

²¹¹ My influence here is Stephanie Smallwood, “Commodified Freedom: Interrogating the Limits of Anti-Slavery Ideology in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 289-298. Also see Stephanie Smallwood, “Freedom,” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 111-115. For more on how the concept of freedom has been instrumental in authorizing colonial violence and has underwritten U.S. imperial agendas, see Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

what it meant to be “free” as overlapping signifiers and epistemological terms rooted in classical liberalism made them readily available and conscripted to overcome the contradictions that emerged from state endorsed labor extraction, exploitation, and racial exclusion.

In other words, the dialectic of “slavery” and “freedom” allowed the state to racially exclude human beings from the benefits of liberal citizenship and transform them into goods to be transferred from one state (or colony) to another via the labor contract and resolved tensions between capital and nation. In the 1940s, the labor contract revealed a faith in the ability of the state to regulate labor migrations for the cause of “freedom” since the nineteenth century.

Through countless laws, agencies, and government hearings, U.S. federal officials assured its citizens that it would certify that contract labor would serve to replace slave labor, not as slaves, but as voluntary labor. Their arguments were not new. In fact, placing the 1940s U.S. contract labor program agreements with Mexico and the Caribbean within the discursive context of nineteenth century indentured servitude can help us to understand how the contract came to be (re)interpreted anew by government officials and laborers in the United States by the 1930s and 1940s and fostered the inception of the labor programs. As much as the architects and critics of the labor programs wished to distance themselves from these historical origins, the context of slavery and emancipation nonetheless dictated and guided the discursive shifts that resulted in and structured the labor programs since the 1940s.

How “Contract” Came to Serve as a Metaphor for the Slave/Free Divide

Contract is so prevalent a concept today that it is natural to assume that it has always existed. Yet the notion of a contract was originally tied to the British Empire and only emerged in the context of British colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The notion of “contract” resulted from the political philosophy of liberalism, the catchword of which

was “freedom” and “liberty.” Liberal social contract theory of the late seventeenth century was conceived as a means to justify political authority and the state through the free consent of individuals, creating a new type of political community based on the voluntary actions of individuals during the age of Enlightenment.²¹² Individuals volunteered autonomy of their own volition in exchange for the protection of the political community by the state, which would ensure their “freedom.” This was, according to Locke, the “Social Contract.”²¹³ The contract stood as the legal paradigm of liberalism, and it became, in the age of slave emancipation, a metaphor for social relations and the very symbol of freedom. Yet the ideal of contract freedom was modeled on classical political economy’s rule of market exchange. Contract expressed obligations arrived at through competition between formally equal and autonomous individuals—not dominion and dependence. Thus, the modern individual work contract functioned to impose social order through personal volition and performed as a metaphor for human relations in market transactions.²¹⁴

The notion of contract rights was imagined in the context of slavery; slavery did not contradict contract but underwrote its existence. Under classical liberal theory, the individual consented to state authority, in exchange for certain rights and freedoms. These rights upheld that human labor was invested in the individual, that property rights could be purchased

²¹² Here, I am referring to the organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed or “the art of government,” that leads to more efficient forms of social control by enabling individuals to govern themselves. See Foucault’s theory of biopolitics and governmentality in Michel Foucault, “Society Must be Defended,” “The Birth of Biopolitics,” “The Courage of Truth” Lectures. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II, Lectures at the Collège De France 1983-1984*, eds. Gros, Frédéric, et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76.*, eds. Mauro Bertani, et al. (New York: Picador, 2003).

²¹³ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), originally published in 1689.

²¹⁴ Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xi, 1.

in others (slaves) outright, or that they might enter the labor market themselves and temporarily trade some of their own rights in persons for wages. In other words, both slavery and the concept of “rights” included the rights to the labor of oneself and others. Western systems of slavery and freedom thus had the same roots, such that “freedom” implied the freedom to enslave others and the two were co-constitutive.²¹⁵ Furthermore, while freedom implied that the worker had the “freedom” to sell his or her labor on the market at the prevailing market price, freedom has historically presupposed real and harmful inequalities. From Locke onwards, the terms of liberalism articulated and condoned inequality and phrased it in terms of freedom to disavow and legitimize inequality. In fact, liberalism presupposed a society based on unequal property and free-market capitalism under “rights” discourse.

By the time of the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807, slavery had become morally objectionable as the epitome of a lack of self-ownership and property in oneself through wages, due to the growth of the British abolitionist movement. Adam Smith stated in the *Wealth of Nations* “a person who can acquire no property can have no other interest but to eat as much and to labour as little as possible.” His formulation became an article of abolitionist faith, ordaining the triumph of voluntary contract labor. Abolitionists argued that free laborers doubled the output of slaves and deemed slave laborers in the Caribbean colonies unfit to compete with free laborers.²¹⁶ They welcomed the end of the slave trade, but the end of the slave trade did not result in the end of plantation slavery. Slavery was officially abolished on August

²¹⁵ See Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975).

²¹⁶ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (New York: Bantam Classics, 1776), 229. Seymour Drescher, “Free Labor vs. Slave Labor: The British and Caribbean Cases,” in ed. Stanley L. Engerman, *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom, and Free Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 51-59. Robert J. Steinfield, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

1, 1834, but Caribbean planters continued to command the full rights to the labor of ex-slaves, who were bound in a form of apprenticeship for a period of six years. The apprenticeship system ended in 1840, around the same time East Indian workers began to be brought in to the British West Indies as contract laborers under individual labor contracts. These contract laborers were referred to as “coolies.” Using Adam Smith’s liberal economic theory, the British government sought to adapt and replace colonial (slave) labor and apprenticeship with migrant (wage) labor via the labor contract in an attempt to create safeguards to prevent the perpetuation of slavery in new forms.²¹⁷

In 1813, Europe’s monopoly trading companies became “joint shared corporations,” signaling the conversion in Europe from mercantile capitalism to modern industrial capitalism. Underlying this shift was the humanitarian rationale of the enjoined and contradictory logics of “free trade” and “free labor,” both opposed by planters. While the transfer from mercantilism to free trade broke down borders in Asia that invigorated and propelled migrations to the Americas, free labor (abolitionists) demanded the closure of such borders.²¹⁸ Planters wanted access to Asians as a new source of enslaved labor and the British Colonial Office attempted to reconcile and resolve the contradictions of “free labor” and “free trade” through the creation of a state-regulated contract labor importation program between India and the British West Indies. In spite of the state regulation of labor migrations, plantation owners again benefited. Along with the shift to imported contract or so-called “coolie” labor came new modes of worker productivity,

²¹⁷ Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1-2, 16. As anthropologist Sidney Mintz has observed, so-called “free trade” emerged simultaneously with the gradual emancipation of enslaved labor and the simultaneous migration of indentured Asian labor. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 61-72.

²¹⁸ Moon-Ho Jung, “Seditious Subjects: Race, State Violence, and U.S. Empire,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Volume 14, No. 2 (June 2011): 231.

discipline, and circulation. With the labor contract, imported workers rhetorically became the subjects of the state, not of planters, lending to the expansion of state power and a new liberal state formation in which the contract served as a device to project and facilitate state power. British colonial officials used the contract to legitimize this new form of coercive labor, marking the contract as the hallmark of “free labor” through the discourse of regulation, protection, and voluntary consent. In other words, colonial labor became naturalized and expanded through the contract, refiguring the state regulation of foreign workers as a form of “free labor” even as it served as a means to expand the global structure of colonial labor.²¹⁹

When contract labor from India began to be imported to the Caribbean, the main subject of political debate regarding these new contract laborers was the extent to which government ought to regulate and inspect them, so as to enforce the workers’ individual agency or “freedom.” The debates focused on improved ship conditions, measures to ensure all laborers departed willingly, and the assurance that the colonies to which migrants went would be “suitable for free men.” There would also be a colonial “protector” at the ports where emigration was permitted and a colonial “protector” near the work site, to give advice, listen to worker grievances, and secure the worker’s contract rights. In spite of these new regulations, the British West Indian colonies gave only lip service to the interests of East Indian “coolies,” and the plantation industry was able to draw upon a new pool of cheap labor with the minimum restrictions from the 1840s to the 1920s. Representations of indentured labor from India as “freely” contracted buttressed state promises of freedom to former slaves in the British West

²¹⁹ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press 2015). Our customary liberal progressive narrative that abolition, emancipation, free labor, and free wage trade is about liberal progress and the extension of freedom to all is a mask for the fact that liberalism was a means for ushering in new forms of control and governance and a lack of freedom through coerced labor.

Indies, while enabling planters to derive profits from the so-called transition from slavery to “freedom” that, in effect, included a range of coercive labor forms.²²⁰ The British colonial state ironically used the hallmark of free labor relations and of state protection and enforcement through the language of free wage labor and the contract, to create a coercive labor supply on behalf of sugar production.

While some members of the British colonial state turned the contract into a universal emblem of freedom, labor advocates and colonial officials simultaneously made it a marker for slavery, spurning the wage contract as a form of compulsion.²²¹ By 1840, critics of the “coolie” labor importation system in the British West Indies considered it a “new system of slavery.” As Lord John Russell stated on February 15, 1840, “I should be unwilling to adopt any measure to favour the transfer of labourers from British India to Guiana....I am not prepared to encounter the possibility of a measure which may lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand, or, on the other, to a new system of slavery.”²²² A similar process took place in the United States after the Civil War, where the ability to participate in the marketplace without competition with foreign workers came to define freedom. In post-bellum debates, the contract became a means to conspicuously blur the difference between free and unfree labor relations as the contract became either the essence of freedom or a vestige of slavery.²²³ U.S. political debates over Chinese “coolies” in the 1860s demonstrate this ambiguity, revealing how “contract” could embody both slavery and freedom. Initially, southern plantation owners introduced coolies as “free labor” improvements on slave labor, much as East Indian “coolies” had been introduced in the British

²²⁰ Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 73, 115, 194.

²²¹ Robert Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²²² Hugh Tinker, introductory quote, *A New System of Slavery*.

²²³ Historian Amy Dru Stanley has developed this idea through the figure of the prostitute. Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 219.

Caribbean. However, intense political debates on the need to protect “free labor” in the United States made it such that Chinese “coolies” came to embody the backwardness of slavery, with U.S. diplomats in China referring to them as “irredeemable slavery under the form of freedom.” White labor activists in California and in the South argued that the virtues of free labor posed them as antithetical to U.S. freedom, and demanded U.S. intervention for humanity’s sake, to “protect” free domestic labor and national security.²²⁴

By the 1880s, these arguments led to state and federal immigration restriction laws that prevented Chinese laborers from migrating to the United States at all. The white labor movement played a particularly important role in ensuring the state’s expansive power in the realm of immigration exclusion. Labor activists emphasized that Chinese “coolie” labor undercut their wages and was responsible for the ruin of the financial health of the nation.²²⁵ In California, the white Workingman’s Party focused competitive anxieties on Chinese immigration, protesting competition with Chinese labor and committing violent rampages against Chinese migrants while petitioning the state for intervention to sustain the living standards of white skilled labor so that they should not be made to “live like coolies.”²²⁶ They imagined foreign contract laborers to be a new form of racialized slavery that would replace emancipated black slaves. Through their protests, the contract came to stand in for slavery, in the name of national security. In other words, the rise in labor union politics and the proliferation of dozens of national trade unions through the 1890s influenced the state to regulate

²²⁴ Lisa Lowe, “Autobiography Out of Empire: A Future Beyond Empire,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 28 (March 2009): 98-111; Moon-Ho Jung, “Seditious Subjects,” 227; Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in The Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

²²⁵ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 160-162.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 167-177.

immigration so as to regulate their “freedom.”²²⁷ The American Federation of Labor (AFL), founded in 1881, engaged in a persistent political crusade to deny Chinese and other Asian workers entry into trade unions. Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL, argued that Chinese living standards were incompatible with and destructive to the political and cultural fabric of the United States, mapping racial difference in terms of opposing living standards (slave versus free).²²⁸ These rhetorical framings resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which restricted Chinese immigration and naturalization whether under contract or not. In these legislative moments, the California state and the U.S. federal government stood against “slavery” through immigration exclusion, under the assumption that contract laborers or “coolies” were bound laborers, whose “contracts” had served as a mechanism to coerce their labor.²²⁹

These anti-Chinese immigration acts extended to the Foran Act of 1885 or “Alien Contract Labor Law,” in which Congress prohibited the importation of foreign contract labor altogether, further delineating the contract a form of slavery in the name of protecting freedom. The law stated, “It shall be unlawful for any person, company, partnership, or corporation, in any manner whatsoever, to prepay the transportation, or in any way assist or encourage the importation or migration of any alien or aliens, any foreigner or foreigners, into the United States, its Territories, or the District of Columbia, under contract or agreement...” These laws demonstrate that if “freedom” could be proposed to justify initial contract labor importation, “slavery” could be invoked to prohibit and exclude it in the name of “freedom.” Debates over the contract demonstrated that the contract could be used historically to challenge the divide between freedom and slavery, even as it helped to resolve and clarify that divide. Such were the

²²⁷ Jung, “Seditious Subjects,” 221-247.

²²⁸ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 167-177.

²²⁹ Jung, “Seditious Subjects,” 221-247.

contradictory effects of the contract—it had always been used in different instances to define and create anew both slavery and freedom.

The Chinese Exclusion Act and the Foran Act proved just the beginning of a series of U.S. government policies that pitted slavery against freedom, resolving their contradictions while expanding the state's role in regulating the movement of people. The Chinese exclusion debates had given the state the power to determine those laborers that were free and those that were unfree in the 1850s-1880s, opening the door to a series of racially constructed immigration restriction acts. These were a means to enforce freedom and protect “free labor” in the name of U.S. sovereignty and security. Putting limitations on “unfree” workers framed U.S. immigration control from the beginning of these immigration debates, as did the underlying assumption that contract labor, like slavery, was the antithesis of free labor upon which liberal democracy depended. From 1862 to 1903, Congress federalized immigration control, legitimized federal deportation laws, and extended border control laws to post-entry social control, solidifying the rise of the state as a protector of U.S. freedom through restriction. The Supreme Court began to make expansive statements of its support of immigration control and the power of the federal government against the rights claims of noncitizens. The Immigration Act of 1891 and the Geary Law of 1892 extended the deportation powers of the federal government through border control. The Immigration Act of 1891 allowed those apprehended within one year of entry to be deported and subject to future exclusion. The Geary Law required all Chinese to carry a resident permit, without which they could be subject to deportation.²³⁰ Meanwhile, the 1903 Immigration Law expanded the list of excluded classes to include “all idiots,” “insane persons,” and prostitutes, and in 1905, Congress ruled that illegal immigrants could be deported without due

²³⁰ Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 92-93, 118-122.

process, allowing Congress to deny habeas corpus or right to a trial to non-citizens.²³¹ This growing bureaucracy of migration control expanded the power of the state to exclude and deport, in the name of freedom, any “foreign” workers considered “unfree,” even beyond the racially coded figure of the “coolie.” From the 1880s to the 1920s, then, the logic of the state impulse to regulate freedom through racial immigration restriction was set. While “coolies” had been the force behind the formation of the unilateral state power to enforce laws regarding deportation and immigration, the enforcement of these laws could be applied to other racialized groups, also considered among the “vast hordes of [foreign] people crowding in upon us.”²³²

Mexican Immigration and the Return of the Contract

From the early twentieth century onwards, Mexicans became the targets of immigration policy as a new “unfree” group of laborers after Asian exclusion. This building animus towards Mexicans led them to be classified as unfree labor, even as it reproduced the conditions for unfree or “peon” labor, as restrictions against Mexican immigration have demonstrated. The growing bureaucracy of migration control that expanded the state’s power to exclude and deport Mexicans in the name of freedom was an inherently racialized process. After Asian immigration had been effectively restricted, U.S. officials, journalists, academics, labor advocates, and others turned their fears to increased immigration from Mexico, placing their Anti-Asian immigration rhetoric directly onto Mexicans. A journalist stated, “The Mexican peons are coming in more rapidly now than did the Asiatics when the Pacific Coast demanded, and secured, complete exclusion.” Both Asians and Mexicans were considered to be similar problems, deserving of identical legislative fates. An academic claimed, the Mexican peon proved to be as “racially

²³¹ See the Supreme Court Case *United States v. Ju Toy* 198 U.S. 253 (1905); Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, 129; Also see Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 160.

²³² From the U.S. Supreme Court Case, *Chae Chan Ping v. United States* (Chinese Exclusion Case), 1889.

alien as the Chinese coolie.” At first, Mexicans were even lumped together with “orientals” through analogy, with journalists referring to Mexico in 1899 as the “Orient of the West.” A travel writer asked, “is it not an Oriental fact about them that they can be fed upon almost nothing, and are they not Oriental in the calm continuance of their own ways of dress and their own style of habitation?” Another writer confirmed, “they are as Oriental in type, in thought, and in habits as the Orientals themselves.” Many academics joined in the rhetoric, pointing out that Mexico’s political history followed an Oriental design making democracy difficult, if not impossible.²³³

The application of the racial formations of the “oriental,” “coolie,” or the “peon” to Mexican labor explained the social condition of Mexico to the United States and demonstrated the importance of a U.S. economic presence in Mexico to ensure its modernization. U.S. writers and intellectuals adopted the term “peon” from Spanish colonial usage in Latin America, in which laborers were indebted to their employers in a form of “involuntary servitude,” that was the principle social organization of Mexico in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Its associations with slavery were clear, as were its connections to contract. After all, the peon’s “contract obliged him to work for the hacienda until his debt is cancelled.”²³⁴ That the Mexican came from the “peon” sector of the Mexican population earned general agreement, and substantial discussion. Anthropologist J. E. Pearce of the University of Texas stated, “the immigration from Mexico into Texas is, for the most part, from the peon elements of the

²³³ E. H. Blichfeldt, *A Mexican Journey* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1912), 45; Chester H. Crowell, “Why Make Mexico an Exception?” *The Survey* 64, No. 3 (May 1, 1931), 180; Ernest Gruening, “The Mexican Renaissance,” *The Century Magazine* 85 (February 1924), quoted in Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 77-80, 142.

²³⁴ Prince A. De Iturbide, “Mexican Haciendas: The Peon System,” *The North American Review* (April 1899).

northern portions of the central plateau of Mexico.” According to a *National Geographic* journalist, “Today the hordes crossing the Rio Grande, as well as those who are already here, are largely from the impoverished peon classes.”²³⁵ These classifications were linked to fears that were very similar, if not connected to, the rising fears that had already been constructed regarding Chinese “coolie” laborers. Many agreed that the “Mexican” was a worrisome, inassimilable mass, which posed dire and cultural consequences for the United States, leading to fears regarding their (im)migration.

This racial association of Asians and Mexicans as “unfree” labor became even more apparent when one examines the rhetoric of the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. With this case, the U.S. Supreme Court validated Louisiana’s 1890 law that mandated separate cars for “white” and “colored” races. While critics argued that the ruling conflicted with the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude, the court abjured that, on the contrary, the Thirteenth Amendment was “intended primarily to abolish slavery, as it had previously been known in this country, and that it equally forbade Mexican peonage or the Chinese coolie trade, when they amounted to slavery or involuntary servitude....” In 1896, the public imaginary regarding Chinese and Mexicans did not see them as separate but as one and the same, both a symbol of slavery. The resultant logic was that it was up to the state to back the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery, by “forbidding” Mexican and Asian immigration to the United States. However, the court denied that refusing accommodations to colored people would be an imposition of slavery or servitude, stating “refusing accommodations to colored people, cannot be justly regarded as imposing any badge of slavery or servitude upon the applicant, but only as involving an ordinary civil injury.” Justice Bradley stated, “It would be

²³⁵ As quoted in Gonzalez, *American Writers*, 143.

running the slavery question into the ground, to make it apply to every act of discrimination which a person may see fit to make as to the guests he will entertain, or as to the people he will take into his coach or cab or car....” Therefore, while the U.S. federal government’s legal prohibition of slavery, peonage, and coolieism sanctified “freedom,” it also sanctified racial discrimination.²³⁶

Several years after *Plessy v. Ferguson* state officials, influenced by Progressivism’s ethos, began to imagine a role for the state not just as the protector and sanctifier of freedom, but as the facilitator of freedom. On March 4, 1913, President Taft signed the Department of Labor (DOL) into law, giving labor progressives a direct voice in the presidential cabinet. As a product of the Progressive movement, the DOL was “to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of working people, to improve their working conditions, and to enhance their opportunities for profitable employment.”²³⁷ Progressive officials began to imagine a new function for the state not only as the regulator of bodies through immigration exclusion but as the mediator of freedom. That is, U.S. officials sought to advance freedom by giving workers the power to exert control by promoting their agency. The U.S. Conciliation Service (USCS) mediated labor disputes and the Bureau of Immigration, Bureau of Naturalization, and Children’s Bureau were all incorporated into the Department of Labor to improve working conditions and maintain labor peace.²³⁸ Progressives, through expanding knowledge, built this state machinery to assist in the creation of a more efficient population and workforce. With the entry of the United States into World War I, adequate war production became a priority and improved work conditions assumed national importance. The state began to vacillate between enforcing order through immigration

²³⁶ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). Also see Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane*, 219.

²³⁷ Judson MacLaury, *History of the Department of Labor, 1913-1988* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1997).

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

restriction and attempting to sustain liberty through bureaucratic intervention. While the state apparatus never had the capacity to either weed out slavery or facilitate freedom through the creation of this new bureaucracy, officials nonetheless began to make claims that the state was a guarantor of freedom through the proliferation of progressive government agencies designed to manage the labor supply. Nonetheless, the regulation of freedom through immigration restriction was still the principal motive of the state at this time such that by 1917, Congress passed the most stringent immigration law to date, the Immigration and Nationality Act.²³⁹

Shortly after the creation of the DOL, during World War I, the United States, pressured by U.S. growers, organized a unilateral labor program to import Mexican agricultural, railroad, and mining laborers into the United States, from 1917 to 1921. Growers complained to Congress of a labor shortage as a result of the state restrictions on immigration, the mass migration of white and black southerners to cities, the war cutting off European migration to the United States, and the draft. The DOL tried to redistribute labor by relocating workers from areas of labor surplus to areas of labor scarcity and passed “work or fight” ordinances, but neither satisfied growers’ demands.²⁴⁰ Pressured by growers, the U.S government agreed to initiate a labor importation program with Mexico. As a war security measure, U.S. Congress decided to veto the Foran Act of 1885 forbidding the entry of foreign laborers under contract as well as the head tax and literacy requirement written into the 1917 Immigration and Nationality Act. The Foran Act’s ninth provision served as a loophole, allowing the U.S. Attorney General to waive

²³⁹ This act created the Asiatic Barred Zone, prohibiting any person of Asian descent from entering the United States. It also raised the head tax to \$8, imposed a \$10 visa fee, instituted a literacy test, and broadened deportation rules. By this point, the government began to introduce the full-scale production of passport controls as an emergency war measure. These became the norm in regulating migration. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 19-20.

²⁴⁰ Cindy Hahamovitch, “Creating Perfect Immigrants: Guestworkers of the World in Historical Perspective,” *Labor History*, No. 44 (2003): 79; Otey M. Scruggs, “The First Mexican Farm Labor Program,” *Arizona and the West*, No. 2 (Winter 1960): 324.

the entrance requirements of the act when there was an emergency need for foreign labor.²⁴¹

Designed as a security measure, the World War I contract labor importation program not only waived the thirty-year old congressional ban on foreign contract labor, it also required that temporary imported laborers sign contracts for the duration of their stay.

To prevent an influx of “slave” labor similar to Chinese contract labor, the Secretary of Labor created a series of contract stipulations that would require certain standards of wages and housing for admitted Mexican workers that would ensure their “freedom.” The temporary Mexican worker was still deemed a “peon,” but a new type of “peon” with free will and liberty, not one kept in place by the force of law the way black slaves used to be.²⁴² However, the program was not monitored by any office or administration.²⁴³ While the state began to conceive of facilitating the movement of Mexican workers, it did not regulate their treatment. Mexican workers complained about the abuses of the program to the Mexican government, which, in 1920, composed a model contract that guaranteed Mexican workers certain rights accorded by the Mexican Constitution. In 1920, the U.S. Secretary of Labor appointed a special committee to investigate the treatment of the workers and found less than ideal wages, working conditions, and housing. Of the approximately 70,000 Mexican workers contracted, nearly a third evaded their

²⁴¹ The Ninth Proviso of the Immigration Act of 1917 went as follows: “The Commissioner General of Immigration with the approval of the Secretary of Labor shall issue rules and prescribe conditions, including exaction of such bonds as may be necessary, to control and regulate the admission and return of otherwise inadmissible aliens applying for temporary admission.” U.S. Congress, *H.R. 10384, An Act To regulate the immigration of aliens to, and the residence of aliens in the United States*, 64th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1917).

²⁴² For more on the congressional emphasis on “free will” instead of slavery under the first World War I labor importation program with Mexico, see Alexandra Filindra, “The Emergency of the ‘Temporary Mexican:’ American Agriculture, The US Congress, and the 1920 Hearings on the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers,” *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 3 (2014): 91- 95.

²⁴³ Barbara Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin: University of Texas, 1999).

contracts due to lack of compliance. The Mexican government, angry with the blatant discrimination and exploitation Mexicans experienced as temporary workers in the United States, called an end to the program in 1921, but few Mexicans participating in the program were actually deported or repatriated, in large part because a government apparatus sufficient enough to oversee their deportation did not exist.²⁴⁴ In addition, the Mexican Revolution drove a mass exodus of Mexican laborers such that by the mid-1920s Mexicans had become the majority of agricultural workers in California.²⁴⁵

The importation of Mexican contract labor into the United States during World War I stood in stark relief to the prohibition of contract labor in the British Empire that took place at the same time. In 1917, the British Empire was forced to halt the emigration of indentured labor from India to the British West Indies, as the anti-colonial movement in India moved to end the contract labor system. Gandhi first began to protest the coolie labor system in 1895, calling the entire system of white-dominated “perpetual indenture” into question.²⁴⁶ From 1895 to 1915, Gandhi attacked indenture in many writings, arguing that “indenture intensified the ‘unnatural relationship’ between British and Indians in which racial superiority and inferiority were systematized.” He led Indian opinion to oppose Indian labor migrations to British colonies as a form of “temporary slavery.” In 1917, several British agencies in India acknowledged the weight of Indian opinion against “coolie” emigration and declared an end to their movements, cancelling labor contracts in the colonies.²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the United States government sought to recruit Mexicans agricultural workers under a unilateral system of contract labor importation, reflective of the increasing power of the U.S. government to include or exclude laborers using

²⁴⁴ Scruggs, “The First Mexican Labor Program,” 323, 325.

²⁴⁵ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 52; Hahamovitch, “Creating Perfect Immigrants,” 80.

²⁴⁶ Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 284.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 343, 357.

immigration policy. Whereas Britain had been forced by the anti-colonial movements in India to halt the expansion of state governance over foreign labor, the United States reconsidered its former prohibition of contract labor in the Foran Act and decided to renew the importation of foreign contract labor as a means to extend state power for the governance of labor and freedom.

With the first Mexican labor importation program, U.S. Congress launched a new era of work, labor and migration in the US-Mexico borderlands, tightening immigration laws and developing the U.S. Border Patrol. Such state regulation meant the rise of a bigger state, with the capacity to manage labor and migration. In the project of liberal state building, federal officials began to create a small immigration bureaucracy to protect “freedom” in the United States from Mexican “peonage” as well as Asian “coolies,” while also sanctifying racial discrimination in the United States. A small border police force contingent had already been created in 1904, to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Acts along the border. In 1917, the U.S. government nationalized the handful of federal inspectors to regulate the influx and deportation of Mexican laborers, making their unlawful entry a misdemeanor.²⁴⁸ The state control of the importation of Mexican labor provided new possibilities and demands for the management of deporting illegal Mexican labor out of the United States.²⁴⁹ All contract laborers were to be issued identification cards, and only authorized to be admitted for work in agriculture, the railroads, or the coal mines. Without cards, Mexican workers could be deported at will. Rather than exclude Mexican migrants altogether, the state, as it slowly expanded in power, tried to establish boundaries between who was voluntary and who was involuntary by creating a system of documentation, visas, and immigration registration cards for Mexican immigrants. As a form

²⁴⁸ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 26, 36.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

of contract, these would distinguish between those deserving of state protection and those who were not, demonstrating again a shift away from the contract as a form of slavery to the state-regulated contract as a new kind of freedom enjoyed by workers. The emergent system ensnared Mexicans in a state apparatus that further racialized them not only as indentured “peons” but as undocumented and illegal. Without the contract or proper identification (visa), the undocumented migrant became an emblem of slavery because he/she did not have the contract and was therefore not deserving of American “freedom.” As “unfree” and “illegal” subjects of the U.S. federal government, Mexican migrants were made into new official targets of immigration policy, even though there was no apparatus capacious enough to carry out or consolidate Mexican immigration control. As a result, the creation of the Border Patrol to consolidate immigration control did not prevent the flow of laborers from Mexico to the United States.

White supremacists expressed concerns that the requirements of the Immigration Act of 1917 and the creation of a national Border Patrol were not enough to prevent the flow of Mexican immigration after the end of the Mexican labor importation program in 1923. They influenced Congress to create a new immigration law, the National Origins Act of 1924. This act placed quotas on nationalities allowed to enter the United States each year. It even further stimulated the production of the illegal immigrant, giving deportation a central place in U.S. immigration policy. The Act also resulted in an increase in the number of illegal entries while creating a new emphasis on the control of the nation’s borders. While few had been deported prior to the 1920s, the 1924 law provided for the deportation at any time of any person entering after July 1, 1924 without a valid visa or without inspection.²⁵⁰ Fearing a loss in their labor

²⁵⁰ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 57, 60.

supply, powerful growers lobbied for all immigrants from the western hemisphere to be exempt from the 1924 quota system, such that Mexicans were permitted to enter the United State without a numerical limit.²⁵¹ The exemption did not please white supremacists and labor advocates in the Southwest. In 1926, Congressman John Box of Texas proposed a quota system for immigrants from Mexico to amend the Immigration Act of 1924. This bill would have reduced immigration from Mexico to 2% of the Mexican population of the United States as recorded by the 1890 Census. Senator Box explained, “the continuance of a desirable character of citizenship is the fundamental purpose of our immigration laws. Incidental to this are the avoidance of social and racial problems, the upholding of American standards of wages and living, and the maintenance of order. ...”²⁵² U.S. labor’s perception of widespread job competition and notions of entitlement to the U.S. West fueled the Box Bill, on the grounds that unchecked Mexican migrants depressed wages and “American” (i.e., free) living standards in the Southwest. Even Mexican American civil rights organizations like the League Of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) followed this logic and supported the Box Bill. A member stated, “we are handicapped by the steady flow of immigration of the laboring peon class....Those here would get more wages if immigration were stopped.”²⁵³

When the Box Bill failed to pass, the State Department moved to restrict Mexican immigration by denying visas to prospective immigrants through the March 4, 1929 Immigration

²⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

²⁵² House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Seasonal Agricultural Laborers from Mexico: Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization*, Statement of John C. Box, 69th Congress, 1st session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1926), 324, quoted in Hernández, *Migra!*, 28-29.

²⁵³ Some members of LULAC supported the Box Bill, in spite of the fact that LULAC desired to “reach the poor and ignorant class.” See field notes/data in Paul Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier, Nueces County, Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 315-316, quoted in Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 74.

Act and then through Mexican Repatriation (1929 to 1939). The law made illegal entry a separate criminal offense and a felony, dramatically increasing the number of deportations from 2,762 in 1920 to 38,796 in 1929.²⁵⁴ The state now consolidated its goal of expelling Mexican labor, under the auspices of keeping out laborers who were driving down American standards of freedom. By 1929, the visa came to define the relationship between the individual laborer and the state, demonstrating the social fitness of an individual. The increase in the number of illegal entries due to the tight immigration controls created a new emphasis on control of the nation's borders.²⁵⁵ It also led to an increase in Border Patrol officers to regulate the territoriality of the border and deport the undocumented, as well as an increase in deportations culminating in mass Mexican repatriation. By the 1930s, the Great Depression heightened racist fears of Mexican labor as unemployment levels rose and wages fell. Although President Herbert Hoover (1929-1933) had enthusiastically recruited Mexican contract laborers as Food Administrator during World War I, he denounced Mexicans as one of the causes of the depression in 1930, claiming "they took jobs away from American citizens," falling back on the insinuation that Mexican migrants threatened "free" citizen labor. President Hoover's administration, in concert with local officials, members of the labor community (AFL), and federal authorities in the Labor Department responsible for immigration control set out on a formal campaign to deport and repatriate nearly 450,000 Mexicans back to Mexico in the 1930s. U.S. Secretary of Labor William Doak promised to rid the country of the "four hundred thousands illegal aliens" he believed were taking jobs away from "free" American citizens. With or without contract visas

²⁵⁴ Hernández, *Migra!*, 92.

²⁵⁵ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 57.

and with or without citizenship, Mexican migrants and citizens alike were forced to leave the United States by the thousands.²⁵⁶

Meanwhile, organized labor began to demand a different sort of state intervention, beyond the immigration restrictions of the 1860s-1920s, not simply in the form of protection against “slavery” through immigration control but through an expanded state that could facilitate their “freedom” by supporting their right to unionize. In response, officials created a bureaucratic system to ensure workers’ agency and prevent workers from becoming “wage slaves” as Asian and Mexican immigrants had been perceived to be. With the creation of the DOL in 1913 and its expansion into the 1930s, a cluster of influential labor, engineering, managerial, and academic progressives promoted and tested institutions of collective bargaining.²⁵⁷ Their expanding knowledge and influence led the New Deal state to privilege the worker and his agency. Furthermore, while workers in industry had sustained multiple defeats in 1919 and refrained from unionism and national politics during the 1920s, changes in the larger political system, in workers’ own orientation, and in the economy, led workers to unionize more intensely in the 1930s. With the economy in a state of crisis, manufacturing production was cut in half resulting in mass unemployment. This led to mass protest, street riots, and turmoil. While families had formerly looked to their ethnic institutions and employers for aid, they began to look to the national government for assistance during the Great Depression. Many of these workers were second generation European and eligible to vote. For for the first time, they realized that the Democratic Party could make a difference in their lives during the Great Depression. Finding a new protector in the state, these workers became involved in electoral

²⁵⁶ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 213-214.

²⁵⁷ Mark Barenberg, “The Political Economy of the Wagner Act: Power, Symbol, and Workplace Cooperation,” *Harvard Law Review* 106 (May 1993): 1428.

politics and the unemployment movement, applying pressure on the federal government to facilitate change within the work place.

Due to the increased influence and pressure from the labor movement, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began to support labor and the common man over private enterprise, promising to take on the “new industrial dictatorship.”²⁵⁸ In 1933, Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) that contained a labor provision, section 7(a) that granted workers a legal right to organize and bargain collectively to halt increased work stoppages. The underlying logic was that a strong labor movement would bring about greater purchasing power among workers, the lack of which was perceived to be the cause of the Great Depression.²⁵⁹ When the Supreme Court ruled NIRA unconstitutional, workers responded with a surge of social unrest and militancy. The number of unions soared between 1932 and 1933, the number of strikes doubled, and the number of workers participating in work stoppages quadrupled. Workers and New Deal progressives again advocated an expanded role for the state.²⁶⁰ By the second half of the 1930s, they were successful in their efforts, such that officials could initiate objectives to enact laborers’ agendas via the liberal state, not just as regulator of freedom but as the mediator and facilitator of freedom through legislative acts and the creation of government agencies designed to ensure against “slavery.” In effect, the growth in influence of organized labor resulted in the creation of a new role for government, not just as regulator of freedom through immigration acts but, rather, as the facilitator of freedom through legislative acts that supported organized labor’s agency.

²⁵⁸ Holly J. McCammon, “Legal Limits on Labor Militancy,” *Social Problems* (May 1990): 206-210, 287.

²⁵⁹ Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 252-253, 267-268, 287. Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).

²⁶⁰ For more on this process, see Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 253.

Championing their cause was Democratic Senator Robert F. Wagner (1927-1949) and his network of political allies. Wagner believed that the state ought to protect workers from intransigency and instability by securing their agency, blaming the state for the economic downturn because it had not aided workers in their quest for “democracy” in the workplace. Wagner rejected the interwar model of company unionism because he believed it could not ensure the protection of workers against domination by employers.²⁶¹ After the failure of NIRA, Congress, led by Wagner, enacted the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935. Otherwise known as the Wagner Act, this law created again under the pressure of labor leaders and Democratic legislators, eliminated employer interference in unions and established the federal government as the regulator and arbiter of labor relations. It set up the National Labor Relations Board to protect the right of most workers to organize into unions. When Roosevelt signed the NLRA into law on July 5, 1935, he declared:

A better relationship between labor and management is the high purpose of this Act. By assuring the employees the right of collective bargaining it *fosters the development of the employment contract* on a sound and *equitable* basis. By providing an orderly procedure for determining who is entitled to represent the employees, it aims to remove one of the chief causes of wasteful economic strife. By preventing practices which tend to destroy the independence of labor, it seeks, for every worker within its scope, that *freedom of choice and action* which is justly his.

In essence, the Wagner Act again molded the language of contract, “fostering the development of the employment contract” into a metaphor for freedom on an “equitable basis,” signaling the return of the employment contract as a device to ensure the freedom and equality of labor.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Wagner’s view was not new, but rather influenced by numerous influential progressive officials and progressive agencies after World War I, who had promoted and tested a role for the state in ensuring institutions of collective bargaining. Barenberg, “The Political Economy of the Wagner Act,” 1381.

²⁶² Italics my own. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Statement on Signing the National Labor Relations Act," July 5, 1935, available online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14893>.

The Wagner Act assured workers that the state would step in to guarantee that the contract was a form of freedom, enforced by the state. Wagner decried the NLRB as “An agency designed for harmony and mutual concessions...an impartial forum, where employers and employees could appear as equals...[and] where they could sign *contracts* of enduring peace rather than mere articles of uncertain truce.”²⁶³ No longer would contracts be “mere articles of uncertain truce” and contract laborers into slavery. Wagner argued, “There can be no freedom in an atmosphere of bondage. No organization can be free to represent the workers when it is the mere creature of the employer.”²⁶⁴ He further stated, “The slave system of the old South was as tranquil as a summer’s day, but that is no reason for perpetuating in modern industry any of the aspects of a master-servant relationship.”²⁶⁵ Wagner turned to the historical metaphor of “slavery” to justify the contract, renewing the binary of slavery and freedom as metaphors for the contract. In other words, Wagner equated liberty of contract with freedom, arguing that inequality of bargaining power negated the actual liberty of the contract. At the heart of his argument was a belief in consent through contract, because he believed workers had the right to collectively influence their contracts through union organization. If the contract was fundamentally unfree, then the state could make it free, not just falsely, but by enforcing workers’ collective agency and consent.

²⁶³ Wagner, “Talk on Labor Relations 9-10,” 29 February 1936, Wagner Papers, SF 103, Folder 36, as quoted in Barenberg, “The Political Economy of the Wagner Act,” 1424.

²⁶⁴ U.S. Congress, *National Labor Relations Board, Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, on S. 1958, a Bill to Promote Equality of Bargaining Power between Employers and Employees, to Diminish the Causes of Labor Disputes, to Create a National Labor Relations Board, and for Other Purposes*, Statement of Senator Wagner, 74th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1935).

²⁶⁵ Robert Wagner, “Company Unions: A Vast Industrial Issue,” *New York Times*, 11 March 1934.

Labor's attempt to involve the federal government in their attempt to organize through effective self-agency found expression through the state enforcement of the contract via the Wagner Act. The contract became an instrument by which state officials organized the laboring population and regulated the work place. It also became the norm by which officials reformed employers' conduct to ensure workers' agency. The quest for norms in worker treatment resulted in a paradigmatic shift in U.S. governance of labor, shifting the state's focus from immigration restriction to freedom and consent of the contract. If the contract had historically been "unfree" in the case of "coolie" labor, then the state could make it free, not just falsely, but through actual consent. This was a distinctly racial phenomenon, even as explicit discussions of race were absent from the congressional debates over the Wagner Act in the 1930s. The worker agency that the U.S. government supported was white workers' agency. The Wagner Act veiled the racial division of labor that structured social life in the United States. At the same time white workers made claims on the U.S. federal government, Mexican workers were being repatriated and excluded from such claims. Furthermore, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) supported an amendment to the Wagner Act that would have prohibited race discrimination by unions, but Wagner refused to support it. Pressured by the AFL, he instead agreed to take out the nondiscrimination language of the amendment. NLRA protections were never meant as anti-discriminatory measures and were never extended to people of color, since those sectors of the work force that people of color inhabited, such as agricultural labor and domestic service, were excluded from the NLRA. The Wagner Act was thus a racial project designed to benefit white workers.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Rebecca Zietlow, *Enforcing Equality: Congress, The Constitution, and the Protection of Individual Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 94; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*

In the years between the Wagner Act and World War II, early experimentation with the state extension of protections to white workers' collective agency blossomed into an expanding welfare state. In its new expanded role as the protector of white workers' welfare and agency, the state became a vehicle by which to extend rights to workers, as a means to protect the "freedom" of white citizen workers. The impetus to police the contract explicitly began to spread across the federal bureaucracy, with vast resources made available for new federal agencies such as the NLRB.²⁶⁷ Given the context of the Good Neighbor policy, it was only a small step from there to applying this bureaucratic formula to Mexican laborers during World War II as part of the "war effort." When World War II began, and growers complained anew of a labor shortage much as they did during World War I, the state could again look to Mexico for labor, in spite of the prohibition of foreign contract labor laid down in the Foran Act of 1885 and the "mistakes" of the first labor program. State officials and labor advocates like Galarza now believed, via the Good Neighbor Policy, that freedom could be attained and extended to "unfree" Mexicans through the labor contract and that the state could guarantee the protection of freedom, as modeled in the Wagner Act of 1935, by extending those protections to contract Mexican laborers. Contrary to widely-held public perceptions of contract labor as a form of slavery at the turn of the twentieth century, the contract emerged again as a metaphor for freedom by 1935.

The Creation of a New Contract Labor Program

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 5-6, 216-217. Also see Margot Canaday, *Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) and Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²⁶⁷ For more on the role of the NLRB, see Frank W. McCulloch and Tim Bornstein, *The National Labor Relations Board* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974).

As suggested in Chapter One, the Bracero Program in 1942 served as a platform for the anti-imperialism of the Good Neighbor Policy and the application of liberty or “freedom” to all peoples. President Roosevelt publicly maintained that the program with Mexico was a means to show that “our peoples....can work together for a common objective....it [is] the secret of future happiness and prosperity for all of us on both sides of our unfortified border.”²⁶⁸ Instead of the unilateralism of the first labor program, Roosevelt promised to create a binational labor program that would reverse former imperial trends. The precedent to suspend the Foran Act had already been set in 1917 by the first Mexican labor importation program, harmonizing with the U.S. government’s unilateral approach towards Latin America. This time, U.S. officials vetoed the Foran Act while disavowing empire, under the premise that the contract would be a means to promote international peace as a reciprocal statement of good-neighborly intentions. The commitment to a new era of international relations was why the language of contract was so appealing in the 1940s. U.S. officials believed the contract would assure Latin America of the United States’ anti-imperialism through certain worker guarantees and protections. The Good Neighbor Policy, the development of state infrastructure such as the NLRB, and the intervention of expertise made the state management of labor in the 1930s and 1940s substantively different from the exclusionary measures taken previously in the 1860s-1920s against immigration. While it was through the immigration restriction acts that experts developed the authority to protect freedom, it was through progressive New Deal government agencies and reforms in the 1920s-1940s that the bureaucracy to mediate freedom was finally established. By the 1940s, U.S.

²⁶⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “United Effort for a Better World: Interdependence of All Nations,” Broadcast from Monterrey, Mexico, 20 April 1943 in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. IX, p. 418-420.

officials were ready to seemingly extend the Wagner Act's provisions to foreign and non-white workers via the binational labor contract.

To create a binational labor importation agreement with Mexico, the Mexican government would first have to agree to one, to demonstrate that the Good Neighbor Policy was truly "neighborly." While appeals for a Mexican labor importation program originated from both liberal political figures and conservative growers alike in 1940 and 1941, U.S. officials were initially skeptical and refused to relax immigration restrictions. In 1940, the executive cabinet asked the United State's Employment Service (USES) to complete an investigation as to whether a farm labor shortage even existed.²⁶⁹ The bombing of Pearl Harbor altered the thinking of many federal officials, who began to perceive farm labor as a national security matter. This, in tandem with a liberal consensus on a benevolently managed labor importation program convinced many government officials that a labor importation program was mutually beneficial for both Mexico and the United States as "allies" in the war effort.

On April 30, 1942, a U.S. interagency group comprised of the WMC, the Department of State, the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice, and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, met separately to discuss the praxis of such a program. Their efforts reflected the committee's efforts to resolve the conflicting demands of organized labor, farmers, and the Mexican government. On May 28, Wickard asked Attorney General Francis J. Biddle to waive the contract labor, head tax, and literacy test provision of the 1917 Immigration Act to permit the temporary entry of Mexican farm workers, to which he agreed. In June 1942, Department of Agriculture Secretary Claude Wickard made an official request for labor to the Mexican government. On June 15, 1942, Mexican Ambassador George S. Messersmith met with

²⁶⁹ Peter N. Kirstein, *Anglo over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon* (San Francisco: R and E Research Association, 1977), 13.

Foreign Minister Ezequiel Padilla to seek approval for the migration. Messersmith argued that the need for labor was urgent and would make an important contribution to the war effort.²⁷⁰ On July 3, 1942, Secretary of Agriculture Wickard attended the second Inter-American Conference on Agriculture at the U.S Embassy in Mexico City. As head of the American delegation, his purpose was to call a “technical and scientific meeting, not a political one,” to convince Mexican authorities to permit the United States government to import Mexican agricultural labor to the United States in order to “raise the standards of rural living” in Mexico. At the conference, Wickard held another meeting with Padilla. Padilla revealed his misgivings about the proposed undertakings at the meeting, given the history of discrimination against Mexicans in the United States. Wickard assured Padilla that requests by farmers for workers would not be approved unless an investigation proved that workers were needed. In addition, he claimed that the U.S. government was ready to stand behind the contract of each worker.²⁷¹

Messersmith, a good friend of U.S. Vice President Henry Wallace, was in attendance at the meetings. He assured Wallace in a July 17, 1942 letter that “the conference was quite a success and I believe it was worthwhile....Mr. Wickard was most helpful in the matter of getting Mexican labor for the United States.” He expressed concern that “producers...think that Mexican labor can be brought in like cattle and exploited. We cannot permit such a thing to happen. It is important, therefore, that the arrangements be made carefully....” Vice President Wallace responded to Messersmith, appreciative that the conference had gone well, stating, “Above all, I am happy to know that you and Secretary Wickard have been working so

²⁷⁰ Otey M. Scruggs, “Evolution of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement of 1942,” *Agricultural History* 34, No. 3 (July 1960): 144-50.

²⁷¹ Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 42; Scruggs, “Evolution of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement of 1942,” 147.

effectively on a constructive solution to the problem of bringing Mexican labor into the United States.” The Mexican delegation, Padilla included, was satisfied with Wickard’s assurances regarding the use of Mexican contract labor and the interagency’s committee’s standards of recruitment. An agreement was reached on the principles of governing the program, and Mexican officials decided to consent to a limited emigration on a trial basis, beginning formal negotiations in Mexico City on July 14, 1942 and formalizing the program via an exchange of diplomatic notes. In his letters, Foreign Minister Padilla made it clear that his government did not wish the workers to contract directly with American farmers, as had taken place during the first labor program. He proposed that the U.S. government serve as the primary employer and contract with the farmer and the worker, so as to shield Mexican contract workers from exploitation. He also refused to allow farmers or their agents to directly recruit workers in Mexico, establishing that the Mexican government would be responsible for their recruitment.²⁷²

The recruitment system involved several contracts, including the binational government agreement, the contracts that individual Mexican workers made with the FSA, and the contracts for groups of workers made by the individual farmers and growers associations with the FSA. Consent, binationalism, and collective agency lay at the heart of each of these contracts. The agreement specified, “the term of the contract shall be agreed upon by the representatives of the two Governments with privilege of extension with the consent of the worker and approval of the Mexican Government.” Thus, the contract itself was a means to combat imperialism through bilateralism and worker consent. The nature of the “individual work contract” signed by each worker functioned above all to impose social order through personal volition and performed as a

²⁷² Scruggs, “Evolution of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement of 1942,” 147; Kitty Calavitas, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Letter Number 2309, “With Reference to the Importation of Laborers from Mexico), 23 June 1942, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 171, Box 15, NARA.

paradigm of the free market economy. As an implement of exchange, these contracts were to be entered into voluntarily by liberal individuals who both took part in negotiating a bargain for labor (as commodity) in exchange for certain guarantees and protections. Leaders of the DOA, the WFA, and the OIAA pointed out the benefit of the contracts, specified as an equal partnership whereby the “free” worker exchanged his labor value for “domestic” or “free” wages via the labor contract. The Office of War Information (OWI) promoted the theme “free labor will win” to news and other media agencies, stating, “free labor challenges the deluded Axis idea that Slave Labor can out-produce Free Labor. With a resounding promise that Free Labor will win, American Labor holds out the hand of hope to the enslaved nations of the world.”²⁷³ These state-produced discourses regarding labor justified and legitimized the U.S.-implemented labor programs, not as a form of labor exploitation or slavery, but as a form of negotiation, where two equally autonomous individuals could come together of their own volition rather than through external force. The contract enforced the notion that the labor programs were emphatically not a form of enslavement, but a choice that Mexican workers made under their own consent, making freedom and equality central to the agreements and the individual labor contracts.

Furthermore, the contract projected the collective agency of U.S. citizen workers laid out onto Mexican workers by extending the right to elect a “spokesmen” to negotiate grievances with their employers. The contract stated, “Groups of workers admitted under this understanding shall elect their own spokesmen to deal with the employer, with the duly authorized representative of the craft or class of employees, or with other interested parties, concerning matters arising out of the interpretation or application of this agreement....” Article 23 of the Individual Work Contract also upheld, “The worker shall have the right to join with other

²⁷³ OWI Report, “A National Theme for Labor Day, 1942,” Box 616, RG 208, Records of the Office of War Information, U.S. National Archives (NARA).

Mexican laborers admitted under the understanding between the government of Mexican and the United States in the election of spokesmen to be members of the group electing them.”²⁷⁴ In other words, Braceros could elect a “spokesperson,” similar to a union leader, who would then voice their collective concerns to the employer. While they could not submit complaints to the NLRB, they could nonetheless have access to representation to protect their “freedom.” This would ensure that the contract could be used by the state to enforce Mexican workers’ collective agency and consent.

The Mexican labor program served as part of an American national narrative of progress, with the contract representing the evolution of the nation’s moral nature under the Wagner Act and Good Neighbor Policy. By World War II, the U.S. and Mexican governments, organized labor, and the New Deal liberal consensus stoutly maintained that national progress was against slavery and colonialism, and for freedom as symbolized through the contract. In doing so, they ironically and inadvertently obscured the new practices by which global divisions of labor were expanded and innovated. After all, Mexican laborers would only be recognized as deserving of state “protection” and of “freedom” if they had a contract and could exercise personal agency through the contract. If they abided by certain standards of self-governance, they could be incorporated into rural populations as legal farmworkers. This included not staying in the United States past the term of their contract, not joining the U.S. military to fight in the war, and remaining in the agricultural regions of the country so as to be employed solely in agricultural work. As such, the state mandated their exclusion from certain parts of society and modern institutions. They were also proclaimed citizen subjects of Mexico, according to their contracts, not citizen subjects of the United States. They were entitled to participate in U.S. society, but

²⁷⁴ “Individual Work Agreement” of August 4, 1942, as amended April 26, 1943, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 171, Box 15, NARA.

only to an extent. While they were recognized by the state via the contract, they were not allowed political participation, nor were they given access to privilege and resources (schools, factories, hospitals, etc.). These racial and imperial connections were displaced or masked by the language of contract, based as they were in the long history of the political doctrine of slavery and freedom.

Growers balked against the state regulation of farm labor from the inception of the Bracero Program, even though they had originally petitioned the INS and other federal agencies to waive importation restrictions in 1940. They made several attempts to alter the binational foundations of the program, fearing unbridled government regulation and socialization of U.S. agriculture. They wanted a program like the World War I program, where they had recruited workers in Mexico without government intervention or regulation.²⁷⁵ For this reason, growers attempted to dismantle the government agency charged with administering the program, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in particular because of its concern with implementing government protections for destitute farmers.²⁷⁶ Conservative farm organizations, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, had already begun their attacks on the FSA in 1937. They had strong allies in Congress and were able to remove the FSA from its role in recruiting workers and rework the international agreement to minimize work guarantees to laborers, permit growers greater control over the contract, reduce the influence of the Mexican government, and directly undermine the bilateralism of the first agreement.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ In the agreement and individual contract, the worker entered into the contract with the “employer,” which was the United States government as represented by the WMC. “Agreement Between the United States and Mexico,” 4 August 1942, RG 211, Box 2-3, NARA. The Agreement (and diplomatic notes between the United States and Mexico) can be found online at: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/immigration/bracero-agreement-1942.pdf>

²⁷⁶ Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 47.

²⁷⁷ Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero*, 19, 45, 15-53.

Even as growers in the U.S. West worked on dismantling the effectiveness of the FSA and ensuring greater access to Mexican labor, growers on the East Coast and in Florida pressured the U.S. government to create their own sort of “Bracero Program,” by importing agricultural laborers from the British Caribbean. Much akin to Mexican and Asian labor in the West, Bahamian labor had long been since the 1860s to develop the eastern coast of Florida, until the 1917 Immigration Act slowed their migrations.²⁷⁸ As more and more workers sought employment in the defense industries, the U.S. farm workers in the Eastern states that remained in the fields used their demand as a weapon to fight for concessions from growers. In search of less recalcitrant workers, growers looked to the Caribbean. Workers on the islands faced high unemployment rates and were anxious to work, often forced to do labor for corporations like the United Fruit Company for low wages. Jamaicans and other Caribbean workers wrote to the British colonial office and the U.S. government, to demand a chance at farm labor in the United States similar to that given to Mexican workers. Growers demanded that the state give them access to these workers just as they had given growers in the Southwest access to Mexican workers. They organized their own formidable lobby to write letters, call congressman, march into officials’ offices, and testify at hearings.²⁷⁹

While at first the state refused to institute such a program for the East Coast, the added pressure of labor unrest and political protest in the Caribbean as a perceived threat to national security forced the U.S. government to reconsider. From 1934 to 1939, labor unrest in the British West Indies that highlighted the disparity of wealth in the colonies had led to the

²⁷⁸ Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 33.

²⁷⁹ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 367-369. Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 366-375; Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land*, 23-25.

development of party politics. Political parties such as the People's National Party in Jamaica and the Barbados Labor Party had a trade union base and connections to African American organizations in the United States, many of which were affiliated with the Communist Party. U.S. officials saw their political dissatisfaction and protest as a security threat to the United States at a time of war because of the Caribbean's nearness to the Panama Canal and the supply route for oil in Trinidad, Venezuela, and Colombia it provided. Seeking to generate jobs to pacify the British colonies, the United States began to build a military network in the British Caribbean territories under the Destroyers Base Agreement in September 1940.²⁸⁰ However, strikes erupted again following the completion of U.S. military base sites in late 1942. As unemployment rose to new heights, U.S. officials sought to appease striking workers in the Caribbean and the growers at home by soliciting the British colonial government for Caribbean laborers. At first, Oliver Stanley, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, did not support the idea of a Bahamian labor program. He feared it would go against the International Labour Organization (ILO) standards that the British had helped to write. He was soon forced to relent, due to unemployment levels and "in the interest of the war effort."²⁸¹

By exchange of diplomatic notes on March 16, 1943, the United States and British colonial governments made an agreement for the importation of temporary contract laborers from the Bahamas to the United States. The agreement was modeled on the Mexican labor agreement, with the same general provisions, including "1) the Bahamian worker shall not be engaged in military service by or for the U.S. government, 2) Bahamians entering the United States as a result of this understanding shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind in

²⁸⁰ Jason C. Parker, *Brother's Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁸¹ Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land*, 42-43.

accordance with Executive Order 8802, 3) Bahamians shall not be employed to displace domestic workers or to reduce previously established wage rates....” Like Mexicans, they were offered certain “protections” and “freedoms” guaranteed by the contract, including minimum wages, work guarantees, living conditions, medical care, legal protections against occupational accidents, transportation paid by the U.S. government and a savings fund in the Caribbean to which a portion of their income would go to improve the island economies. Among the General provisions, the agreement also specified that “there will be full cooperation between the Government of the U.S. and the Bahamas and their respective agencies...,” so as to treat all governments concerned “in an equitable manner.”²⁸²

Two months later, the United States and British colonial governments made a similar agreement to import Jamaicans onto the sugar plantations of Florida (May 1943). In Jamaica, half of all land was divided among mostly British and U.S. landowners, including the United Fruit Company and Standard Oil Company, such that leaving for work abroad had become a right of passage for Jamaicans. For decades, many left to build the Panama Canal, drill for oil in Venezuela, or work on sugar, coffee, and banana plantations in Cuba, Nicaragua, Honduras, and other parts of Latin America. With the completion of the Panama Canal (1914), the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924, and the Great Depression, they had nowhere to go for work, turning Jamaica into a haven of protest and mass strikes. With increased calls for national independence across the Caribbean, British colonial elite sought a way to pacify the Jamaican population and backed the U.S. request to import Jamaican laborers. While growers in New Jersey had also called for a labor importation agreement with Puerto Rico, the state feared the lack of control

²⁸² “Agreement for the Employment of Bahamians in the United States,” Made between Fred Morrell, Assistant Director of the Agricultural Labor Administration of the Department of Agriculture on behalf of the U.S. government, and Honorable William Leslie Heape, Colonial Secretary on behalf of the Government of the Bahama Islands, RG 224, Entry 6, Box 18, NARA.

over deportation they would have with a Puerto Rican labor program, in which workers' status as U.S. citizens would prevent the state from controlling their migrations and prevent the workers from being "temporary." With control over deportation their central concern, officials agreed to a labor importation agreement for other Caribbean groups instead of Puerto Ricans, including Barbadians, British Guianese and British Hondurans. Again, the agreements mirrored the Mexican Labor program agreement, signed by the WFA and the DOA and by the colonial secretary of the Bahamian Islands.²⁸³

The importation of labor from the British West Indies to the United States was linked to the history of slavery on the islands as well as to the contract labor supply established there by British colonists in the nineteenth century as a form of "free labor" after abolition. Instead of the British importing East Indian agricultural laborers to work in the Caribbean plantation colonies, the United States now imported British West Indian workers to work on U.S. plantations. These workers were often the descendants of former slaves and former contract workers in the Caribbean. This passing of the colonial "torch" occurred in a context in which the U.S. government had taken an anti-colonial stance and also expanded its function as protector of "contract" labor as part of that stance. The irony was that where U.S. officials now condoned the contract as a form of freedom, Britain had prohibited contract "coolie" labor as a form of slavery in 1916. Despite these contradictions, both the U.S. and British governments called for the right to self-determination and "freedom" for all peoples through the Atlantic Charter in 1941. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill stated that the United States and Great Britain shared "the same language, the same hymns, and more or less, the same ideals," to "strengthen our resolve,

²⁸³ Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land*, 52-54, 71; Office of Inter American Affairs Letter, 28 August 1942, RG 229, Entry 1, Box 76, NARA; Letter to Senator Dennis Chavez of Puerto Rico from Paul McNutt, re: Importation of Puerto Rican Labor, 15 June 1943, RG 211, Entry 171, Box 15, NARA.

that we fight...till all enmity and oppression be done away, and the people of the world be set free from fear to serve one another.”²⁸⁴ This symbolic uniting of Great Britain and the U.S. for the cause of freedom indicated a new role for the U.S. and Great Britain in the world. Through the Atlantic Charter, Roosevelt and Churchill imagined a world deliberately redesigned to transcend the economic and political conditions (i.e., imperialism) that had bred previous global conflicts, prefiguring the United Nations Charter, and even the free-trade ideology of the Bretton Woods charter that established the World Bank and the IMF.²⁸⁵

In spite of the anti-imperial rhetoric that both the United States and Great Britain propounded, the agreement with the British colonial government to import Caribbean labor into the United States reflected and generated several very real contradictions. Not only was the U.S. government importing a “colonial” labor supply from the British colonies into the United States, it also sought the continuation of military influence in the Caribbean. With the Good Neighbor policy, Roosevelt had renounced the right to intervene unilaterally, binding the Americas together in a series of political, economic, and cultural treaties that led to an assortment of multilateral institutions. The U.S. withdrew troops from the Caribbean in 1936, advocating for an end to colonialism and militarism.²⁸⁶ However, by 1940, troops were again in the Caribbean with military bases established on several islands for the purpose of “national security” to subdue an incipient anti-colonial movement in the Caribbean.²⁸⁷ The context of the decision to import British Caribbean colonial labor thus exposed the lack of “binational” motivations in the labor

²⁸⁴ Cited from Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁸⁶ Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007), 74.

²⁸⁷ Harvey Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

program agreements. Instead, they revealed the imperial connections that cemented the relationship between the United States and Britain and the means by which Britain was able to pass its imperial role onto the U.S. government, under a new set of ideologies purportedly against the colonial order of things.

In the case of the Caribbean labor programs, the contract again became an innovation to advance the cause of “freedom,” so as to legitimize the expanding structure of colonial labor. The contract revealed a growing faith in the ability of the state to regulate labor migrations for the cause of “freedom” since the nineteenth century through countless laws, agencies, and government hearings that would do the work of ensuring that migrant (contract) labor would serve to replace slave labor, not as slaves, but as voluntary labor. As such, the Tolan Committee hearings discussed in the last chapter were not anomalies, but rather part of a broader continuum in the renovation of territorial occupation and imperial rule, encouraging the circulation of people while requiring a stronger state to regulate and control them. Galarza overlooked the history of labor importation at the hearings when he stated, “It is a peculiar thing, we have many agreements with the Mexican Government regarding boundaries and practically everything else excepting the flow of human beings from one country to another. As far as I know, there is no treaty or agreement of that kind between two Governments....” Galarza’s statement ignored past historical realities that had long structured contract labor importation between colonies and the state through the conjoined categories of slavery and freedom. While Galarza viewed the contract agreement as a metaphor for freedom in 1942, that metaphor functioned to obscure the historical reality of coerced labor in the continual practice of making people into commodities and capital. His logic elided the imperial connections between liberal contract theory and the freedom/slavery divide that had structured the genealogy of “contract” all along. It was also

what would drive Galarza and the labor movement of the 1940s and 1950s to ironically return to similar arguments formerly used by organized labor during Chinese exclusion to oppose contract labor: the Mexican contract worker was a “legal slave,” and a “rented slave,” a “foreign” element undeserving of racial inclusion, driving down “free” U.S. wage levels to “slavery” standards.²⁸⁸

Conclusion

The transition in state discourse over “contract” from the 1800s to the 1930s during a moment of intensive expansion of state power was crucial in the establishment of the labor importation programs. It demonstrates that while it may seem that slavery and freedom were a paradox, the two were instead inherently intertwined and ambiguously interchangeable, depending on the historical moment. The ambiguity of what it has meant to be “slave” and what it has meant to be “free” as overlapping signifiers has made them readily available and conscripted in different moments in the growth of state power. The use of “slave” or “free” as categories has legitimized capitalist labor relations and state expansion in different historical contexts by resolving the contradictions that emerge from liberal state-endorsed labor extraction, exploitation, and racial exclusion. In resolving these contradictions, the slave/free dialectic has allowed the state to racially exclude human beings from the benefits of liberal citizenship and turned them into goods to be transferred from one colony to another, in a process regulated and enforced by the state. Such legislative exclusion resulted in the creation of a racialized caste of labor designed to work exclusively in U.S. agriculture such that as the state became the enforcer of freedom, it also became the enslaver, opening the state up for critique and turning the state into a site of political struggle.²⁸⁹ At the same time, the transmutability of slavery and freedom

²⁸⁸ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 161; Craig, *The Bracero Program*, 30.

²⁸⁹ See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 61-67.

for labor and civil rights advocates has delimited an extended critique of the state and of capitalist labor relations in the United States and, in fact, has aided in the expansion of U.S. state power.

The language of the “contract” therefore calls for a critique of liberalism and of how national and imperial epistemologies structure resistance strategies, so that a more progressive and expansive politics might be pursued. Instead of turning to the slave/free paradox to analyze and critique the labor programs, we should turn greater attention to how the logics of that paradox have maintained the free/unfree continuum and the commodification of laborers. Rather than examining the free or unfree nature of the labor programs, we should focus on the process—the acts of state—that made laborers into “slave” or “free” subjects and the politics through which foreign contract workers have historically been legitimized or prohibited through the language of contract. Instead of turning to the liberal state to resolve the inequalities of contract, we should critique and disrupt the role of the liberal state as an arbiter of freedom and thus of social divides. The state has historically policed the racialized boundaries of “foreign” and “domestic” through the slave/free dichotomy that figures contract. Official debates surrounding “contract” not only deepened and muddled the divide between slavery and freedom, they also resolved, clarified, and reproduced that divide, with lasting historical implications, as similar debates are used even today to sustain “guestworker” programs into the twenty-first century.

Chapter Four

From Civil Rights to Immigration Restriction: Braceros' Resistance Strategies and Labor's Search for Rights, 1947-1957

“With my heart I shout a proudful cry, long live our nation and American victory,” cheered Mexican contract workers shortly after World War II. From the program’s inception, U.S. and Mexican government officials and media labeled them as foreign “allies” and “friends,” as well as “soldiers of democracy,” who journeyed to the United States in a pact of mutual understanding and agreement, as symbolized by the contract. As the first clause of their individual work agreements stipulated, “the Government of the U.S. and the Worker mutually desire that the worker be *beneficially* employed in the USA with a view to alleviate the present shortage of agricultural workers in that country and to cooperate in the successful prosecution of the war.” Many braceros believed in this contractual obligation, making it their boastful reason for migrating to the United States.²⁹⁰ Yet it was not long after the initiation of the Bracero Program that Mexican migrant workers began to take note of the incongruity between what they were told about the labor programs and the reality of exploitation and contract violations on the ground. Bracero Felix Tapia contested, “We laborers and citizens of Mexico have come to offer our services to our sister nation when she needed us...The treatment which we have received, nevertheless, all falls short of any standard of Good Neighborliness.” Realizing the contradictions between the rhetoric of inter-American cooperation and the actual conditions of

²⁹⁰ “Versos” dedicados a Mexico y Los Estados Unidos, by J.S. Vilchis, a bracero working for the Northwest Railroad Company at the Davenport, Iowa camp, no date, Box 17, Folder 9, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries (EGP); See also the agreement of August 4, 1942 For the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States as Revised on April 26, 1943 By an Exchange of Notes Between the American Embassy at Mexico City and the Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Box 19, RG 224, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Also see the front page of Pacific Lines, *Southern Pacific Bulletin* (October 1943), Box 17, Folder 8, EGP.

the Bracero Program, workers often decided to speak out against the specious and misleading representations of the programs. By the late 1940s, many had come to the conclusion that the contract was a hoax. A bracero stated, “A few of us have read our contracts but we just read them for fun. The contracts do not mean anything in this camp.”²⁹¹

In that context, Ernesto Galarza entered the farm fields of California as a labor leader of the National Farm Labor Union-American Federation of Labor (NFLU-AFL). He sought to alleviate the violations of the labor program he felt personally responsible for creating. From 1948 to 1952, he became involved in an extended battle to unionize laborers in the California farm fields of the Central and Imperial Valleys. Central to Galarza’s mission was to mobilize the federal government to enforce the realization of the bracero labor contract to protect both the civil rights of the U.S. worker and of the bracero. After all, he argued, “the protection of the civil rights of the bracero is an aim that is implicit in the Agreement and the work contract.”²⁹² A discourse of “rights” and equality was apparent from the beginning of the Bracero Program. When a contingent of Mexicans left Mexico for the United States on May 13, 1943, Mexican Secretary of Labor Francisco Trujillo Gurria said to them: “You are soldiers of democracy, and fight with the patriotic spirit that is alive in all of Mexico....*tratados exactamente igual a los trabajadores de la Union Americana*/ treated exactly equal to U.S. workers.”²⁹³ Galarza and his connections at the NFLU and at the AFL understood that their struggle to organize farm laborers

²⁹¹ Testimony of Felix Tapia, 27 September 1945, Galarza Field Notes, Box 6, Folder 3, EGP; Testimony of two “nationals” at the Rudy Avila Camp in Patterson, California, Galarza Field Notes, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

²⁹² Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields: Based on a Report Regarding Compliance with the Contractual, Legal, and Civil Rights of Mexican Agricultural Workers in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Fund for the Republic, 1956), 15. Note: The NFLU became the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU) of the AFL in 1952.

²⁹³ Speech (Discurso) by Sr. Lic. Francisco Trujillo Gurria, Sec. del Trabajo y Provision Social, to a contingent of Mexican workers that went to the United States on May 13, 1943, Box 17, Folder 8, EGP.

was linked to a struggle for equality and for “rights,” recognized and regulated by the U.S. federal government.²⁹⁴ Galarza believed that all workers—whether Mexican or U.S. farmworkers—would benefit, if the federal government intervened to regulate the Bracero Program. That had been part of Galarza’s 1942 argument when he supported the implementation of a Mexican labor program in the first place.

At first, Galarza and the NFLU tried to include braceros in their unionization campaign, organizing braceros and domestic workers alike under the NFLU. However, when each of Galarza’s efforts to organize strikes in California was thwarted by growers’ use of braceros and undocumented laborers as strikebreakers, he became increasingly frustrated and came to see Mexican labor as a problem. Instead of defending braceros and attempting to unite workers across foreign and domestic divides, Galarza and the NFLU resorted to excluding non-citizen Mexican migrant workers from the California farm labor movement, whether under contract or not. Hank Hasiwar, president of the NFLU demanded the control of the flow of imported labor, arguing:

The union wants resident farm workers to go on the job first and get permanent employment rather than the contract nationals from Mexico. It demands that the farmers not hire illegal workers. The union insists that the Mexican nationals should have the right to union representation and enjoy equal standards with American workers. The union will continue to fight for control of the flow of imported labor so as to protect American standards for all workers.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Robert Korstad referred to the labor and civil rights movements as “civil rights unionism” in his book, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Zaragosa Vargas has pointed out how “civil rights are labor rights” for Mexican-Americans organizing in the United States. Zaragosa Vargas, *Civil Rights Are Labor Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Also see Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

²⁹⁵ Hank Hasiwar, “Darkness in the Valley of Plenty,” *The American Federationist* (June 1951), Box 43, Folder 10, EGP.

Increasingly interested in preventing “illegal immigration,” the NFLU influenced the Border Patrol and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to reinvent immigration control as a site of crime control in the 1950s. In fact, U.S. and Mexican organized labor worked with state Border Patrol officials and the INS to shape the politics and governance of the border. Since the U.S. and Mexican governments seemed incapable of controlling the flow of labor, U.S. and Mexican labor unions created instantaneous “road stops” along the border to prevent undocumented workers or “subversives” from entering the United States, instead.

Unbeknownst to Galarza and other labor leaders, race and empire lay at the heart of these processes, for it was precisely the mobilization of the state to “protect American standards for all workers” that produced Mexican workers as racialized targets of state violence. While Galarza tried to distinguish between state protection and state violence, his own strategies and visions helped to make them mutually constitutive. The crux of the contradiction between protection and violence was a rights-based language: in order for labor and civil rights advocates to maintain their claim to rights and to assert their rights as U.S. citizens, they had to define who could and could not have access to those rights. In other words, U.S. labor’s language of civil rights created national divides precisely because it necessarily and ideologically constructed the border between “us” and “them.” This rights-based language permitted civil rights advocates like Galarza to disavow racism even as they racialized undocumented workers as “wetbacks.” The result was Operation Wetback (1954), a policy lobbied for by labor union leaders and conservatives alike that was designed to clamp down on “illegal” immigration from Mexico by initiating yet another campaign of violence, repatriation, deportation, and expulsion of Mexicans. While it catalyzed nearly one million “criminal” apprehensions in its first year, “Operation Wetback” was never entirely successful in preventing profit-seeking growers and contractors

from recruiting “illegal” labor. Rather, it resulted in a more permanent and strategic border patrol presence under the guise of “national security,” a presence that was not only systematically invasive but also systematically violent.²⁹⁶

Racial exclusion and state violence were not the only possible outcomes in the debates over the status of braceros. Braceros and their advocates critiqued the labor contract and sought something different from what the labor agreements afforded, even as they became part of a larger discourse on labor that produced exclusionary impulses from the farm labor movement. Despite braceros’ alternative visions, the U.S. labor movement’s discourse of “rights” and disavowal of racism prevented Mexican workers from becoming legible as racialized subjects, effectively reproducing white supremacy.²⁹⁷ The imperatives of “civil rights” and labor rights in the California farm labor movement thus helped to create a system of immigration regulation based on a core paradox: a system founded on the principles of equality and fairness generated an ever larger caste of racialized “illegal immigrants.” In other words, U.S. labor’s faith in the federal government’s ability to fulfill the principle of equality (state power), and its belief in the contract based on individual liberal subject choices involved a crucial slippage in which a symbolic gesture of equality toward citizens obscured and fostered the unequal treatment of non-

²⁹⁶ For more on Operation Wetback, see Kelly Lytle Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943-1954,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (Winter, 2006): 421-444. Hernández’ article provides an analysis of the state’s role in aggressively campaigning against undocumented Mexican immigration, culminating in Operation Wetback. Also see Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Julian Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1971); Juan Ramon Garcia, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Undocumented Mexican Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

²⁹⁷ Even further, because Mexican and Latinos/as do not fit into the black/white racial formation of the U.S. civil rights movement, they have been used to discipline blacks, even though they face similar racial abuse and violence, such that the black/white paradigm has been productive for white supremacy. Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 62.

citizens.²⁹⁸ In demarcating who should have access to rights and who should not, the California farm labor movement and the AFL unwittingly devised a dialectic between civil rights and immigration, such that the “illegal immigrant” became the necessary condition to assert one’s civil rights.²⁹⁹

Los Libres y Los Desarraigados/ The Free and the Uprooted: Bracero Perspectives on Contract Rights³⁰⁰

Mexican contract workers understood perfectly well the power and importance of the labor contract over their lives and struggled to defend their contract rights, even if they knew that pursuing those rights was often hopeless. At the J. Cota Camp in Miromar, California, a bracero upheld, “some of the men have read the contracts but we cannot mention this to the foreman or the contractor. They yell at us and tell us that the contract is a piece of dirt. If we want to see how useless it is, just try to see somebody about it.”³⁰¹ Workers were quick to point out the limitations of the contract under the profiteering shadow of U.S. agribusiness, often indicating the contradictions of supposed contract “freedom.” They protested their lack of choice under contract, making transparent the power difference between the U.S. government

²⁹⁸ Mae Ngai, “A Nation of Immigrants: Cold War and the Civil Rights Origins of Illegal Immigration” (April 2010), Paper Number 28 (Unpublished talk). In this talk, Ngai conducts a genealogy of President Kennedy’s book, *A Nation of Immigrants* (1958) to attempt to show how liberalism’s commitment to formal equality directly contributed to the rise of illegal immigration. Also see Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 165-166.

²⁹⁹ It is important to note that the notion “civil rights” is just beginning to form in the public imaginary, especially as indicated by President Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights (1946), created by Executive Order 9808, to investigate the status of civil rights in the United States to strengthen and protect them. This committee prepared a report entitled “To Secure These Rights,” that explained this perception of civil rights succinctly.

³⁰⁰ *Los Libres* (the free) and *Los Desarraigados* (the uprooted). “*Corrido de los desarraigados/The Corrido of the Uprooted Ones*” in María Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 165.

³⁰¹ Bracero Interviews by Ernesto Galarza, 20 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP. Also see Galarza *Strangers in Our Fields*, 18.

and the individual worker, between the employer and the bracero. Workers also devised a multitude of ways to contest their lack of choice, freedom, and legal representation. Angry at contract violations, many Mexican contract laborers first sought to find a representative who might assist in the defense of their contract rights. Article 17 of the Individual Mexican Labor Work Agreement, advocated for by leaders of the U.S. labor movement, stated: “The Worker shall enjoy the right to participate with other workers in the selection of representatives who shall be recognized by the Employer as his spokesmen for the purpose of maintaining this agreement.” Yet when braceros tried to elect a representative among themselves to air out their grievances to the foreman, contractor, or grower, that representative would be surreptitiously deported back to Mexico.³⁰²

Any time Mexican contract workers spoke out against program abuses, they risked the loss of their job and a return trip to Mexico. A group of nine braceros at Joe Perez Camp in Terminous, California explained, “there is a clause in the contract about the guarantee of work, but the contractor says the paper is not good here. He told us the contracts were made many years ago when they really needed braceros but now they can get all they want and the braceros that show contracts should be put in a truck and sent home right away.” If a contract worker individually called out the contract fallacies, either as a representative or to defend himself, he took a great risk. “The way it is, you do not want to make any complaint because they want to put you on the truck right away and because either you have just a 45-day contract or you are just

³⁰² According to Galarza, not a single camp was found throughout his survey *Strangers in Our Fields* in which the workers had one individual or a committee to act as a spokesman for the group. The grower and the state reserved the right to terminate the contract and deport the worker. As the contract stated, “...if the government determines that the worker is unable or unwilling to work in accordance with the terms of this agreement...or if the worker violates any law of the U.S., this agreement may be forthwith terminated by the Government.” But the government left it up to individual growers to make the decision. Under the threat of deportation, many workers learned that it did not pay to speak out. See *Strangers in Our Fields*.

going to finish a contract and it is no use anyway,” a bracero explained. Another bracero lamented in Watsonville, California on October 1, 1955, “If I complained, that would be the end of my renewal.... one worker spoke a little English because he had been here before on contract. He went to the camp head to ask for better meals and work for all of us. Next thing we knew he had been transferred out of the camp. We heard he had been sent back to Mexico.” That did not prevent another bracero from one day reading the contract out loud to the foreman or contractor supervising his work, upon which the foreman grabbed the contract and tore it to pieces in the field.³⁰³

Realizing that the contract was a one-sided manipulative device in which the American employer had far greater power than the worker, braceros became increasingly frustrated by the whole experience of being a contract laborer such that some gave up complaining at all. “The field boss tells us we should get along with the farmer and not make trouble about the contract,” a bracero stated, “but they tell us about the contract themselves. If we ask for transfer to more work they warn us to stay right in this camp or the immigration will pick us up for violating the laws of this country.” Braceros were not permitted to discuss or even mention the contract in dissent, but field bosses (foremen) used the contract to threaten and control the workers if they tried to desert or to leave for another field. A set of workers noted on October 10, 1955 in Patterson, California, “it seems that the contracts are enforced only when the [farm] Association can get something out of it. For us the contract has had no support. There is no one we can go to and receive instructions on the way contracts should be applied for the workers. The Association representative comes only to renew the contracts and leaves immediately.” Another bracero in

³⁰³ Galarza Interview with 9 nationals, Joe Perez Camp, Terminous, California, 20 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP; Interview with 8 at the Julian Ramirez Camp, Tracy, California, 14 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

Tracy, California maintained, “the contract is not good for the workers because there is no authority to guarantee the clauses.” Workers thought of telling the authorities in Mexico, but noticed, “there is no use telling these things to the government when we get back to Mexico. The thing is past, and the men have gone to many different places and you can’t prove anything anyway....”³⁰⁴

Nevertheless, migrant workers saw the Mexican and U.S. nation-states as a sight of hope and protection that could afford them real practical benefits. For example, they were quick to question what rights they did have and what aspects of the contract they could take advantage of under the contract. The desire to have their contract rights defended was always present, even when braceros knew representation was unavailable in either Mexico or in the United States. While they had little faith in the federal government’s ability to defend their rights, they still hoped that it would. As another pointed out, “it would be better if we had a list of offices where we could go immediately when some problem comes up where we could ask for instruction and have our rights defended.” According to the individual labor agreement, the Mexican consul and Mexican labor inspectors were the state representatives braceros could turn to for legal protection under the law. The contract stated:

The Mexican consuls, assisted the Mexican Labor Inspectors, recognized as such by the Employer will take all possible measures of protection in the interest of the Mexican workers in all questions affecting them, within their corresponding jurisdiction, and will have free access to the places of work of the Mexican workers. The Employer will observe that the sub-employer grants all facilities to the Mexican Government for the compliance of all the clauses in this contract.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Galarza interview with 5 braceros at the Gondo Camp in Watsonville, California, 1 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP; Interview with 2 at the Rudy Avila Camp in Patterson, California, 10 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP; Galarza’s interview notes from Tracy and Patterson, California, 7 October 1955, 10 October 1955; Interview with 12 in Tracy, California, 7 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁰⁵ Agreement of August 4, 1942 For the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States as Revised on April 26, 1943, By an Exchange of Notes Between the

Yet, as a few braceros in Tracy, California noted, “The workers never see the consul and the association man [Department of Labor] is supposed to be our representative but how can he be our representative if he works for the association?”³⁰⁶

Lack of representation did not stop many men from writing letters to the consul and aggregating meager earnings to pay for one among them to travel to the nearest Mexican consul to complain in person, when they were able to acquire his name and address. In creating mutual aid funds to pay for a bracero to travel to the nearest Mexican consul to lodge complaints, braceros expressed a collective identity that exceeded the individual identity bestowed upon them by the contract. Similarly, some decided to walk off of the job as a collective force: “Our situation did not improve so we walked out one day,” a group of braceros stated. “Fourteen of us asked that the association representative come to the camp. We could not get him here so we decided to walk to Salinas. We put our clothes in gunny sacks and started out. A truck picked us up and we went to the association office....” Once at the office, braceros were usually asked to either return to work or return to Mexico; only occasionally did a Mexican consul come out to the office to speak with the workers and when a consul did appear, it was usually to encourage braceros to go back to work.³⁰⁷

Many braceros felt that if they had no form of legal representation and could not look to the nation-state for protection, their only means of protesting contract violations was to abandon the contract. Dozens of men confessed, “we don’t care about the contract. It only means that we

American Embassy at Mexico City and the Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Box 19, RG 224, NARA.

³⁰⁶ Galarza interview with 12 braceros in Tracy, California, 7 October 1955, and 8 braceros on 14 October, 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁰⁷ Handwritten interview with 8 nationals at Camp Soledad, no date, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP. Ernesto Galarza handwritten field notes, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

can't take some better job...." Galarza noted that as many as forty percent had formerly entered illegally or had performed work without contract.³⁰⁸ For many, the act of deserting their contracts became the essence of freedom from bondage under contract. A bracero in Salinas maintained, "I have been a wetback several times. Now it is hard to be a wetback.... but it is better to be a free worker anyway. That way you can choose your boss. This way they tell you you have to fulfill your contract before you can transfer to another job. They will not let you pick your boss. It makes us feel like we have been sold." For many braceros, the contract was the equivalent of slavery, whereas going "illegal" or "wetback" was a means to exercise freedom and the right to choose whom they worked for and for how long. By "skipping" or "jumping" their contract, they became "libres" (free men). Another bracero stated, "I have been a wetback twice and I think you are more of a free man that way. This way you are honor bound to keep the contract, but the bosses do not keep their part of it."³⁰⁹

In asking questions regarding the suggested "freedom" of the contract, braceros created their own language in which the freedom offered to them by the U.S. and Mexican governments under contract became the antithesis of freedom. To Mexican contract workers, desertion of the contract was a risky but fruitful means to become a "free" worker, allowing braceros to create their own affiliations beyond the U.S. and Mexican governments. However, given the realities of state control and violence over their lives, not all Mexican workers abandoned their contracts,

³⁰⁸ Or, according to historian Deborah Cohen, "the most powerful weapon that most braceros had was their feet—they left." Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 2011), 140. Also see Report by Ernesto Galarza, October 1, 1955, Box 3, Folder 1, EGP.

³⁰⁹ Interview at Camp McCallum in Salinas, California, 4 October 1955; Interview with 12 braceros in Tracy, California, 7 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

especially when they knew such a vision of freedom was limited and potentially dangerous.³¹⁰

Braceros were aware that their vision of freedom was limited, as it turned them into fugitive “aliens” or “wetbacks,” racial terms that were widely and loosely used in the 1940s and 1950s to lump “Mexicans” together under a new immigration regime of racialization and criminalization. The appellation had different implications from *peon* which was rooted in Mexican *hacienda* history and referred to “inferior” low-paid and unskilled laborers. However, *wetback* had a much broader and sharper impact as it became a commonly used racial slur to refer to any “Mexican,” whether a U.S. citizen or non-citizen, documented or undocumented, casting them as criminals and implicitly evoking an us-versus-them or foreign versus domestic imaginary; *they* are breaking *our* laws.

Those braceros who chose to remain under contract called out the limitations of their contracts in other ways: through wage complaints sent to contractors, to Mexican consuls, to the United States Employment Service (USES), and to Ernesto Galarza at the NFLU. Their first complaint letters to Galarza were sent to him while he was still a Director of Labor and Social Information at the Pan-American Union in 1945. Their letters emphasized how their contracts specified a wage guarantee:

Wages to be paid the worker shall be the same as those paid for similar work to other agricultural laborers under the same conditions within the same area, in the respective regions of destination. Piece rates shall be so set as to enable the worker of average ability to earn the prevailing wage....³¹¹

³¹⁰ Ngai maintains that Mexican agricultural labor differed from colonial labor in several important respects; It was not unfree but free waged labor. The shift to wage labor was necessary to create an agricultural proletariat that modern agriculture needed. As free labor, they exercised the right to quit. However, exercising the right to quit does not signify “freedom,” as braceros demonstrate, due to their positioning by the state as “impossible” subjects. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 133.

³¹¹ Agreement of August 4, 1942 For the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States as Revised on April 26, 1943 By an Exchange of Notes Between the

The wage guarantee varied by contract depending upon region, as the (USES) made wage determinations based on the average wage earned for domestic farm laborers. In reality, the farm associations worked with USES to deflate wage earnings for their region. Even further, growers and contractors skimmed from wages by taking deductions from paychecks for housing, meals, and insurance, costs that were falsely augmented.³¹² Many braceros argued, “We do not know what the [wage] rate is going to be until we are on the field.... sometimes we have to wait until the end of the day or the next day. We ask the foreman but we do not like to do it because he gets mad. He is very sensitive.” Others stated, “The contractor is always saying those who don’t like it can pack right up and go to Stockton. We can walk if we want to, he says.... He gets especially mad on payday; we don’t get a regular rate. One day it is piece rate another day its hour rates. It depends....”³¹³ Hundreds of letters from braceros pointed to the same contract failure with regards to wages.

It is thus not surprising that many braceros refused to work by either directly walking off of the field or performing work stoppages in the middle of the day, again expressing their solidarity and collectivity in hopes of having their rights enforced. As early as November 1942, just three months after the inception of the program, braceros went on strike against a lettuce

American Embassy at Mexico City and the Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Box 19, RG 224, NARA.

³¹² As a group of braceros declared, “We figured out that in our camp we had over 100 men last month and that the camp got about \$1300 every week for board. You could get good meals for 100 men for this money. But the meals we get you could buy for half that much. It would be better if we had our own cooking utensils, but the contractor will not permit it. He says it is a violation of the law.” Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

³¹³ Interview with 3 braceros at the Juan Lucio Camp in Manteca, California, 14 October 1955, Interview with 2 braceros at the D’Arrigo Company in Coyote, California, 10 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

grower in the Imperial Valley protesting low wages and other contract violations.³¹⁴ In Tracy, a dozen braceros maintained: “Our entire gang refused to work and asked for transfer to another camp. The Big Boss (American) came and was very mad. He called us lazy SOBs and said he would send our whole camp back to Mexico. Took us all to camp and then to the Association. The rep there called us lazy Mexicans and said we did not come up here as tourists. One man protested this and he was put aside right away and his contract was cancelled.... they said it might happen to the rest of us.” Two braceros in the Rudy Avila Camp in Patterson, California admonished: “There are ten in the crew. One day the contractor would pay by the hour and the next day he would pay on contract. After a few days we asked him to pay regular but he got mad and said that was the only way the rancher could make money. We asked for our passport home and to be taken to the association....but he only got madder and said we could walk. We started out with our clothes and walked about eight miles....”³¹⁵

The strike activity on behalf of braceros largely resulted from a desire to have contract rights fulfilled, including the right to labor representation as per Article 17 of the contract.³¹⁶ If they could not join a union and strike with a labor organization, they would create their own wild strikes. These work stoppages were often quite effective in encouraging growers to do something to encourage them back to work. A bracero stated,

³¹⁴ Police forced them back to work, while others “escaped” back to Mexico. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 145.

³¹⁵ Interview with 12 Nationals in Tracy, 7 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP; Interview with 2 Nationals at the Rudy Avila Camp in Patterson, California, 10 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

³¹⁶ Mexican Labor Work Agreement/*Convenio de Trabajo para Trabajadores Mexicanos*, c. 1951, Box 19, Folder 2, EGP. The same clause existed in the Standard Work Contract, as amended after Public Law 78 had been instituted in July 1951, as it existed in the original agreement of 1942. See “Individual Work Agreement” of August 4, 1942, as amended April 26, 1943, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 171, Box 15, NARA.

Last week we all stopped work in the field. It was five days over and we had not received our wages. It happened that the rancher came on the field and he asked why so many men were not working. He was a man with leather boots and he got out of a big car. I said to him 'no money' and made some signs. So he said something to the contractor and we could see he was very mad. So the contractor went off in a truck and came back with some case and he paid us right there. Then we went back to work. We thought he was going to fire the contractor but it did not happen....³¹⁷

At the Benito Valdez Camp in Tracy several braceros admitted, "last week the picking got so bad we decided that we should take the risk of going back to Mexico so we asked for a raise to 13 cents a box. There were three crews of 100 men all together. Nobody worked for a few hours...."³¹⁸

Often braceros struck randomly and collectively on their own, without the help of a national labor organization, because they realized the futility of participating in organizational efforts with U.S. labor unions, when braceros "come and go like the wind." A bracero stated, "we cannot elect a representative from the men since he would be sent back right away.... we do not have meetings of any kind to be educated on our rights. We are too strange to each other and we are tired. Some days some gangs do not get to camp until 9pm. How can you have solidarity that way?" Another bracero mentioned, "we can't get organized in camp. Men come and go. Some leave after a few days because they can't take it. The contracts are short and we are all worried they will not be renewed." They stressed the impossibility of electing a representative: "It would not be possible to have an elected committee to represent the men. We know what would happen to them. The new ones are too ignorant and the others are afraid they will not be renewed. The contracts are so short." And, "if the contract is no good, as the contractor says, there is no use electing a committee. The consul does not come here to listen to the committee

³¹⁷ Interview with 8 "Nationals," Tracy-Julian Ramirez Camp, 14 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

³¹⁸ Interview with 1 bracero, 9 November 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

and it is too expensive to send a committee to Sacramento every time there is a problem with the contractor. The best thing is to go home. The longer we stay the more we will owe for the food.”³¹⁹ A bracero further stated, “I think most of our trouble is from the way they have the camps located. We are separated from everything. Some of the neighbors are Mexican and we could talk with them but they live in town, which is several miles away.” As a Bracero protest song decreed, “Before we were honorable men, now we have lost it all. With our passports [contracts] we think we are Americans. But we are called the uprooted ones.”³²⁰ Mobility as well as lack of mobility was the largest factor preventing braceros from organizing larger strikes.

Galarza Admonishes the Federal Government to Dust the Webs³²¹

In spite of their isolation, a few braceros were able to find brief representation through the California farm labor movement, when Ernesto Galarza entered the agricultural fields of the Central Valley in 1947. Through the figure of the bracero, Galarza tied civil rights to labor rights as “individual rights,” arguing that the federal government should intervene on behalf of the individual (the bracero) to guarantee their contract rights. Galarza’s views demonstrated that social justice politics rooted in a language of state protection, rights, and nation could contribute

³¹⁹ Interview with 3 braceros, Patterson Camp, 12 October 1955; Interview with 8 braceros, Camp Soledad, c. October 1955; Interview with 5 braceros at the Gondo Camp in Watsonville, California, 1 October 1955; Interview with 3 braceros, Juan Lucio Camp in Manteca, California, 14 October, 1955; Interview with 9 braceros, Joe Perez Camp, Terminous, California, 20 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP.

³²⁰ Interview with 3 braceros at the Benito Valdez Camp in Tracy, California, 9 November 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP; “*Corrido de los desarraigados/The Corrido of the Uprooted Ones*” in Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 165.

³²¹ In *Spiders in the House, Workers in the Fields*, Galarza refers to the contract as a “web” woven by committees of growers in congressional hearings and the congressmen that supported them, or “spiders in the house.” He stated, “the web, taken figuratively, was a mesh of decisions, legal actions, deployments, understandings and moves that were calculated to prevent unionization of the Corporation’s field and shed workers,” 69. He took this metaphor from the book by Bailey, “Congress At Work,” who, in observing a congressional committee at work, drew from it “an edifying picture of the cunning spider carefully weaving a web to trap an unwary fly.”

to recreating imperial processes that exclude, violently subjugate, and divide human beings. Interrogating Galarza's perspective and role in the labor movement here can help to reframe predominant conceptions about the Bracero Program, the border, citizenship, and race. Shortly after the U.S. and Mexican governments' implementation of the Bracero Program, Galarza had developed two visions for the bracero: one in which braceros were democratically included "as members of the national community" and able to organize collectively with U.S. labor unions, and one in which the federal government (and state power) extended rights to Mexican contract workers. The latter belief echoed that of the African American struggle for racial equality. As formerly mentioned, Galarza worked with A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and leader of the Double V for victory campaign of 1941, to demand the desegregation of the war industries, resulting in the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in June 1941.³²² Galarza suggested that the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) consider the desirability of including the study of the conditions of employment of Mexicans in California in its program before the Bracero Program had even been created. Mark Etheridge, Chairman of the FEPC, approved Galarza's suggestion.³²³ While an ineffective U.S. state organization, the FEPC signaled an early attempt to apply state power to alleviate racial inequalities in the United States. From the beginning, Galarza's mission to protect Mexican farmworkers was linked to a vision of civil rights, which implied the expansion of state power for individual rights.³²⁴

³²² Armando Ibarra and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Man of Fire: Selected Writings, Ernesto Galarza* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), xvii.

³²³ Memorandum for Dr. Rowe from Ernesto Galarza, 4 October 1941, Box 5, Folder 6, EGP.

³²⁴ By "individual rights," I am referring to the alleged liberty of each individual to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as stated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776). According to the Declaration, these supposedly applied to "all" human beings. Executive Order 8802, translated anti-discrimination ideals into federal law. However, this order was issued only

While Ernesto Galarza first formally organized braceros as part of his farm labor unionization campaign in the central valley from 1947 to 1952, his attempt to organize braceros started much earlier. As soon as Galarza realized that there was no attempt on behalf of the federal government to investigate bracero complaints or to file grievances, he made multiple reports to the War Manpower Commission (WMC), USES, Department of State, and other governmental organizations to highlight program abuses. He primarily sought the fulfillment of the labor contract and the freedom of braceros to join U.S. labor unions. On May 1, 1943, he wrote a letter to William Green, president of the AFL, complaining, "I know there is a rule against accepting union members who are not citizens of the United States. Given the extraordinary circumstances of the war, the AFL should be willing to invite its member unions to reconsider this manner for making it possible for them to join." Green responded that he agreed but made no attempt to include braceros. Galarza then looked to other venues outside of organized labor to secure collective solidarity between U.S. farm laborers and braceros. Above all, Galarza aimed to show that braceros' contract rights were essentially civil rights and that they mattered in the larger construction of civil rights in the 1940s. In other words, he saw the contract as an implicit statement of the protection of the civil rights of the bracero.³²⁵

Since Galarza could not convince William Green, President of the AFL to include braceros as union members, he decided to circumnavigate the AFL. In May 1944, he reached out to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a national organization advocating individual rights that often worked to combat racism and discrimination. He sent the ACLU a

reluctantly by Roosevelt and never actually resulted in the desegregation of the military at this time. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802, "Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry," 25 June 1941, RG 211, NARA.

³²⁵ Letter to William Green from Ernesto Galarza, 1 May 1943, Box 5 Folder 6, EGP; Galarza, *Strangers*, 15.

plan to create an “emergency national council,” the goal of which was to make “a systematic effort to organize these people into a national association through which they can lay the foundation for self developments as members of the national community...in the defense and expansion of an American way of life.”³²⁶ Unfortunately, the ACLU found his proposal lacking, asking him to “be specific about his objectives against economic and racial discrimination,” to make a statement about the specific “evils” he was tackling, and to “explain how his new movement” or organization would “fit in” with the “LULACs and the *Liga Obreras*.” Established in 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) sought to combat the discrimination faced by Mexican Americans in the United States, as a Latino/a counterpart to the NAACP in the Southwest. In 1935, the Spanish Speaking Labor League (*Liga Obrera*) was created in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado for miners in the area. Both organizations had a specific strategy and precise target community that Galarza did not have for his proposed national organization, according to the ACLU.³²⁷

Having failed at convincing the ACLU to back his cause, Galarza then turned to the U.S. Department of State in September 1944, informing officials of the multiple contract violations conducted by growers and the grievances of Mexican contract workers. Unwilling to help, Joseph McGurk, Acting Director of the Office of American Republic Affairs of the Department of State, responded that two years had hardly been enough time to give the Bracero Program a chance. McGurk stressed the “voluntary” nature of the contracts, stating, “people naturally complain but when I talked to returned nationals in Mexico, they all expressed satisfaction with their experience and wished to renew their contracts.” Galarza informed McGurk that while the

³²⁶ Ernesto Galarza, “Plan,” addressed to the ACLU, 31 May 1944, and letter from the ACLU to Galarza, 6 June 1944, Box 5, Folder 7, EGP; New York City Meeting Minutes, Box 5, Folder 9, EGP.

³²⁷ Ibid.

workers entered contracts voluntarily, they accepted employment because “they are in a terrible dilemma due to uncontrolled inflation in Mexico and inadequacy of wages....While legally they exercise free choice, the conditions in Mexico are an important element.” He realized that the supposedly “voluntary” nature of their contract was nullified by the fact that many were unemployed in Mexico and had no choice but to migrate. Yet McGurk found a simplistic response and solution for each and every issue Galarza found with the labor program. It was obvious from Galarza’s communication with McGurk that he could expect no change in the situation through the Department of State.³²⁸

In 1945, Galarza then explicitly tried to link the rights of braceros under the Bracero Program Agreement to the larger African American struggle for civil rights. He contacted private African American civil rights organizations, including the American Council on Race Relations and the Union for Democratic Action, claiming that “investigation and action must be taken to protect the reputation of the United States as a good neighbor and to protect American labor standards from the degrading effects of sweatshop wages and working conditions....”³²⁹ The American Council on Race Relations replied that it preferred to “restrict its resources to the pressing field of Negro-white relations,” and both organizations denied Galarza funding. As Chief of the Office of Labor of the Pan American Union at this time, Galarza then visited over 20 labor camps and conducted over 200 personal interviews with braceros in 1945. He published a booklet on behalf of the Pan American Union, written by Robert C. Jones, which revealed the racism, terrible living standards, and unbridled exploitation of the program, which he sent to the

³²⁸ Memo by Ernesto Galarza, 6 September 1944 and Report to Dr. Leo Rowe (President of the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C.) referring to a conversation with McGurk and MacLean of the Department of State with reference to his memo on conditions in camps for Mexican nationals, Box 5, Folder 7, EGP.

³²⁹ Letter from Edwin Embree of the American Council on Race Relations, 24 March 1945, Box 5, Folder 8, EGP.

press.³³⁰ After the war was over, Galarza wanted to make sure every last Mexican worker “had been repatriated,” with the best possible attitude toward the United States.³³¹ Since that never happened, he took more measures to ensure the protection of the workers under contract, believing that the federal government could effectively enforce contract stipulations.

In 1946, Galarza resigned from the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C., and became involved in the California farm labor movement.³³² He attended a farmworker convention in 1947, where he urged Hank Hasiwar and Bill Becker of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union (STFU) to organize Mexican workers. Sharing his democratic and anti-discriminatory outlook, the STFU placed Galarza as the Director of Research and Education for the STFU, now renamed the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) in California. This move was strategic, finally allowing Galarza to tackle the very problems he had helped to create in advocating the Bracero Program. Galarza sought to change the Bracero Program through federal policy reforms that would require growers to abide by the contract stipulations. If the contract could not be enforced—that is, if the Bracero’s civil rights could not be enforced—he would attempt to effectively organize braceros in the fields. When Galarza entered the fields, he found that any direct organizing of braceros had to be done in complete secrecy. He stated, “we

³³⁰ Robert C. Jones, *Braceros Mexicanos en Los Estado Unidos*, Division of Labor and Social Information, Pan American Union (1946). Also see a newspaper article by Sidney Wise that refers to this pamphlet. Sidney Wise, “Distinciones Raciales, Mala Vivienda y una Explotacion Desenfrenada de Los Braceros,” 3 August 1945, Re: Racism, Bad living standards, and unbridled exploitation--t he Pan American union reveals this ordeal in a new booklet,” EGP Box 24, Folder 10.

³³¹ Letter from Galarza, 10 September 1945, Box 5, Folder 9, EGP.

³³² Galarza resigned from the Pan American Union when he realized that the United States Department of State colluded with U.S. mining businesses in Bolivia to prevent tin workers from unionizing and obtaining higher wages. Richard Chabrán, “Activism and Intellectual Struggle in the Life of Ernesto Galarza, 1905-1984,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 7, Issue 2 (1985): 135-152. Available online at the Ernesto Galarza Applied Research Center, University of California, Riverside: <http://egarc.ucr.edu/about.html>.

couldn't get to them. I lost track of the number of times I was thrown out of the camp talking with braceros." He gave an example of how he tried to organize 300 braceros in one camp 10 miles west of Corcoran: "When I got to this camp I had to walk clear around the camp to find the gate in the barbed wire fence. I waited till evening and walked in, contacted some of the men and told them the strike was coming and please don't pick the cotton. That was about all the time I had until the camp director, the cop, came and told me to leave. Of course, I left." Galarza would also pick up braceros as they were walking from the fields to the camp, or from the camp to the town, offering them a ride in exchange for a few words regarding their experience. He stated, "the men were afraid to talk to you. If they were seen talking with you in town they were spotted and changed to either another part of the state or sent home to Mexico." Galarza found that if he went to the Department of Labor (DOL) to present a grievance on behalf of a contract worker, the DOL requested the name, employer, and the camp of his employer then immediately reported him to his employer, who then summarily transferred him to another camp or requested that he be repatriated.³³³

Nonetheless, Galarza made every attempt to include braceros in NFLU strikes. The first strike Galarza helped to initiate on behalf of farmworkers in California was the 30-month strike (1947-1950) against DiGiorgio Corporation, an agribusiness giant in the Central Valley that had the largest fruit packing plant in the nation and over 1,000 employees. The NFLU decided to focus on the Central Valley because it was one of the nation's top producers of labor-intensive crops and because it believed its majority white constituency would gain political empathy from

³³³ Interviews with Ernesto Galarza, *The Burning Light: Action and Organizing In the Mexican Community In California* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1982), 16; Galarza, *Strangers In Our Fields*, 72-73.

powerful whites in the region.³³⁴ While Galarza attempted to include over 120 braceros in the strike, those who joined him were threatened with deportation or expelled from the country. Furthermore, DiGiorgio employed new braceros as strikebreakers, a tactic that Galarza was unable to prevent.³³⁵ Galarza professed:

The state was literally flooded with braceros while we were on strike and before the strike and after the strike. So everywhere we went we had to contend with these workers.... from 1948-1959, I participated in probably 20 strikes and always that was the problem. And if there were not enough braceros in the area to satisfy the growers that had replacements, they would bring them in from Mexico. After the strike started, with permission from the Department of Labor, they had no trouble getting permits for braceros.³³⁶

According to Galarza, another “formidable card” played against the union was the employment of undocumented or “illegal” workers: “They do not speak English. They are completely ignorant of any legal obligations that the employer may have with respect to them. They cannot file claims of any kind because of their illegal status. They cannot invoke the protection of the Mexican consul. They are, in short, perfect strikebreakers.” Even though federal immigration officers raided DiGiorgio more than once, picking up “illegals” for deportation, the raids were, as Galarza stated, “not effective in eliminating their employment...they reappear at the ranch and are again hired after they are arrested.”³³⁷

³³⁴ DiGiorgio employed 1100 Anglos, 200 Mexican Americans, a smaller number of Filipino and Japanese, and about 130 braceros. Grubbs, 458; Dionicio N. Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement Before the UFW: Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, California* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011), 181.

³³⁵ One exception: Galarza sufficiently pressured the Mexican government through affiliates in Mexico to remove 150 braceros used as strikebreakers by DiGiorgio in 1947. “California Sends 150 Back to Mexico,” *New York Times*, 1947, Box 18, Folder 1, EGP.

³³⁶ Galarza, *Burning Light*, 16.

³³⁷ Ernesto Galarza, “Narrative from ‘Poverty in the Valley of Plenty,’” 14 May 1948, Box 35, Folder 3, EGP. Note: the INS had on multiple occasions accommodated growers by legalizing workers, in a process referred to as “drying out the wetbacks.” It was a simple process: the INS raided the agricultural fields, arrested undocumented workers, transported them to the border, and then to the DOL, where U.S. officials then promptly processed them as braceros and

DiGiorgio was so successful at using Mexican contract workers and undocumented laborers as strikebreakers that the strike failed after 30 months in 1950.³³⁸ Galarza became increasingly frustrated in his attempts to organize braceros, finding he was ambushed at each turn by either new bracero workers or by undocumented workers whom growers used to replace striking braceros just as they left the fields. It became difficult for Galarza to stress solidarity with braceros when his every attempt at solidarity obstructed the success of his organizing strategies. Instead of organizing with braceros, Galarza began to see braceros and undocumented workers as part of the problem U.S. agricultural workers faced.

On May 22, 1950, exactly eight years after his defense of the Mexican labor importation program before the Tolan Committee on May 22, 1942, Galarza proposed a new series of safeguards and laws before Congress, to change the Bracero Program. Galarza framed his arguments around equality and civil rights for all farm workers, emphasizing that not ensuring contract policies put braceros in direct competition with domestic workers, which threatened the individual rights of all workers. In his analysis inserted in the Congressional Record, Galarza argued: “it is becoming more difficult for domestic workers with families to get jobs in competition with imported contract labor...these labor recruiting agreements have been used to support a nation-wide attack on the wage scales of farm labor.” He turned the matter into a problem of national rights and a violation of the law on all sides, and defended U.S. citizenship: “[the agreements] have enabled the national government to surrender the constitutional rights of its citizens....” The State Department of Labor violated laws by contracting labor without a

transported them back to the very fields they had been arrested in. See Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 153.

³³⁸ Galarza’s battle against DiGiorgio did not end until 1958. For more on the DiGiorgio strike, see Deborah Cohen, *Braceros*, 145-160; Ernesto Galarza, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970).

public hearing and investigation by the federal government, he argued, by usurping congressional authority in legalizing the status of illegal entrants, and by acting in collusion with growers, as “agents for finance farmers.” Galarza proposed that the federal government consider developing a new series of safeguards or laws to change the Bracero Program, structuring his arguments around civil rights: “if foreign labor should be contracted, such labor should be contracted on the basis of equal conditions for all.”³³⁹

In late 1949 and early 1950, Galarza was seeking a new target and a new transnational strategy for the NFLU, this time focusing on a cluster of farms in the Imperial Valley.³⁴⁰ He made El Centro, California, the new home of the NFLU-AFL’s “Labor Temple.” By 1951, Galarza attempted a new strategy on behalf of the NFLU: instead of solely organizing braceros in the United States by having them strike with domestic workers, he sought to broaden transnational ties between Mexican and U.S. labor organizations, in an attempt to unionize braceros and guarantee the fulfillment of their labor contracts.³⁴¹ In February 1951, Galarza

³³⁹ House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, Special Investigating Subcommittee, Investigation of Labor-Management Relations, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, 601-616. See Extension of Remarks of Hon. John F. Shelley, May 22, 1950. John F. Shelley, a democrat and “friend of labor,” presented Galarza’s analysis, stating “Dr. Galarza’s program for reform of the procedures should be given serious consideration by every member of the House with a real interest in maintaining and improving living and working conditions. . . . recent Nationwide publicity in the press and magazines gives real evidence that we do now have real reason to feel shame.” Also available in Box 35, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁴⁰ Galarza also extended a union presence in Soledad and Salinas at this time. He created a nucleus of a local under the volunteer leadership of Sam Gallegos. See Letter from C.J. Haggerty, Secretary-Treasurer of the California State Federation of Labor to Galarza, 26 May 1950, Box 17, Folder 11, EGP; Also see letter to Hank Hasiwar of the NFLU, from A.J. Clark, Secretary of the Central Labor Union of Monterey County, AFL, 14 January 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁴¹ The underlying reason Galarza went to Mexico City was not simply to organize transnationally, but also because he was furious that U.S. government and agribusinessmen had secretly met in Mexico in January 1951 to avoid including organized labor, leading to Public Law 78, a unilateral measure to extend the Bracero Program. The government had excluded organized labor from any new negotiations of the imported labor program. As a letter to *Alianza*

went to Mexico City for two weeks to “try to do something about the contracting of Mexican nationals.”³⁴² On February 7, 1951, the NFLU signed a formal agreement for mutual assistance and cooperation with the *Alianza Nacional de Braceros*, an affiliate of the *Confederacion Proletaria Nacional/National Proletarian Confederation (CPN)*.³⁴³ On March 9, 1951, the NFLU concluded a similar agreement with the *Union de Trabajadores Agrícolas del Valle de Mexicali (UTAVM)*, an affiliate of the official Mexican labor confederation, the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM)* of Mexico. The basic point of their agreement was “the organization of contract workers into bona-fide trade unions for the purpose of the enforcement of contracts.”³⁴⁴ This was yet another strategy engendered by Galarza’s faith in the law; he believed that the contract, based as it was on individual choices, could be a means to ensure the individual rights of the worker.

In joining with Mexican labor unions and organizing braceros transnationally, Galarza was complying with the agenda of the Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, AFL-CIO, of which he was a member. Formed in 1949, the Joint U.S.-Mexico Trade Union Committee was a group of majority Democratic anti-communist U.S. labor organizations affiliated with the AFL-CIO that believed in using U.S. laws to combat the negative consequences of the Mexican labor importation program. As a field representative of the committee, it was Galarza’s job to unite U.S and Mexican unions, with his objectives a mirror of

leader Jose Hernandez Serrano from Galarza stated: “The unions of both countries need to be present when governments decide to ratify or change the contract.” Letter, 3 February 1950, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁴² Letter to A.J. Clark, head of local union number 284 in Soledad, Salinas, and Monterey, from Galarza, 15 February 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; Letter to Hank Hasiwar from A.J. Clark, 14 January 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁴³ Press Release from the NFLU-AFL, 13 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP. Alianza or the “National Alliance of Braceros” formed in 1943 in Fullerton, California.

³⁴⁴ NFLU Report, 9 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

the AFL-CIO's mission for the Bracero Program. In 1951, the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers or Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT) was established as a regional organization for the Latin American members of the Joint U.S.-Mexico Committee. Together, they resolved to "seek the full enjoyment of the right of Mexican braceros in the U.S. to organize and elect representatives" via Article 21 (later Article 17) of the U.S.-Mexico Labor Agreement. The ORIT decided that the CTM and other Mexican unions would prepare braceros prior to their journeys, telling them to get in contact with the NFLU when they arrived. Galarza's approach to organizing unions transnationally was supported by the U.S.-Mexico Joint Trade Union Committee, which resolved to "see the full enjoyment of the right of Mexican braceros in the United States to organize and elect a representative as their bargaining agent."³⁴⁵

Alianza or the "National Alliance of Braceros" and the NFLU together arranged a varied approach to organizing braceros, as noted in their mutual agreement of 1951.³⁴⁶ While *Alianza*'s most successful role was reporting abuses of the Bracero Program to the Mexican press, publicizing contract violations and worker exploitation by breaking censorship, the organization did much more than this. In November 1943, it began to orient braceros in Mexico before they left for the United States so as to "bring honor to our country." Their logo was "*Por el triunfo de las democracias*/for the triumph of the democracies." United formally with the NFLU in 1951, they agreed to make every attempt to unionize braceros. Together, members of the NFLU and *Alianza* visited bracero camps on Sundays to "take a tour" and inform braceros that the NFLU

³⁴⁵ "Resolution of the Conference on the Points of the Agenda," International Conference of the Trade Unions of Mexico and the United States Convened by the ORIT, Mexico, D.F., 14-16 December 1953, Box 21, Folder 10, EGP. Also see Cohen, *Braceros*, 164; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 161.

³⁴⁶ Letter from Galarza to "Jack" (Congressman John F. Shelley), 9 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6.

Labor Temple was open 10AM-3PM. They played Mexican music from a loud speaker at the Labor Temple to attract braceros, posting a sign outside featuring the name of the union in Spanish.³⁴⁷ In Mexico, *Alianza* worked with Galarza and the NFLU to get braceros in contact with local unions upon their arrival to the United States. According to their agreement, *Alianza* and the NFLU included braceros as dues-paying members, stopped braceros from working in the fields and staying in the camps in the event of a strike, encouraged members “not to skip contracts but to stay and fight for compliance with them,” appointed “one delegate undercover in each camp and two alternates,” and published a special bulletin for braceros, a union membership book, and a one-page instruction page for braceros who join. They also assigned a delegate to “contact the Mexican consul in Fresno and needle him on violations, to see how fast and how far the union can take over.”³⁴⁸

The primary resolution that *Alianza* made with the NFLU was to ensure that labor had a voice in all of the negotiations and administration of the international labor importation agreement with Mexico. Like Galarza, members of *Alianza* had their own vision of how the labor program ought to look, and thought that labor ought to be involved in every step of the process in the contracting of labor. At first, the aim of NFLU and *Alianza* was to become the grievance agency in support of the contract, providing the assistance to the national governments on both sides of the border to guarantee the “protection” of braceros under the law. To accomplish this, they heard complaints from braceros in Mexico, who presented them with violations of the work contract stipulations. *Alianza* would then contact the Mexican consuls of

³⁴⁷ Agreements between NFLU and *Alianza* on Braceros, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁴⁸ Letter to Galarza, from Local 284, Soledad, 26 May 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; Letter from José Hernández Serrano, President of *Alianza*, to Galarza, 8 June 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; See series of letters to and from Serrano and Galarza, 10 November 1943, 31 March 1950, 16 February 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

the region where the contract violation occurred. Unfortunately, the strategy was not very effective, as consuls maintained that braceros had to personally present their complaints to the consulate to explain them.³⁴⁹ They also tried to be present at meetings between the U.S. and Mexican states in the negotiation of the labor contract so that contract policy could be changed. If the contract did not effectively fulfill the individual rights of the worker, then they would attempt to change contract guarantees. Galarza did not want to end the Bracero Program; he wanted merely to *reform* it so that it fit the ideals of the U.S. and Mexican labor movements. The same went for Galarza's organizing efforts with the Mexican labor union, the *Union de Trabajadores Agricolas del Valle de Mexicali* (UTAVM).³⁵⁰

It was clear from their reform efforts that Ernesto Galarza, the NFLU, *Alianza*, and UTAVM had faith in the state, in international cooperation, and in the capacity of the contract to guarantee individual rights and equality. Throughout his life, Galarza viewed the government as a potentially positive force that could be pressured to advance democracy, "freedom," and the interests of working people. Yet this is precisely what allowed him to argue for the exclusion of undocumented workers from the farm labor movement and from the United States. In his report added to Congressional Record in May 1950, Galarza argued first that the U.S. Congress should amend immigration law to make illegal entry a felony. He then upheld that organized labor ought to have a say in all stages of the labor importation program. He stated, "the NFLU proposes a reconstruction of the entire approach to the recruitment and employment of foreign workers in the United States. The AFL should be represented at all levels: as part of the public

³⁴⁹ Letter from Consul Ricardo Castro Sainz, of the Secretary of Exterior Relations in Mexico, to José Hernández Serrano of *Alianza*, no date, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁵⁰ The agreement between NFLU and the UTAVM was very similar to their agreement with *Alianza*. Report, "Basic Points of the Agreement signed by the NFLU and the Union de Trabajadores Agricolas del Valle de Mexicali on March 2, 1951," 9 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

body that certifies the need for foreign workers...bona fide trade unions should be parties to the agreement....workers should be members of such unions with transferable membership for the duration of the contract....”³⁵¹ Galarza believed that if the AFL was to unionize farm workers successfully and to reap the benefits of the Bracero Program labor contract, it must not only work with the federal government to manage the labor program, it also had to pressure the federal government to prevent Mexican migrant workers from entering the United States without a contract.

Underlying each of the organizational strategies of the Mexican labor unions and the NFLU lay two common agendas: to prevent undocumented workers from crossing the border and to organize braceros to ensure the enforcement of the contract. As José Hernández Serrano of *Alianza* wrote to the AFL, the *Alianza de Braceros*: “is convinced that you can acquire a measure that will help us to prevent illegal immigration, if we mutually fight to achieve a recruitment of 30-40,000 braceros that are properly organized with a deep sense of their obligations.” To accomplish this objective, Galarza wanted organized labor (the AFL-CIO) to take the place of the U.S. Department of Labor to have authority over the recruitment and importation of labor. He believed that if labor could not have a say in international contract negotiations, then labor ought to have a say in contract compliance to ensure the fulfillment of contracts. With the UTAVM, he sought to “properly assure compliance” by preventing contractors on the Mexican side of the border from contracting workers “illegally.” Galarza believed that the only way to ensure contract fulfillment was to “eliminate” the “wetback

³⁵¹ Ibid.

problem.”³⁵² He realized that any attempt that the U.S. and Mexican unions made to strike with unionized braceros would be pointless if they were replaced with undocumented workers. Taking for granted the federal government’s capacity to enforce such distinctions, Galarza targeted undocumented workers as the core problem faced by the labor movement.

As a result, the NFLU collaborated with the UTAVM to control the flow of labor across the border, placing themselves as the police agents or border patrol officers of the labor programs. In other words, they formed their own sort of “border patrol.” Crossing over the U.S.-Mexico border regularly in March-April 1951, Hank Hasiwar and Galarza sought to “carry out a series of moves intended to put the racketeers [contractors] out with an arrest warrant and on the defensive.” Galarza saw labor contractors as the source of the problem of illegal migration: “midway between the corporate farm and the labor pools of illegals stands the private labor contractor. He is the Jekyll and Hyde character who operates as a private businessman and as a corporation employee simultaneously. He is the invisible, protected link between the employer and the illegal. He is also the mixer of the ‘mixed crew’ of braceros and wetbacks.”³⁵³ So successful was the NFLU and the UTAVM in preventing labor contractors from recruiting braceros and undocumented workers that the Mexican government decided to prosecute leading members of the UTAVM who had been involved in policing the border. Just as in the case of *Alianza*, the Mexican government sided on behalf of growers and the U.S. government, targeting specific leaders of the UTAVM by harassing, intimidating, and threatening their lives. For example, UTAVM leader Ignacio Marquez and his wife were arrested in Hermosillo, Mexico in

³⁵² Letter to H.L. Mitchell, President of the NFLU, from the *Alianza de Braceros*, 19 December 1949, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; Letters to Galarza from Hernandez, 19 December 1949 and 3 February 1950, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

³⁵³ Note: as of September 1950, there was a bracero recruitment center at Mexicali. See “Warren Is Asked to Aid Mex Labor Recruiting” *Sacramento Bee*, 19 September 1950, Box 42, Folder 10, EGP; Statement by Ernesto Galarza, c. 1951, Box 24, Folder 4, EGP.

March 1951 at the recruiting center for Mexican nationals and charged with conspiracy to organize Mexican farm workers in cooperation with the NFLU.³⁵⁴

Galarza and the NFLU's focus on "illegal" immigration had begun with the DiGiorgio strike in 1948, when DiGiorgio had used contractors to recruit undocumented Mexican workers directly from Mexico when braceros were unavailable. DiGiorgio used undocumented workers as a device to pit farm workers against farm workers, segregating contracted from non-contracted laborer and whites from Mexicans to ensure their easy divisibility. Galarza and the NFLU reinforced these divides.³⁵⁵ They blamed undocumented workers and braceros for causing their strike to fail, targeting undocumented workers as the crux of the problem. They began to believe that if they could just convince the government to enforce the bracero contracts and prevent "illegal" immigration, the use of so-called "wetback" labor would be eliminated and braceros would have to be included in the union, as part of the contract. Galarza and the NFLU continued to target the enforcement of the contract and the policing of the border in the Imperial Valley, with the Mexican labor unions following suit. It was precisely their faith in the power of the law to secure individual rights for citizen subjects that caused the NFLU, *Alianza*, and UTAVM to exclude non-citizens from the NFLU's transnational campaign, because the question always remained: individual rights, but for whom? Not only were they convinced of the power of the state to distinguish between who had documents and who did not, they believed that they could effectively assist the federal government to distinguish between *wetback* versus *bracero* and *legal* versus *illegal*.

³⁵⁴ Letter from H.L. Mitchell to George Sundquist of the ACLU in New York, 5 April 1951, EGP.

³⁵⁵ Cohen maintains that a farmworker class struggle that transcended race and nation was not to be because of growers' discursive and material control over agricultural labor. She states, "Farmworkers and activists alike largely operated within the terms of debate that growers set." Cohen, *Braceros*, 145-146.

Instead of defending Mexican labor as equal, Galarza and other labor leaders placed labor on a hierarchy in which domestic labor rights had to be protected first, and, in fact, *had to be protected* from foreigners who threatened domestic working standards, even as it promised said foreigners equality and protection through their management, control, expulsion, or exclusion. This actually fit with the anti-discriminatory motto of the NFLU: “Don’t be fooled by DiGiorgio falsehoods! These strikers are trying to raise wages and better working conditions for ALL farm workers regardless of race, creed, or color,” and with the clause of the Mexican labor contracts, which specified that employers would not discriminate with regards to “race, color, creed, religion, or national origin.”³⁵⁶ Hank Hasiwar, director of the NFLU maintained, “The union wants resident farm workers to go on the job first and get permanent employment rather than the contract nationals from Mexico. It demands that the farmers not hire illegal workers. The union insists that the Mexican nationals should have the right to union representation and enjoy equal standards with American workers. The union will continue to fight for control of the flow of imported labor so as to protect American standards for all workers.”³⁵⁷ By simultaneously including braceros as equal to U.S. citizens and marking them as the source of inequality for U.S. citizens, this contradictory language demonstrated how a discourse of equality and protection could be used to exclude and racialize an entire group of people as a foreign threat to “American” standards of labor.

This threat found a name in the construction of the racialized figure of the “wetback,” making race essential to labor’s civil rights project. In the 1920s and 1930s, the term

³⁵⁶ Galarza tried to reach Spanish-speaking workers at DiGiorgio with this message, but found them “hopelessly divided among Mexican Americans, illegal immigrants, and legal ones.” Ernesto Galarza, “Poverty in the Valley of Plenty: A Report on the DiGiorgio Strike,” 1 May 1948, 3, 6-8.

³⁵⁷ Hank Hasiwar, “Darkness in the Valley of Plenty,” *The American Federationist* (June 1951), Box 43, Folder 10, EGP.

wetback began to appear only occasionally in newspapers, but rose to prominence in the 1940s in connection with the Bracero Program when the numbers of undocumented migrants rose. *Wetback* became a commonly used racial slur to refer to any Mexican, casting them as criminals unlawfully in the United States, implicitly evoking an us-versus-them, foreign versus domestic, imaginary: *they* are breaking *our* laws.³⁵⁸ The term gained prominence because of a particular political climate in which any foreigner was suspect. Not only had the Communist red scare sensitized U.S. officials to the political dangers of immigration, the border patrol had reinvented immigration control as a site of crime control, targeting Mexicans. This culture of fear, in combination with a policy lobbied by labor unions, culminated in Operation Wetback (1954). The U.S. Border Patrol was not alone in reinventing immigration control as a site of crime control targeting Mexicans.

This was demonstrated by a strike in which Galarza led over 5,000 farm workers in El Centro against Imperial Valley growers, from May 24 to June 25, 1951. The strike was against “wetback labor conditions imposed upon American workers” by the Imperial Valley Farmers Association, representing 489 of the largest growers in the U.S. Growers and local police responded with a communist smear of the organization and with violence. On May 30, 1951, 16 union organizers were arrested for obstructing traffic in Calexico to prevent trucks carrying undocumented workers from entering the United States, and some spent nearly 30 days in jail. According to a NFLU report, entitled “Wetback Strike: A Report on the Strike of Farm Workers in the imperial Valley of California,” the NFLU was successful at reducing the number of

³⁵⁸ Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!*, 169; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 58-6; Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2014), 112-114; Alexandra Filindra, “The Emergence of the ‘Temporary Mexican’: American Agriculture, the U.S. Congress and the 1920 Hearings on the ‘Temporary Admissions of Illiterate Mexicans,’” *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 3: 85-102.

“wetbacks” in the area from 5,000 to 2,000 by posting picket lines along the border and forcing truckloads of workers to turn around and go back to Mexico.³⁵⁹ In spite of this perceived success, 5,000 Mexican contract workers were used as strikebreakers, making them a “developing threat for the entire labor movement.” Galarza noted that Mexican contract workers were not unlike illegal workers, as “a docile, tractable manpower whose rights under the agreement are but dimly enforced by the U.S. agencies or the Mexican officials charged with their supervision.”³⁶⁰ Galarza had initially attempted to unionize braceros, to reform the contract, and to establish a compliance mechanism for the contract as a strategy to achieve the equality of braceros with domestic workers, but his lack of success in achieving any meaningful change led him to instead blame braceros.

While Galarza, the NFLU, the AFL, and Joint-U.S. Mexican organizations tried to organize braceros and domestic workers, making a worthwhile attempt to organize with Mexican unions transnationally, they were limited by their focus on the so-called “strangers in our fields.”³⁶¹ Since the federal government had not effectively ensured contract fulfillment, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Thinking that the enforcement of the Bracero Program and the policing of the border by members of the labor movement could be effective in ending the use of undocumented labor, U.S. and Mexican labor essentially formed their own quasi-border patrol. Dividing workers along a domestic and foreign divide split the labor movement around racial and nationalistic lines, obviating any effective anti-imperial,

³⁵⁹ NFLU Report, “Wetback Strike: A Report on the Strike of Farm Workers in the Imperial Valley of California,” Box 45, Folder 3, EGP. In one case, a truck load of braceros hit union member William Swearingen, who sought to stop it before it crossed the border; in another, a picket line in Calexico of 13 American women barred the way of “trucks loaded with wetbacks.” News Release, 31 May 1951, Box 45, Folder 1, EGP.

³⁶⁰ Ernesto Galarza, “Poverty in the Valley of Plenty,” 14 May 1948, Box 35, Folder 3, EGP.

³⁶¹ A reference to Galarza’s book, *Strangers in Our Fields* (1956). Mae Ngai makes this connection in *Impossible Subjects*, 163.

transnational, inclusive, or collective critique of the labor importation programs. This became apparent as the NFLU continued its farm labor unionization campaign in the Imperial Valley. As in the case of the strike against DiGiorgio, braceros had their hands tied; they could not express solidarity with local farmworkers by joining strikes or refusing to cross picket lines because they would risk being deported. Because they were denied these labor rights, domestic farm workers saw them only as foreign competitors and the cause of lower wages, just as they perceived “wetbacks,” not as part of the same farm worker class.³⁶²

Ironically, the federal government was never quite as invested in organized labor as organized labor was in the federal government. In January 1951, the U.S. Department of Labor and a group of growers met secretly with the Mexican government under President Miguel Alemán to negotiate and administer an agreement to extend the Bracero Program. This meeting culminated in the signing of Public Law 78 in July 1951. Galarza and chairman of the U.S. Section of the United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, Frank Noakes, were kept out of the negotiations. When he discovered that the meetings would take place, Galarza went to Mexico City and joined with *Alianza* in a publicly held meeting to binationally discuss the labor program extension with the Mexican and American flags side by side. They spoke before Mexican workers to explain the position of organized labor in the United States on the Bracero Program. The Mexican government reacted with an assault on *Alianza*, intending to prosecute the executive board of the union. State police from the Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE)/ Secretary of Foreign Relations arrested several Mexican unionists by order of the committee negotiating the new international agreement. The police would only release them if

³⁶² Cohen, *Braceros*, 165-166.

they agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled with Galarza and Noakes.³⁶³ The Mexican government then posted an attack on *Alianza* on the front page of Mexico City's newspaper, *El Tiempo*. It also prepared legal action, filing criminal charges against officials of the Alianza and attempting to make it a crime for Mexican workers to cooperate with the AFL in the struggle to "maintain and raise living standards." Galarza contacted friends of the U.S. labor movement in great distress, taking personal responsibility: "the reason for this threat on our friends is that the *Alianza* executive board stood by me 100% when I was in Mexico City representing the AFL in the negotiations for nationals.... Stress my point that the Mexican Government is making a drastic move against our friends in complete agreement with the policy of the Department of State." While the U.S. government's immediate target was *Alianza*, the Mexican government soon moved on to the Mexicali union (UTAVM) as well.³⁶⁴

In an August 1953 report entitled "The Use of Mexican Contract Nationals and Its Effects on the Employment of Domestic Agricultural Workers in the Imperial Valley of California," the NFLU observed that the objective of the Bracero Program under Public Law 78 had been to "prevent the displacement of domestic workers by foreign labor" and to "protect domestic standards of employment." It was also designed "to guarantee that the domestic workers shall constitute the basic labor force and the Mexican nationals a supplementary one." Claiming implicitly that its own labor rights and standards were much more important than and superior to Mexican standards, the NFLU aimed to protect both domestic workers and Mexicans by

³⁶³ Letter to The President, From: The Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees, 5 July 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; Dionicio Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement before the UFW Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 220.

³⁶⁴ Valdés, *Organized Agriculture*, 220; Letter to Serafino from Ernesto Galarza, "Re: Article on Page One of *Tiempo* Magazine in Mexico City on February 23, 1951," 8 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; Report, "The Agreement with the *Union de Trabajadores Agricolas del Valle de Mexicali* of March 2, 1951," 9 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP; NFLU Press Release, 14 March 1951, Box 19, Folder 6, EGP.

preventing their exploitation through the continuation of the Bracero Program agreement. Their problem with the labor program was not so much the program violations by growers and the federal authorities, but that braceros were taking jobs from its constituents. Because of its confidence in U.S. law, the NFLU again framed its arguments around a hostile anti-immigrant rhetoric that erased the need to provide any basic civil rights to Mexican workers that Galarza thought should have been accorded to them by the contract. The NFLU concluded that because hiring Mexican contract nationals had negatively affected American “work opportunities, working conditions, wages, and income,” the NFLU should again have its own representatives take part in the negotiation of migrant labor agreements, an aspiration that was ironically forever denied them by federal authorities.³⁶⁵

Whose Civil Rights? From the Perspective of U.S. Labor

The AFL mirrored Galarza’s and the NFLU’s unwavering faith in the nation-state’s fulfillment of individual rights as the universal answer to inequality. Since civil rights were associated with equality of treatment by law, unionists stressed the “rights” of individuals to receive equal treatment as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and federal laws. As noted formerly, A. Philip Randolph’s Double V for victory campaign in 1941 had motivated many people of color to turn to the CIO unions to fight against discrimination and expand job opportunities in the fight for racial equality.³⁶⁶ Through their actions, “civil rights” came to signify appeals to federal state authority and a confidence in the state to intervene on behalf of individual rights. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman created the Committee on Civil Rights by Executive Order, and instructed the committee to investigate the status of civil rights in the

³⁶⁵ NFLU-AFL, “The Use of Mexican Contract National and Its Effects on the Employment of Domestic Agricultural Workers in the Imperial Valley of California,” August 1953, Box 43, Folder 4, EGP.

³⁶⁶ Zaragosa Vargas, *Civil Rights are Labor Rights*, 12-13.

United States. This committee prepared a report titled “To Secure These Rights” that explained the official perception of civil rights succinctly. The report maintained that freedom and equality were linked as part of a timeless American heritage that is the “American way.” It upheld that “the central theme in our American heritage is the importance of the individual person...[as well as] a basic moral principle: all men are created equal as well as free.” However, “it is government which must referee the clashes which arise among the freedoms of citizens and protect each citizen in the enjoyment of freedom to which he is entitled.” Furthermore, “there is no essential conflict between freedom and government.”³⁶⁷ While Truman’s commission resembled Roosevelt’s race relations strategy six years earlier by appointing a committee (the FEPC) rather than taking direct action, it also officially declared the federal government the guardian of all U.S. civil rights.

In addition to his Committee on Civil Rights, President Truman also formed a President’s Commission on Migratory Labor five years later (1951), during Galarza’s organizing efforts in the California farm fields. Truman created the President’s Commission on Migratory Labor to check “the extent of illegal entrance of foreign workers into the United States, and the way in which Government authority may be strengthened to eliminate illegal migration.” Before this commission, Truman argued, “the importation of Mexican nationals should not be used to the disadvantage of domestic farm workers who are attempting through their own efforts, to raise their standards to equal that of workers in other industries.”³⁶⁸ Following that line, the AFL’s mission was not to include foreign contract workers as equals or to create equality between foreign and domestic labor, but to ensure the equality of domestic agricultural labor with

³⁶⁷ President’s Commission on Civil Rights, “To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights,” (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947).

³⁶⁸ See Maurice J. Tobin, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor, “The Recommendations of the President’s Commission on Migratory Labor,” April 1952.

domestic industrial labor. Walter Mason, legal representative of the AFL and CIO, stated: “American citizens employed as agricultural migrants suffer degrading and un-American conditions of work and life. The wages that are paid and conditions of labor remain below any acceptable concept of an American standard. The agricultural worker is deprived of the protection of most federal and state laws written to elevate the economic and social standards of other citizens.”³⁶⁹ The AFL differed from Galarza in that civil rights became not about federal intervention towards racial equality, but rather about federal intervention towards class equality among domestic workers, as well as an entrenchment of the foreign/domestic divide. Organized labor embraced this official conceptualization of civil rights without considering a perception of rights beyond outside of the nation-state.

According to the AFL, undocumented Mexican workers and braceros were essentially causing U.S. workers to lose their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In order to protect American jobs and standards of employment, and to prevent Americans from competing with braceros for jobs, the AFL believed that legislation should be written to protect the rights of the bracero, according to the contract, which would promote equality and individual rights. In a statement presented before Congress by Andrew C. McLellan, consultant of the Texas State Federation of Labor and co-author of the report, “What Price Wetbacks?:” “in order to provide a degree of equality for the American workers who must compete with braceros, we urge your committee to write legislation to secure a prevailing wage rate, to ensure American workers are employed first....”³⁷⁰ After all, that American workers would be employed first was a stipulation

³⁶⁹ Statement by Walter Mason on the proposal to extend the Mexican contract labor program, 12 June 1953, Box 19, Folder 9, EGP.

³⁷⁰ Statement of Andrew C. McLellan before the Subcommittee on Equipment, Supplies, and Manpower of the House Committee on Agriculture on HR 3822, 21 March 1955, Box 19, Folder

written into the Bracero Agreement. In order for the federal government to provide “a degree of equality” for American workers and protect their individual rights, the AFL believed that government leaders had to write legislation that would elevate wages to an “American” standard, as opposed to a “Mexican” standard, to secure and protect jobs for domestic workers, as per the contract. Like Galarza, the AFL framed its arguments about organized farm labor as an issue of equality and civil rights, but civil rights for whom?

Not surprisingly, leaders of the national AFL felt the same as Galarza, the NFLU, and the Mexican labor unions about the control of the influx of labor across the border into the United States. They believed that the Mexican border had to be policed, if not by a state-operated border patrol, then by the union itself. For example, the southern regional AFL made their own visit to Mexico in June 1951 to meet with Mexican labor organizations and to “launch them with our ideas of the control of the “wetback problem.” They maintained, “Our findings show that the Mexican Labor Movement is entirely in agreement with our thinking...the Mexican unions do not want ‘wetbacks’ in this country at all.” They argued for facilities for U.S. and Mexican labor organizations to “handle the bracero situation...without interference from governments of either country.” They specified: “the organization resolves that facilities be established along the international border both by the Mexican labor organizations and the American labor organizations, to properly assure compliance with the terms of any agreement that may be reached.”³⁷¹ Galarza’s organizing strategies with regards to braceros and undocumented labor in the Imperial Valley made perfect sense under such a resolution.

6, EGP. This publication was commissioned by the American G.I. Forum of Texas (a Mexican American organization) in 1954.

³⁷¹ J.L. Rhodes, Southern Regional Director of the AFL, “Special Report on Visitation to Mexico,” 9 August 1951, Box 19, Folder 4, EGP.

The AFL and the NFLU shared the same enemy with regards to inequality, as reflected in the title of an article in *The Teamster* magazine: “The Wetback Menace.” According to U.S. labor, the “wetback menace” was a threat to national security, a weapon leveled at American wage and working standards by large employers of cheap labor in the South and Southwest.” So rooted was labor’s rhetoric in the ideology of the “yellow peril” fomented by a former generation of labor advocates, that it might as well have called the “wetback menace” or the “brown peril.” Organized labor viewed illegal immigration as an unmitigated evil, a flooding of the domestic labor market with cheap labor. At times, unions conflated illegal and contract labor, believing employers used both to keep wages down and unions out. They argued that both were forms of unfree labor, which was essentially un-American labor, echoing an earlier generation of labor activists (see Chapter Three). The bracero was a “legal slave,” a “rented slave.”³⁷²

Labor’s opposition to Mexican undocumented labor was reflected by politically conservative elements, including Democratic U.S. Senator Patrick McCarran, most notable for his fervent anticommunist national security enactments. McCarran stated,

I believe that this nation is the last hope of Western civilization and if this oasis of the world shall be overrun, perverted, contaminated or destroyed, then the last flickering light of humanity will be extinguished. I take no issue with those who would praise the contributions which have been made to our society by people of many races, of varied creeds and colors.... Today, as never before, untold millions are storming our gates for admission and those gates are cracking under the strain.³⁷³

The McCarran-Walter Act, passed by Congress in 1952, had reclassified unskilled immigrants as basically inadmissible to the United States, making guestworker programs a permanent feature of immigration policy. This act changed the ninth proviso of the Immigration Act of 1917 to allow for the admission of “temporary” imported contract workers. The act also prohibited citizens’

³⁷² “Wetback Menace,” *The Teamster* (March 1954), Box 50, Folder 8, EGP; Valdés, *Organized Agriculture*, 160.

³⁷³ Pat(rick) McCarran, “The Background of the McCarran-Walter Act” (*Congressional Record*, March 2, 1953), 1518.

arrest of unauthorized immigrants, a measure aimed at members of the NFLU, who, as demonstrated, had been making citizens' arrests of undocumented workers at the border in 1951.³⁷⁴ Alongside McCarran, political liberals of the NFLU arrested undocumented workers under a creed of anti-discrimination "regardless of creed, color, religion, or national origin," just as McCarran supported "contributions which have been made to our society by people of many races, of varied creeds and colors," while at the same time excluding non-white foreigners from "storming our gates" except under temporary contract. Undoubtedly, the communist red scare during the Cold War fueled the juxtaposition of racial liberalism and immigration restrictionism. The racialized assumption that the Mexican border was "virtually an open door for subversives" was definitely a common theme affirmed by political officials and the press.³⁷⁵ But it was also indicative of a larger vision of racial liberalism and civil rights, tenets that ultimately fueled, inspired, and even required anti-immigrant hostility.

After all, the NFLU and AFL could not have made an argument for the "individual rights" of the farm worker without specifying who should and should not have access to those rights. The dialectic of "rights" and immigration made it such that the "illegal" (outside of the nation) became the necessary condition to assert one's civil rights. Without blaming undocumented migrants for forestalling agricultural workers' equality with U.S. workers in

³⁷⁴ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California, 1942-1960* (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1964), 62. As Galarza admits, "citizens arrests had been used effectively in the Imperial Valley by members of the National Farm Labor Union in 1951." Also see Cindy Hahamovitch, "Keeping the Unskilled Out: Why Hart-Celler Didn't Matter to Workers," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class Histories of the Americas* 12, no. 3 (2015), 25.

³⁷⁵ See newspaper clippings, Box 50, Folder 8, EGP. Titles included "Governor Warren indicates that subversives are coming through the Mexico-U.S. Border Like a Sieve," 21 December 1951; "Communists are entering the U.S. Under the Guise of Farmworkers," *The Daily News*, 19 February 1951. In 1954, Benjamin Habberton, acting INS commissioner, warned that more than 100 communists crossed the border daily. See "Commies Cross Border Patrol Daily, Officers Warn," *El Paso Herald-Post*, c. 1954; "The Wetback Menace," *The Teamster* (March 1954).

industry, U.S. labor's claim to rights would have no substance. More than contending that the language of civil rights elaborated by labor leaders excluded (im)migrants necessarily because it was framed by nation, I am suggesting that excluding immigrants provided the necessary condition for a language of civil rights to flourish and triumph. Labor leaders framed their battles against undocumented Mexican migrants—not just because of the delimiting politics of Cold War anti-communism—but also because their arguments were based in the language of individual rights and contract. Historian Penny Von Eschen has shown how Cold War McCarthyism forced civil rights leaders to carefully demarcate their critiques within the contours of American democracy, disallowing an anti-colonial critique of racial oppression during the Cold War.³⁷⁶ While it is true that anti-communism limited the critiques of civil rights activists at this time, the architecture of “rights” manifested by labor and civil rights leaders also limited their critique. The crux of the contradiction between protection and racial exclusion was labor and civil rights advocates' rights-based language: in order to maintain their claim to rights and to assert their rights as U.S. citizens, labor advocates had to define who could and could not have access to those rights.

In the end, neither the United States nor Mexican efforts to unionize bore fruit organizationally in the 1950s.³⁷⁷ When Galarza was interviewed years later in the 1980s, he did not view the 1950s outlook of the union as exclusionary or limiting:

The strategy of our union was based upon bringing about the termination of the Bracero Program, and then to bring about legislation concerning wetbacks...our view was not to exclude wetbacks. Our view was that the so called wetback is a product of the political

³⁷⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11; Penny VonEschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Valdés, *Organized Agriculture*, 238.

³⁷⁷ According to Valdés, neither country's labor federation put meaningful financial or political resources into it. Valdés, *Organized Agriculture*, 163; Cohen, *Braceros*, 141.

and social conditions of Mexico. ...[to] zero in not on the wetback as a person, but on the Mexican government and its policy in Mexico that created such terrible poverty conditions that the wetback was a natural product of this burgeoning Mexican capitalism. That was our pitch.³⁷⁸

In fact, Galarza did not want to terminate the Bracero Program in 1943 or a decade later in the fields of the Imperial Valley in 1952, but wanted to ensure program compliance among California's corporate growers so as to weaken their exploitative grip on farm workers.

Galarza's strategy, and the AFL-CIO's strategy, was to attempt to give the labor unions the authority to advise the U.S. and Mexican governments on the nature and shape of the international agreement. With their strong belief in individual rights, they wanted to negotiate and enforce the contract agreement, not to end it. Yet Galarza's revisionism hints at a lack of awareness that his actions and ideology, as well as the actions and ideologies of both conservatives and liberals alike, had resulted in the exclusion of an entire group of people from the U.S. civil rights and labor movements.

Exclusion was not the only possible outcome in the debates over braceros and "rights" in the 1950s. Letters sent to President Truman or to Mexican consuls were nearly always signed by multiple braceros at a single camp, indicating a collective identity that transcended labor's state-enforced individual rights. As previously noted, braceros also acted collectively to protest labor conditions: "Fourteen of us asked that the Association representative come to the camp," a group of braceros noted. "We could not get him here so we decided to walk to Salinas...." Mexican migrant workers discussed among each other the best options to respond to exploitation and program abuses, questioning what rights they had that could be taken advantage of. For example, small groups of braceros met in their camps to create a form of mutual aid for each other, amassing funds to pay for medicine for those who were ill, unable to work, and not

³⁷⁸ Galarza, *Burning Light*, 16.

earning enough money to pay for medicine on their own. They also raised money for bus tickets for one or two braceros to travel to the nearest Mexican consul and seek aid, a first step in following grievance procedure according to their contracts.³⁷⁹ Braceros' alternative vision of rights stressed collectivity and mutual aid, indicating that there were other possibilities beyond framing civil rights as individual rights. It is clear by the fact that Mexican migrant workers sought the intervention of the Mexican consul that they saw the U.S. and Mexican states as a form of hope and protection that occasionally did afford them real practical benefits. Yet they soon realized that turning to the state rarely benefited them and became frustrated by the whole experience of being a bracero. Braceros frequently spurned the contract and chose to work "illegally." In doing so, they critiqued and surpassed the nation-state. Whereas braceros realized that the federal government was there to protect them, they also recognized that it was responsible for unmitigated violence towards them—an irony that Galarza and the AFL were unable to see.

There were also Mexican advocates within the United States that framed an alternative vision of rights for braceros that was inclusive rather than exclusive. Dolores Huerta suggested, "We should let these people come in as residents and be citizens instead of having a captive labor supply." There were also radical groups that organized across the border in a way that Galarza and the AFL-associated labor organizations could not imagine. The American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (ACPFB), for example, linked the rights of Mexican "aliens" with the civil rights of Mexican Americans. They argued in a 1959 petition that "the difficulties faced by the bracero reflect the problems faced by the average Mexican

³⁷⁹ Letter to Señor Presidente Harry Truman, from multiple braceros, 15 May 1945, Box 17, Folder 9, EGP; Interview with 8 nationals, Camp Soledad, 1 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, EGP; Field notes, *Strangers in Our Fields*, 16 October 1955, Box 3, Folder 1, EGP.

American.” They refused to recognize any distinction between citizen and alien, instead highlighting their shared state of insecurity resulting from discrimination, segregation, and deportation. By the late 1950s, many Mexican Americans began to realize the vital constitutional, legal, and moral stakes they held with regards to the immigration question, noting that all Mexicans had to fear the state or “Los Federales,” regardless of citizenship status. Being aware of the racist dimensions of immigration policy encouraged them to develop a broader sense of community solidarity with non-citizens, increasingly holding their government responsible rather than holding immigrants responsible. Involved in organizations like the ACPFB, many Mexican Americans created a radical new basis for political organization and mobilization that not only eclipsed but deprecated the federal government for its role in maintaining a system of racist exclusion. However, most Mexican American organizations, including LULAC and the G.I. Forum, continued to proudly proclaim their commitment to American ideals and values, as well as their support of strict border control and the restriction of future immigration from Mexico.³⁸⁰

So influential was this mainstream discourse that it culminated in “Operation Wetback” in 1954. It also fed into racial arrogance and Cold War politics that attack undocumented workers as a potential security risk.³⁸¹ Yet racial arrogance and cold war politics alone do not explain such a grandiose expulsion of people from the promises of “nation.” Civil rights had become so entrenched with “nation” under the tutelage of liberals and labor advocates that an

³⁸⁰ Hearing of the Senate Fact Finding Committee on Labor and Welfare, California State Legislature, held in Sacramento, California, 15 June 1960. This was a special public hearing called to give testimony regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of federal and state laws and regulations relative to the harvesting of crops. David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigration, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 174-176.

³⁸¹ Valdés, *Organized Agriculture*, 238.

extension of “rights” to anyone outside of the nation could not be considered during the civil rights movement. The absconding of those rights from non-citizens was the foundation required to make the argument that U.S. citizens, regardless of race, should have those rights and that those rights should be protected. For most liberals and conservatives, racial segregation and illegal immigration were separate issues, blinding them from seeing the problems of exclusion, violence, and racial exploitation that the Bracero Program had generated as a question of national civil rights and a domestic concern. The separation between civil rights and immigration, shaped in the context of anti-communism, influenced the civil rights movement, lending it a nationalist perspective that would restrict the ability of many civil rights leaders to include an anti-colonial and transnational critique in their struggles.

It is therefore unsurprising that Attorney General Herbert Brownell implemented “Operation Wetback” (May 1954) in the same month that he gave his opinion that racial segregation was unconstitutional in public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education* (May 1954). In the latter case, the Supreme Court intended to “remove legal distinctions among all persons born or naturalized in the United States” because education is “the very foundation of good citizenship.” The case announced that racial segregation in public education is “a denial of the equal protection of the laws.”³⁸² If *Brown v. Board* was an affirmation of the federal government’s power to protect individual rights, so was Operation Wetback. As Brownell stated, the United States was “faced with a breakdown in law enforcement on a very large scale.” He focused on the criminality of illegal border crossing, maintaining that the deportation policy and the exclusion of Mexican immigrants was a necessity in order to protect the rights of U.S. citizens by law. Thus, Operation Wetback and *Brown v. Board of Education* were not

³⁸² U.S. Supreme Court Opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 17 May 1954.

contradictory governmental projects, but, rather, reinforced one another as two sides of the same coin.

The separation of “civil rights” from immigration was so powerful that it catalyzed an entire new generation of guestworker labor importations after “Operation Wetback” and effectively but temporarily curbed the “illegal” importation of Mexican labor. This time, growers looked to the British West Indies, the Philippines, and Japan as sources of labor, developing new programs that were not as mired in bureaucracy as the Bracero Program had become. Because Operation Wetback had successfully reduced the number of undocumented workers in the United States, growers looked to new sources of labor that would be just as exploitable. Based on the McCarran Walter Act, growers could legally look to create new “guestworker” programs without the auspices of wartime necessity, and without the need for formal bilateral agreements with sending countries. Also, importing these workers freed the U.S. government and growers from paying for transportation, as round-trip transportation costs would be pushed back onto the workers. After the signing of Public Law 78 of 1951, which made the Bracero Program an institutionalized feature of U.S. agriculture, the number of braceros increased two-fold. In 1951, there were 121,600 braceros in the United States September. In 1960, there were 234,171 in the same month. Meanwhile, the labor importation programs with the British West Indies retained a steady supply of about 12,000 each year (which was the average number of workers in the fields per month). This meant that while in 1951, Caribbean workers account for about ten percent of the total number of imported labor, by 1959, they account for only five percent of the workers. In 1956, the United States began to import Japanese workers in increasing numbers, from 390 in 1956, 990 in 1957, 1,200 in 1958, 1,560 in 1959, to 1,830 in

1960. A small number of Filipinos were brought in starting in 1957, with about 30 employed at any given month in California.³⁸³

The benefit of these new Japanese and Filipino labor importation programs for growers was that when these workers were dissatisfied or mistreated, they had no means to exercise their “freedom” by abandoning their contracts and going home. It also signaled a return to Japanese and Filipino labor, labor that growers had historically sought out to work in the agricultural fields of California since the 1890s. As noted in Chapter Two, the state, in collusion with growers, had continuously turned Asian migrants into a permanent force of cheap and temporary labor since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Japanese labor importation program received the same response that the Bracero Program had received from organized labor. As the California State Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO maintained before Congress: “Our American position requires no explanation. We are bound to the Japanese worker by common cause and common humanity....” Again, labor unions argued for the protection of “free” American labor from “unfree” foreign labor by standing against the exploitation and discrimination of foreign workers, “regardless of race, color, creed or national origin.”³⁸⁴

Galarza argued that the recruitment of these new foreign workers was “a danger to organized labor.” From his point of view, the Mexican labor importation program was

³⁸³ Ernesto Galarza, Statement before the Special House Judiciary, Subcommittee on Japanese Labor Program in California, on behalf of the NAWU, AFL-CIO, c. 1957, Box 17, Folder 6, EGP. Annual Peak Employment of Foreign Nationals Employed in Temporary Agricultural Jobs in the United States, 1951-1960, Records of the War Manpower Commission, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 25, Box 2, NARA.

³⁸⁴ California State Federation of Labor, Statement on the Importation of Japanese Farm Workers, “Asian Contract Laborers, 1950-1961,” Submitted to the House of Representatives on 23 April 1957, Box 17, Folder 6, EGP. Also see Statement of Andrew J. Biemiller, Department of Legislation, AFL-CIO, before the special Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives on the importation of Japanese farm workers, 16 May 1957, Box 19, Folder 9, EGP. Biemiller stated, “The existing Japanese farm labor importation program is a despicable form of colonial wage slavery. No program is more Un-American.”

preferable because it at least had “some semblance of legal and administrative orderliness.” He further explained, “Some argue [the Japanese Labor Program] is a fine demonstration of international good will. They will receive a fine technical education in farming while here....we heard this before and it did not work out. A foreign contract worker is essentially an indentured worker.” Just as braceros emphasized the involuntary nature of their contracts, so did workers from Japan. As a group of 78 farmers “returned” to Japan stated, we “found the U.S. no land of liberty.”³⁸⁵ Not unlike braceros, they lamented their treatment and argued for the legitimacy and implementation of their labor contracts and their rights. Galarza and other labor leaders agreed; they, too, sought the equal treatment of contract workers that their labor contracts specified. Instead of supporting the termination of the labor programs, Galarza argued for the legitimacy of binational agreement and for contract enforcement. Galarza could not escape the vise of nation, maintaining that the new labor programs “prevented American farmworkers from enjoying the benefits of federal legislation” on labor.³⁸⁶ In other words, foreign contract workers had become both friend and foe, “guest” and “alien,” a necessity for the rights-based language that had been catalyzed and reframed through the labor importation programs all along.

³⁸⁵ Ernesto Galarza, Statement before the Special House Judiciary, Subcommittee on Japanese Labor Program in California, on behalf of the NAWU, AFL-CIO, c. 1957, Box 17, Folder 6, EGP; *Sacramento Bee*, 20 October 1959. According to Mitsuo Sato of Nikaho, “I have lived a slave’s life for 3 years on a farm near Yuba city....if the word slave hurts American feelings, perhaps I should say serf.”

³⁸⁶ Ernesto Galarza, Statement before the Special House Judiciary, Subcommittee on Japanese Labor Program in California, on behalf of the NAWU, AFL-CIO, c. 1957, Box 17, Folder 6, EGP.

Chapter Five

Empire and Nation: Movements for Independence and the Caribbean Labor Importation Programs

In 1942, Eric Williams, scholar, activist, and future first Prime Minister of an independent Trinidad and Tobago (1962) set out a path for Caribbean independence through economic development, calling out sugar as both “king” and curse to the Caribbean islands while arguing for U.S. expert intervention.³⁸⁷ In his book, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, he concluded that “no permanent solution can be found for the future welfare of the Caribbean which does not have as its aim and purpose the raising of the standard of living of the area, and so raise the productive capacity of the islands...this is the contribution the United States can make.” He argued that such a contribution would carry out the United State government’s ideological mission to liquidate empire in Latin America and the Caribbean under the Good Neighbor Policy. For *economic* independence would lead the British West Indies on the path to *political* independence. In response to poverty on the islands, Williams stated, “some [economic] scheme, if the good neighbor policy is to survive, will have to be devised....”³⁸⁸ Partially influenced by Williams’ suggestions, the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (AACC), a joint British-United States organization, set out to improve labor conditions, uplift the Caribbean population, and reduce unemployment in the British West Indies. Towards these ends, the AACC worked to facilitate the importation of Caribbean agricultural laborers to the United States in 1943. To resolve the unemployment problem, “ease the manpower shortage in the United States,” and ensure that the Caribbean would participate in the “war effort,” the U.S. War Food Administration (WFA) signed an agreement with the British Colonial government to

³⁸⁷ Eric Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1942), 26.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 108-109.

import workers from Jamaican, the Bahamas, and Barbados to the United States. The U.S. section of the AACC handled the diplomatic arrangements for the British-U.S. led labor importation programs.³⁸⁹

The sheer parallels and congruencies between the basis of the AACC, as influenced by Eric Williams, and that of the Joint U.S.-Mexican Committee to govern Mexican labor, as proposed by Ernesto Galarza, are conspicuous. The overarching goals of both the joint commission Galarza imagined at the Tolan Committee hearings and the AACC were to provide general standards of wages, housing, and healthcare to “rehabilitate” or economically uplift the Caribbean and Mexican populations, especially through the management of labor migrations. Similarly, both shared a language of good neighborly intentions, anti-imperialism, and bilateralism that state officials applied to create the Bracero Program. However, the first original labor program agreement with Mexico (1942), dependent on the notion of bilateralism, had only made sense in the context of Mexico because Mexico was an independent nation already and could therefore be considered an equal among nations. The bilateralism of the U.S. labor

³⁸⁹ The AACC then became the organization representing the Jamaican Government in the administration of the labor importation programs, working cooperatively with the War Food Administration (WFA) to ensure contract compliance for the workers. U.S. Department of State, *The Caribbean Islands and the War: A Record of Progress in Facing Stern Realities* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943). By an act approved April 29, 1943, the U.S. government appropriated \$26 million for the use of the newly created War Food Administration (WFA) in conducting the Emergency Farm Labor Supply program. The same law gave the U.S. Extension Service (USES) responsibility for recruiting and placing interstate and foreign labor. General supervision for the Caribbean labor programs was vested in the WFA, which created an Office of Labor to have general responsibility for the interstate and foreign labor aspects of the farm labor program. The county extension agent was a key figure in intercounty movement of laborers because he had the authority to approve or disapprove such movements. He also reported annually on farm labor activities within his own county. See Preliminary Inventory No. 51, Records of the Office of Labor of the WFA, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

importation agreement with Mexico, when applied to the British West Indies through the Caribbean labor importation programs, became more overtly anti-colonial (in a colonial context) even as it set the blueprint for U.S. domination and hegemony over the islands after the war. In the British West Indies, the United States government became even more invested in choices than in Mexico; in the choice of the nation-state to serve the greater good and in the choice of the workers to serve the allied “free” nations as an expression of democracy and good will. The labor programs therefore served several functions in the Caribbean: to rhetorically apply liberal subjectivity to colonial subjects in-line with global anti-colonial struggles, to purportedly aid the economic development of the islands as a means towards eventual political independence and self-government, and to make the United States a site of hope for the independence of the British West Indies. These functions of the labor programs were challenged and exceeded by the contract workers themselves, who also became a means through which such a relationship was forged and extended.

The dramatic shift in the application of the political rationality of liberalism and “nation” to British West Indian colonial subjects during World War II, through the labor programs, produced an adjustment in the ways that Britain and the United States managed colonial possessions and their labor. The new postcolonial model of governance that emerged promised the right to self-determination of all peoples and was necessary for the United States to remain viable as a hegemonic state power and as the “authentic” defender of freedom after World War II.³⁹⁰ The concept of “nation” or of civic nationalism, which involves the voluntary and active participation of citizen-subjects with a set of “rights,” seems counterintuitive to empire. While scholars, like Uday Mehta, have shown how the “nation” automatically implies empire in its

³⁹⁰ For influence, see Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 25-35.

presumption of an in-group and an out-group, there is little research on how specific moments in the application of “nation” to colonies, or the application of epistemologies of liberalism to colonized regions, have been productive for empire. If “imperialism” is a political system in which an imperial center governs colonies, then the granting of political independence or statehood should signal the end of empire. However, in the case of the British West Indian colonies, granting political independence to colonies in the twentieth century did not signal the end of empire. Instead, the granting of state power to colonies forced the colonies (now states) to take on a liberal agenda, leading to overlapping state projects that each began to take part in projects of imperialism and state-building. If viewed within a critique of liberalism, it becomes apparent that granting statehood or independence (liberal subjectivity) to the Caribbean did not fundamentally signal an end to empire; instead, new national governments formed in the pursuit of imperial aims that were not often different from the aims of the former imperial “center.” This is not to say that offering independence meant an equal power relationship with the imperial center. However, the logic that nation and empire are distinct is problematic. For example, national independence meant political and economic dependence justified through a logic of anti-imperialism, as we can see with the U.S. Platt Amendment in Cuba in 1901 and later with the Good Neighbor Policy in 1933, but these two U.S. state policies hardly signaled the end of U.S. empire.

Caribbean contract workers, once in the United States, called out the anti-imperialism of the labor programs as a falsehood. One group of Jamaican workers wrote to the War Food Administration (WFA), the organization responsible for the management of the labor programs in the British West Indies, “Our willingness to work...marks our true character and honesty of purpose. We are still suffering daily impositions of the most Nazi-like and undemocratic nature,

and we all agree on the face of the facts that [our employer] does not honor the allegations of our contract made by the U.S. government.” They called out their “rough treatment” in 1944 as the “exact replica of that practiced in Germany and Japan.”³⁹¹ Another worker wrote to the U.S. federal government, “Sir, I am a Jamaican and contracted to do war work in the United States. I am very sorry to say that we are doing slavery works....We leave Jamaica to work as a decent citizen and to be treated as men and not as boys or dogs.” A group of workers from Barbados suggested, “Sir, my government and you all has agreed that a few hundred of us should come out from Barbados to help harvest the war food, feed the soldiers and sailors, and for the welfare of the USA and I come here for the month of June and I have done my duty. Now that it is time that I should go home I can’t get out....” In other words, the conditions that they experienced under the labor importation programs hardly marked their attainment of liberal subjectivity or “freedom,” as suggested by the labor importation programs.

By turning to the black civil rights movement and the struggles of Jamaican and Bahamian workers in the 1940s, wider visions of social justice, beyond the nation-state and universal “freedom” as it is framed by “rights” and “choice,” become legible. These workers participated in the production of U.S.-led independence in the Caribbean, pushing the universalist and inclusionary dimensions of the concept of the “nation-state” as far as they could to locate themselves within it. While U.S. officials worked to build and consolidate a particular political culture that revolved around the nation-state that disavowed race and imperialism, the laborers called out the ironies that resulted. Meanwhile, many black civil rights activists pointed

³⁹¹ Letter from James Edward Watt at Camp Ritta in Clewiston, Florida, to the War Food Administration, Office of Labour, no date; Letter from Barbados Workers at Fort Eustis in Livingston, Virginia, 11 August 1944; Letter from A.F. Simmonds at Kennedyville Camp in Maryland, August 1944, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

to the hypocrisy of the U.S. nation-state even as others became educated in a new regime of self-determination and “rights,” shaping the radicalism of the black anti-colonial civil rights movement.

The Concept of Caribbean Independence and the Labor Programs

The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (AACC) formed in 1942, with the goal of economic reform and social welfare in the British West Indies. Underlying the formation of the AACC was the implicit need to “strengthen Caribbean security and contribution to the war effort.”³⁹² In September 1940, the U.S. and British governments had signed the Destroyers for Bases Agreement, which provided land grants to the U.S. to build military bases in the British colonial possessions, including Trinidad, Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, and British Guiana. U.S. officials touted the bases as an effort of the Good Neighbor Policy to improve economic conditions on the islands and reduce unemployment after widespread labor unrest in the Caribbean.³⁹³ Caribbean interests in Harlem, including Wilfred Domingo, Richard Moore, and others responded to the base agreement by organizing the West Indies National Emergency Committee (WINEC) in New York, using the security crisis to lobby for U.S. support of West Indian rights and interests, including self-government against British colonial rule. Roosevelt’s brain trust advisor, Charles W. Taussig met with these leaders, including Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In his writings and

³⁹² Olive Holmes, “Anglo-American Caribbean Commission—Pattern for Colonial Cooperation” *Foreign Policy Association Policy Reports* 20, No. 19 (1944), 242.

³⁹³ The 1940 agreement was an implicit means to pacify a burgeoning labor movement on the islands after the labor unrest of 1937-8. In offering employment at the bases and a higher wage scale than they were accustomed to, the bases calmed the labor movement. Jason Parker, *Brother’s Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21-23, 35; Nigel O. Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1995).

appearances after the Bases Deal, White emphasized the heightened importance of the West Indies and race to American diplomacy, noting the damage done to America's reputation by its racial practices. Taussig was highly influential as close principle advisor of the New Deal presidential cabinet, with special reference Latin American and the Caribbean in general. In response to the outcry of black activists against the military bases, Taussig advised Roosevelt to send him out on a fact-finding commission to address issues of race and economic unrest on the islands, and to find specific sites for the army bases. Roosevelt agreed and, after his tour of the Caribbean, Taussig recommended that the United States take a reformist and anticolonial stance to the region. Roosevelt took Taussig's advice, and it led to the formation of the AACC.³⁹⁴

Eric Williams, scholar, activist, and would-be first Prime Minister of an independent Trinidad and Tobago (1962), joined the AACC as a representative in 1944, just after he had published his first book, *The Negro in the Caribbean* (1942). Taussig had personally read Williams' book and used it as a precedent to establish the principal motivations of the AACC, even though it was a struggle to recruit as a black representative of the Caribbean colonies in an all-white organization.³⁹⁵ Williams stated, "Taussig, who knew all about the *Negro in the Caribbean*, decided that I was to be associated with the AACC."³⁹⁶ Williams had come to the United States from Trinidad in 1939 to join the faculty at Howard University in Washington, D.C., after receiving his Ph.D. at Oxford University. He quickly became part of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States through his scholarly activism. Williams' mission was to free global black society from all vestiges of colonial rule. In his book, *The Negro in the Caribbean*

³⁹⁴ Parker, *Brother's Keeper*, 32-33.

³⁹⁵ Tony Martin, "Eric Williams and the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission: Trinidad's Future Nationalist Leader as Aspiring Imperial Bureaucrat, 1942-1944," *The Journal of African American History* 88, no. 3 (Summer, 2003): 274-290.

³⁹⁶ Eric E. Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1969), 81.

(1942), Williams set out a path for Caribbean independence through economic development, calling out sugar as both “king” and curse to the Caribbean islands while arguing for U.S. expert intervention.³⁹⁷ Williams proclaimed that economic diversification of the islands was a necessity if the islands were to progress economically, arguing that the Caribbean should look to the United States for knowledge to improve the island economies. He stated, “some scheme, if the good neighbor policy is to survive, will have to be devised....” Such a scheme would ensure that “surpluses that normally went to Europe will be consumed in the Western Hemisphere.”³⁹⁸ U.S. economic and expert assistance, if done under the aegis of the Good Neighbor Policy, would surely be better than British colonialism for the islands and help to end British colonial rule.

Influenced by Williams’ suggestions, and by the activism of the black anti-colonial civil rights movement, the AACC’s major motivations included improving labor conditions, uplifting and rehabilitating the Caribbean population on the islands, and reducing unemployment. Towards these ends, the AACC worked to facilitate the importation of Caribbean agricultural laborers to the United States. To resolve the unemployment problem, “ease the manpower shortage in the United States,” and ensure that the Caribbean would participate in the “war effort,” the U.S. War Food Administration (WFA) signed an agreement with the British Colonial government of the Bahamas and the Government of Jamaica to import agricultural labor from Jamaica and the Bahamas to the United States. The U.S. section of the AACC handled the diplomatic arrangements for the British-U.S. led labor importation programs.³⁹⁹ According to a

³⁹⁷ Eric Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 26.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 108-109.

³⁹⁹ The AACC then became the organization representing the Jamaican Government in the administration of the labor importation programs, working cooperatively with the War Food Administration (WFA) to ensure contract compliance for the workers. U.S. Department of State, “The Caribbean Islands and the War: A Record of Progress in Facing Stern Realities,” United States Government Printing Office, (Washington, D.C., 1943).

report of the AACC in 1943, “the Commission was diverted from its intended detailed examination of basic problems of unemployment and low wages to the immediate maladjustments in labor supply resulting from war conditions....the major issue [became] to make the best possible use of Caribbean labor in the war effort.”⁴⁰⁰ More than 15,000 workers migrated to the United States from the British West Indies for temporary employment in 1943 and almost 30,000 migrated in 1944. Official reports of the AACC highlighted the safeguards implemented by the labor programs to ensure the welfare of Caribbean labor, including a seventy-five percent employment guarantee, a minimum wage, and adequate housing, almost identical to the contract protections of the Bracero Program.

Members of the U.S. section of the AACC styled themselves as colonial reformers who would sweep away an antiquated British colonialism and replace it with a modern vigorous Anglo-administration in a slow transition to the eventual independence of the islands (after they had been rendered economically fit for self-governance). The AACC’s vision became the prototype for other the Caribbean colonies, later leading to such programs as “Operation Bootstrap” in Puerto Rico and “Operation Jobs,” led by Eric Williams, in Trinidad. The AACC in combination with the WFA also created an experimental labor importation program with Puerto Rico in 1943 to alleviate unemployment there, which was short-lived but later more successfully repeated in 1954 under the U.S. policy, “Operation Bootstrap.”⁴⁰¹ “Operation

⁴⁰⁰ Report of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission to the Governments of the US and Great Britain for the Years 1942-1943 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1943), 23.

⁴⁰¹ The AACC cooperated with the War Food Administration (WFA) to recruit 2,000 workers from Puerto Rico to work as contract labor in industry in the United States. However, “owing to complications that Puerto Ricans, as American citizens, could not be required to return to the island after their term of service had elapsed,” the program with Puerto Rico, also under the AACC’s jurisdiction, was quickly cancelled. Olive Holmes, “Anglo-American Caribbean Commission—Pattern for Colonial Cooperation” *Foreign Policy Association Policy Reports*, vol. 20, No. 19 (1944), 242.

Bootstrap” or Operación Manos a la Obra (1948) was the name given to a series of U.S.-led state projects that attempted to transform Puerto Rico into a developed industrialized economy by opening up its economy to free trade. Such economic development displaced hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers in Puerto Rico, resulting in widespread unemployment and poverty. To remedy the problem, officials designed a labor importation program in which Puerto Ricans, like Mexicans and other Caribbean workers, could migrate to the United States for temporary agricultural employment. Again, migrant workers were essential to these visions of state-led economic development but also forgotten and often rendered illegal, even as the promise of eventual independence remained a promise unfulfilled.⁴⁰²

Caribbean Worker’s Respond to Liberal State Benevolence and the Contract

Once in the United States, Caribbean contract workers railed against contract violations as the liberal subjectivity/ access to rights promised them by the AACC failed to live up to their expectations. While workers from the Caribbean were initially celebrated in local communities in the North for their contributions to the war effort, by July 30, 1943, these celebrations declined as Caribbean workers spread throughout the United States from New York to Florida, and from Michigan to Arizona.⁴⁰³ After the first few months of the labor programs, they found themselves faced with insufficient food and housing, high room and board charges, wage differentials, racial discrimination, poor labor camp management, lack of work, and violence. According to the War Food Administration (WFA), “Jamaican workers are as a

⁴⁰² For more on narratives of “development” in Latin America see María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “Development and Revolution: Narratives of Liberation and Regimes of Subjectivity in the Postwar Period,” in *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁴⁰³ Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 58-66; Wayne D. Rasmussen, “A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, 1943-47,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, (1951), 265.

whole....very well educated, and are intimately familiar with and have usually committed to memory every word in the agreement as well as the employment agreement, and in addition, due to the fact that they are British subjects and British trained, they are well aware of their rights and privileges and will be constantly voicing their opinions and arguing for any cause whatsoever...”⁴⁰⁴ Many came to the United States literate and politicized by labor unrest and unionization campaigns that took place in the Caribbean from 1937 to 1938. The agreement between the United States and British Colonial government was modeled on the Mexican labor agreement, and required growers to pay a prevailing minimum wage, provide food, housing, and transportation, and promised a seventy-five percent work guarantee. When growers violated these stipulations and the state failed to step in to remedy the contract violations, many Caribbean workers either refused to work, applied for U.S. citizenship, abandoned one labor camp to move to another in search of higher wages or better housing, formed committees, and wrote letters to the government that demanded a boat ride home. They also formed their own committees and threatened the federal government with violence and direct action if the government refused to intervene, to guarantee the stipulations of their contracts.

Their labor contracts stated explicitly that they were in the United States for the purpose of the war, and the war was often the primary basis upon which they lodged complaints. The Jamaican workers Work Agreement stated, “The government and the worker mutually desire that the worker shall be beneficially employed in the United States of America to alleviate the present shortage of labor and to aid in the successful prosecution of the war.” Another version stated that the labor movements were “in the furtherance of the common war effort of the United

⁴⁰⁴ Report by William A. Anglim, Chief of Operations of the War Food Administration (WFA), 24 May 1945, RG 174, General Records of the Department of Labor, Box 7, Entry 25, NARA. Attaches basic documents governing the employment of Jamaicans.

Nations.” Similarly, the Bahamian Agreement stated, the program existed “for the purpose of making agricultural workers from the Bahamas available for work in the United States of America for the production of food for the winning of the war.”⁴⁰⁵ Hundreds of letters written to the WFA by Caribbean workers referred to the “war effort” or the “fight for freedom” or referred to themselves as “the soldiers of the home front,” to demand immediate attention to the contract violations they suffered. As forty Bahamians at Stony Brook Camp in Dansville, New York, wrote, “we arrived at the above mentioned camp when we expected a good deal of work...a great deal of manpower hours [are] being carried out here, in a period when it is greatly needed, not only among the farmers here, but also over the globe. For the past four weeks there is not enough work to supply half of the 125 men sent here.” When growers overestimated the number of workers needed, a strategy often used to lower wages, Caribbean workers responded that the resulting lack of work prevented them from fulfilling their duty to help “win the war.” They also pointed to the seventy-five percent work guarantee that was promised to them in their contracts. As the forty Bahamians at Stony Brook continued, “these forty workers maintained that the company men tried to [placate] us by saying you sent us ahead of time. But sirs, since knowing what a dreadful war is going on, and that our special efforts are needed.” These workers further admonished, “as you know, this is not only a broke down to the war efforts, but also to our family preposition. According to governmental rules, seventy-five cents per day must go to the

⁴⁰⁵ Original Agreement between the United States and Jamaican Government, 5 April 1943, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 18, NARA; Work Agreement (Jamaican Workers) revised 21 March 1945, RG 174, General Records of the Department of Labor, Entry 25, Box 7, NARA; Agreement for the Employment of Bahamians in the United States, 16 March 1943, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 18, NARA.

Bahamas government as family allowance. Should this continue, it cannot be done.”⁴⁰⁶ That is, they would not be able to send home money to Jamaica to improve conditions there, either, which had been one of the primary benevolent features of the labor importation agreements (to improve local Caribbean economies, as per the AACC’s purported mission).

Jamaican and Bahamian workers explicitly called upon their contracts to insist that the government change the way that they were being treated. A letter signed by three Jamaicans from Moscow Hill Labor Camp in Hubbardsville, New York wrote to President Roosevelt, “we are recruits from Jamaica as agricultural workers. According to our contract we were told we would start work on our arrival. We are now pending for a period of 8 days of which conditions are rather imperfect.” A Bahamian worker, Joel Seymour suggested in a handwritten letter written from the Hebron Labor Camp in Hebron, Maryland, “our contracts read that we should have a pay day at the end of every seven days period and they are not paying us off that....now they are taking out \$7.50 per week for food and rent. [We must pay for food] we can not enjoy and still have to pay for it and I don’t think it is legal sir.”⁴⁰⁷ When several dozen Jamaican workers at a camp in Pincoming, Michigan realized they would be paid thirty cents an hour, instead of the prevailing wage rate they appealed to their contract agreement for a new assignment. Thirty of these workers were summarily repatriated by the WFA with the approval of the AACC.

⁴⁰⁶ Letter to the WFA from nine Jamaicans at Somers, Connecticut, 22 May 1944; Letter to the WFA from 40 Bahamians (Eustace Johnson, Leroy Curry, Edward McPhee, et. al.) from Stony Brook Camp in Dansville, New York, 17 August 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴⁰⁷ Letter to Washington Labor Officer of the Bahamas Agricultural Workers, from Joel Seymour of Hebron, Maryland Labor Camp, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

Not only did these workers suffer from lack of employment, low wages, and poor housing, they also experienced racial discrimination and Jim Crow segregation, a direct violation of contract stipulation number two of the Bahamian Agreement, “Bahamians entering the United States as the result of this understanding shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind in accordance with Executive Order No. 8802, issued at the White House June 25, 1941.” Anti-discrimination was also mentioned as stipulation 5(g) of the Jamaican agreement: “The Workers shall be entitled to freedom from discrimination in employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin, in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order No. 8802 of the President of the United States dated June 25, 1941.” In Imlay City, Michigan, Jamaicans complained that they were unable to buy beer anywhere in town, the drug store fountains were closed to them, and the moving picture theaters were open to them but two evenings each week. When found loitering in the streets with nowhere to go, the chief of police ordered them to leave. The police expulsion of the workers occurred in spite of the fact that “pastors invited them to their churches, individuals gathered and took magazines to the camp, and a lawyer wrote for the local paper a very nice and effective defense of the Jamaicans on behalf of their non-discriminatory acceptance...”⁴⁰⁸ In Gooding, Idaho, a race riot broke out after a local white man walked up to a group of Jamaicans who were playing a guitar and singing and struck one of them for no reason at all.⁴⁰⁹ The workers were also plagued with wage differentials, even though the contract promised a prevailing wage rate to prevent these workers from replacing local workers. In Ithaca, New York, Jamaicans complained of domestic workers receiving higher wages in

⁴⁰⁸ Letter to G.A. Woodruff, From E.R. Crusbee, Agricultural Labor Specialist, September 1943, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴⁰⁹ Newspaper clipping, “Saturday Night Race Riot Termed as ‘Unfortunate,’” 19 August 1943, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

1944.⁴¹⁰ The WFA “established beyond a doubt” that “domestic help is getting fifty cents per hour and Jamaicans in the same fields are receiving forty-five cents” in Long Island, New York. The AACC discovered a similar situation at Stoughton, Wisconsin, with white men receiving ten cents more than Jamaican workers doing the same type of work. The Jamaicans working there noted that their employer told them, “if he pays us the same rate of pay he pays the white men they all would walk out on him.”⁴¹¹

The AACC worked in cooperation with the WFA, and often stepped in to protect the welfare of the workers. Jamaican workers often wrote directly to Herbert Macdonald, Liaison Officer of the AACC in Washington, D.C., representing the Jamaican Government. Herbert Macdonald had two Assistant Liaison Officers, E.C. Carnell-Sara in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania and M.S. Goodman in Indianapolis, Indiana. For example, to redress local racism in Imlay City, Michigan, M.S. Goodman declared, “proper work with the community could have eliminated existing discrimination.” Since that work had not been done, he advised that “the camp should operate a canteen so that beer and soft drinks would at least be available to Jamaicans [and] would take some of the edge from the resentment against them.”⁴¹² However, the AACC’s suggestions to the WFA often resulted in dismissal. For example, the AACC investigated a complaint sent by a group of fifty Jamaicans in Kennedyville, Maryland that the camp manager (Mr. Raymond Hill) “does not honor the allegations of our contract made by the US government.

⁴¹⁰ Letter to Howard Preston from Nelson Hopper, Area Representative of the WFA in Ithaca, New York. 21 October 1944, RG 224 Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴¹¹ Letter to M. E. Hays, Chief of Operations, WFA, from E. R. Ormsbee, Agricultural Labor Specialist, September 1943; Letter to Herbert MacDonald from Jamaican workers at Stoughton, WI, 13 August 1943, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴¹² Letter to Herbert MacDonald, from M. S. Goodman, 14 September 1943, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

We have approached him on certain conditions and when referred to the authorities in Washington he told us that Washington has nothing to do with his camp and that Washington does not run his camps and will not ...and if I should call in your office in the matter we would be sent to jail.” E.C. Carnell-Sara of the AACC investigate the situation and wrote to the WFA, “I visited the camp, which housed fifty-eight Jamaicans. Without a doubt this is the worst situation I have yet seen....In my opinion, Mr. Hill is as near a slave driver as it is possible to get...It seems that he caused three men to be jailed for what he called “refusing to work.” I was not at al convinced, after listening to the evidence, that there really were any refusals. The men are continually threatened with the sheriff for any little thing.” Carnell-Sara further suggested “the removal of every last man from this camp in the shortest time possible.” The area representative of the WFA refused his suggestion, stating that it would be “an injustice to the workers and to the farmers.” Furthermore, “Mr. Hill may be crude and rough but he pays them very good money, probably more than anywhere else in Maryland. The living conditions would be 100% better if the workers would cooperate.”⁴¹³

While the WFA and AACC investigated some worker complaints, rarely did they fix the mistreatment and violence workers face, instead often insisting that the workers were “over-exaggerating.” For example, the BBPA wrote to the WFA to correct mistreatment of workers, referring to “cases where the workers have been beaten to within inches of their life if they ask questions concerning their right as workers under contract with the United States Government,” and “cases where they were thrown into prison if they ask for their wages, or better food. They

⁴¹³ See Report of the Office of the Liaison Officer, Representing the Jamaican Government, Re: Kennedyville, Maryland, Liaison officer: Herbert G. MacDonald, Assistant Liaison Officer: E. C. Carnell-Sara (this report signed by the latter), 28 August 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA. Also see response letter from William N. Ensor, Area Representative of the WFA, 6 September 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

have also been threatened with guns on numerous occasions.” As the WFA wrote to the BBPA, “an intensive investigation has been completed,” and “your broad references to man-handling, placing of workers in jail without authentic charges, and the threat of use of firearms is exaggerated.” The WFA further explained, “it is true that on occasion it has been necessary to have workers arrested for committing serious misdemeanors and held pending repatriation. In all cases, every effort has been made by the [WFA’s] Office of Labor to release them from civil authorities into our custody so that repatriation can be completed.” In its investigations of contract violations, the WFA consistently agreed with the growers that most of the workers’ complaints were invalid and it rarely stepped in to intervene beyond investigation. If field representatives of the WFA or AACC did intervene, it was to place a quick fix on the situation by either deporting or “repatriating” the workers responsible for the complaint or fixing a general problem at the labor camps, such as providing hot water for showers. While they often provided suggestions to ameliorate conditions that even they themselves often found “unfortunate” or “terrible,” there is rare evidence that they followed through with those suggestions.

While the WFA insisted that the organization existed to protect the welfare of the workers under contract, their primary purpose was the control and management of workers, to prevent complaints and avoid leakages on program violations to the press.⁴¹⁴ Philip Bruton, Director of Labor of the WFA stated, “Scrupulous pains are taken to see to it that the

⁴¹⁴ The WFA could not prevent their own workers from leaking information to the press, as in the case of an article published in the Nassau Tribune newspaper in the Bahamas on February 24, 1944, by a representative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture who stated his purpose at the Florida labor camps was to “show the contribution which the Bahamian and Jamaican workers are making to the United Nations’ cause by assisting farmers of this country to produce and harvest food and fibre crops vitally necessary to prosecute the war. Letter from Philip Bruton, Director of the WFA, to his Royal Highness, the Duke of Windsor, Governor of the Bahamas Islands, 31 March 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

commitments made by the U.S. government and the Bahamas government to protect the welfare of the Bahamian workers are carried out and that all the terms of the workers' contracts with the WFA are fulfilled."⁴¹⁵ The proof was in the numbers, the director of the WFA explained, as "out of 4,698 Bahamians brought to the United States in 1943 by the War Food Administration for agricultural employment, only 1,505 had returned for all causes one year from the beginning of recruitment." While the WFA lauded these figures, they were hardly worth celebrating, since nearly thirty-two percent of all workers had opted out or were deported within the first year. The complaint letters written by Caribbean workers often led the WFA to deport them to their sending countries. The WFA even marked some workers' on record as having "refused to work," to prevent those who complained from returning on a new contract, which the workers often opposed as a violation of the contract. As one group of eight workers stated to the WFA, "we would like to be informed as to the laws which subject a worker employed by the WFA to be marked "refused to work."⁴¹⁶

In response to abuses in the fields, Caribbean workers often decided to perform work stoppages, demanding a field representative of the WFA perform an investigation of their circumstances. Workers in Port Jefferson and Deansboro New York went on strike as a result of low wages and poor housing, refusing to work until the WFA representative for that area was made available to the camp. The WFA report stated "they are not working at present time and have been very destructive, tearing the telephone off the wall, throwing food in the mess hall,

⁴¹⁵ Letter from Philip Bruton, in "Bahamians in Florida: the following letter has been received by us for publication: WFA, Wash," *Nissau Tribune*, 31 March 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴¹⁶ Handwritten letter from eight workers at Lyndonville Labour Center in Orleans County, New York, 9 July 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

and plugging up the latrines in the sewages system.”⁴¹⁷ Another WFA report indicated that a group of Jamaicans refused to work in response to their pay rates at Camp Manuel in Plymouth, Massachusetts and the police put them in jail. Local police and sheriff departments commonly cooperated with the WFA to house those workers that refused to work in local jails while the WFA arranged for their deportation. At a labor camp in Sherburne, New York, all workers refused employment because of the wage rates and the entire group walked out of the camp, after which the state police promptly returned them. The WFA imprisoned seven of the workers that it considered to be the “ringleaders” at this camp, pending deportation.⁴¹⁸ When several Bahamian workers at Hebron Labor Camp in Maryland refused to shovel hay because of the work conditions, which required them to stand on wagons thirteen feet from the ground with no protection on the sides, they were promptly delivered to the county jail. According to the workers, they begged to go back to work, just to be released from jail, where they had been kept for ten days. In the end, state authorities forced them to sign a paper that said they were unwilling to work to leave the country. In the labor fields and camps, growers restricted their movements from the fields to the camps. As one letter from the Bloomingdale labor camp in Maryland stated, “a lot of the farmers take us for prisoners.”⁴¹⁹

Realizing that the government would do very little to help them with flagrant violations of the contract program agreement, the workers attempted other means of gaining access to rights, including applying for U.S. citizenship. Farmer Donald Delaney of Joliet, Illinois, wrote

⁴¹⁷ Reports on Port Jefferson and Deansboro Farm Labor Camps, 25 July 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴¹⁸ Letter from M.E. Hays of the Department of Agriculture to the Director of Labor of the WFA in Philadelphia, 11 July 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴¹⁹ Letter, signed by Bahamian workers, 11 September 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

to the WFA, “a citizen of Jamaica who is temporarily staying at Joliet, Illinois on a contract with the government of the Island of Jamaica to aid in the harvesting of our crops has sought advice from me as to the possibility of obtaining American citizenship.” Another letter from a farmer in Whitehall, Maryland, refers to a Jamaican worker who “would like to remain in the states and learn building constructing work, which would include masonry, carpentry, and bricklaying...he tells me that someone has to sponsor him for at least a period of six months...” In both cases, the WFA wrote back, “we are sorry to advise that the International Agreement with the Jamaican Government, as well as Public Law 229, 78th Congress, under which we operate, stipulate that a recruit must return to Jamaica at the termination of his work agreement.” C.E. Herdt of the Operations Branch of the WFA noted, “during the period of their stay in the United States, they are not eligible to apply for American citizenship, and in order for them to become eligible, it will be necessary for them to return to Jamaica and return to the United States under the regular quota.”

Other Caribbean contract workers refused to turn to the state for protection entirely, preferring to instead to threaten violence with violence. These threats to the U.S. government sometimes became a reality. As one letter signed as “Farm Workers” by Jamaican workers stated, “Sir, through unbearable circumstances we are penning this letter to you. During recruiting we were told as our contract papers will verify this, that our minimum pay would be thirty cents per hour whether it be by task or hourly work. And to our surprise we will work for six days at 10 hours per day and weekend we’ll receive one cent, forty-cents, or seventy-five cents as our wages. The board and lodging conditions are also exhibits of hardness. We are therefore requesting your quick attention as a continuance of this might bring trouble.” A Bahamian laborers at the Cheriton, Virginia Farm Labor Supply Center stated, after complaining

of lack of sufficient earnings, “Sir, after all we are only human, we are not gods nor angels....it’s a group of about 600 here, sir, and they decided that by the first of July if the men are not transferred from Cheriton, Virginia, it will be hell here. They are planning a riot when the farmers come in the yard at morning. Lots of them have guns....”⁴²⁰

For these workers, the labor programs were not the social welfare institutions that the governments purported them to be, leading them to eschew U.S. and British state power, preferring violence or deportation to state control. When many Jamaicans employed in the North were asked to shift to cane-cutting in Florida (where Bahamians were already employed), a riot did actually ensue. Whereas in the North, Jamaicans had often received a welcome reception in local towns, they arrived in Florida to cement-block dormitories surrounded by barbed wire, their movements controlled by local growers, the FSA housing authorities, the AACC, and the WFA. In October 1943, ninety-three Jamaicans “refused to get off the busses,” according to Herbert MacDonald, and when the WFA managed to convince them to go to the mess hall they “scraped their food on the ground and trampled it” and “abused everyone and everything in sight.” The authorities immediately sent them to the local jail in Dade County where they awaited deportation. Within two weeks, the number of Jamaicans sent to Florida jails rose to seven hundred, as many refused to sign the “Jim Crow” agreement forced upon them. The WFA replaced those that were deported with new Jamaican laborers, seeking ever more passive laborers. Despite the militancy of these workers, their grievances were rarely addressed.⁴²¹

Meanwhile, the U.S. federal government explained away their labor resistance as a function of their status as British colonial subjects, a status which made them volatile subjects.

⁴²⁰ Letter from James Buchanan, Bahamian worker at Cheriton, Virginia camp, 26 June 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

⁴²¹ *Daily Gleaner*, 6 November 1943; *Pittsburg Courier*, 26 October 1943; *Palm Beach Post*, 9 October 1943 and 15-16 October 1943, quoted in Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land*, 73-74.

The WFA had stated, “Jamaican workers are as a whole....very well educated, and are intimately familiar with and have usually committed to memory every word in the agreement as well as the employment agreement, and in addition, due to the fact that they are British subjects and British trained, they are well aware of their rights and privileges and will be constantly voicing their opinions and arguing for any cause whatsoever...”⁴²² Because they are educated, Jamaicans had to be kept separate from Mexicans, according to the WFA. The WFA upheld, “In handling Jamaicans, the documentation and office work connected with the administration of their problems should at all times be kept separate and distinct from the Mexican National Program just as the workers must be kept in so far as possible physically separated.”⁴²³ The WFA and the AACC segregated the workers in camps by color and citizenship.⁴²⁴ The segregation of workers proved a useful tactic among growers to discourage solidarity among workers, playing the supposed “superiority” of one group of laborers over another by paying disparate wages to each group and causing infighting, even between Bahamians and Jamaicans. For example, a WFA report refers to an investigation of Bahamian workers receiving ten cents more per hour than Jamaican workers at Blakeford Farms in Centreville, Maryland, since they seemed more willing to cooperate.⁴²⁵ Even the logic of the “contract” segregated workers, as the governments involved divided the workers according to separate Mexican, West Indian, or Bahamian contracts.

Over time, growers became more and more powerful in administering the labor programs, taking over or collapsing the “benevolent” role of the state, such that the state came to

⁴²² Report by William A. Anglim, Chief of Operations of the War Food Administration (WFA), 24 May 1945, RG 174, General Records of the Department of Labor, Box 7, Entry 25, NARA.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land*, 71.

⁴²⁵ Letter, 5 August 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

do the bidding of growers. By 1955, growers refused to work with Herbert MacDonald, “forcing him to resign,” because of his interference in the face of poor camp management or abuse, his successor being much more cooperative with growers in ignoring abuses when he saw them. By the early 1960s, when the Department of Labor’s Assistant Secretary for Employment and Manpower sought to work with the INS to bring an agreed set of minimum standards to all guestworker contracts, it took them over two years to convince Florida growers to adjust the contract stipulations of the Caribbean labor programs so that the federal government could “better protect” the workers. When pointed to the program violations of the Caribbean labor programs, growers in Florida consistently pointed to the Bracero Program as the crux of the problem and refused to take seriously the state Department’s requests. As one Department of Labor letter suggested, these growers were “influential with Senator Holland of Florida.”⁴²⁶ In the end, state officials and growers colluded to create a cheap and expendable agricultural labor force with the Bracero Program and the Caribbean labor importation programs, demonstrating how empire (state power) and capitalism (profit dependent upon racial hierarchies) were intricately intertwined and dependent upon one another with regards to the labor programs.

Black Anti-Colonial Civil Rights and the Caribbean Labor Programs

The workers were not without advocates, as black civil rights activist organizations including the NAACP in Washington, D.C., the Bahamas Benevolent Protective Association (BBPA), and the Jamaican Progressive League (JPL) in New York intervened when they thought appropriate.⁴²⁷ The JPL had formed specifically to promote the independence of the British

⁴²⁶ Letters from David E. Christian to Jerry R. Holleman, Department of Labor’s Assistant Secretary for Employment and Manpower, 24 February 1961, 28 March 1961, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 25, Box 2, NARA.

⁴²⁷ The Jamaican Progressive League (JPL) of New York, formerly the Jamaican Benevolent Association, was an anti-colonial group of black activists that formed in 1936 to promote the

West Indies, and seemed to view the labor programs as a step in that direction, since they worked cooperatively with the WFA to manage the programs. These organizations often received letters regarding labor contract violations directly from Jamaican or Bahamian workers and would contact the WFA and the AACC to demand an investigation and assure workers of contract compliance in the labor programs. On July 13, 1944, Reverend Egbert Ethelred Brown of the JPL received a letter from multiple Jamaican workers and forwarded their complaints to the WFA. As he stated, “it was reported that the sleeping quarters are so overcrowded that 100 men out of a total of 300 are forced to sleep on the floor, and that there is not sufficient work for the men so that the average weekly earning of each man is five dollars. There is only one toilet on the property and no facility for bathing.” Brown’s letter expressed the intention of securing the welfare of the workers to ensure that the state was doing its intended job in cooperation with the WFA—not with the malicious intent of calling out the WFA, or with the goal of ending the labor programs. As Brown stated to the WFA, “the League [JPL] will this season continue the policy of the last of cooperating with your Department in passing on to you complaints which have been brought to the directors, to the end that you will be good enough to investigate such complaints, and in the cases where it appears that real grievances exist you will take appropriate action leading to their removal.”⁴²⁸

self-government of Jamaica. The organization included such members as W.A. Domingo, Adolphe Roberts, and F. Theo Reid, and they addressed social welfare concerns, emergency relief, and other needs of migrating communities from Jamaica. They also created the People’s National Party (PNP) on the island, devoted to universal suffrage and Jamaican independence. See Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner, *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings 1920–1974* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁴²⁸ Letter from Ethelred Brown of the JPL to C. E. Herdt of the WFA, 13 July 1944, RG 224, Records of the Office of Labor, War Food Administration, Entry 6, Box 17, NARA.

Black anticolonial activists in New York also threatened the government with more overt action if they perceived workers being mistreated and not treated inclusively. When Origen Taylor of the BBPA received a letter from Caribbean workers that made general charges of the mistreatment of Bahamian workers, including man-handling, placing of workers in jail without authentic charges, and the threat of the use of firearms, he told the WFA, “if these conditions continue to exist after being called to your attention, we will be forced to bring them to the attention of higher authorities in the United States Government, and the Bahamas Government.” Leslie S. Perry, Secretary of the NAACP, wrote the WFA in January 1944, also called on the federal government to investigate the situations faced by the workers, noting the “21 Bahamian workers held in Trumbell County Jail in Ohio because they refused employment in Bloomfield due to the deplorable conditions under which they were to be housed.” “Would you be kind enough to let us know what your findings were?” Perry requested. While they expressed concern regarding the welfare of the laborers, they also turned to the state as a solution to address imported laborer’s welfare and ensure the fulfillment of Caribbean workers’ rights under contract.⁴²⁹

The historical moment of World War II accelerated the anti-colonial movements led by Afro-Caribbean activists in the United States, and many saw the war (and, therefore the labor programs), as an anti-colonial effort to “free” the world from the tyranny of European imperialism. As Paul Robeson (Trinidad) argued on Sept. 2, 1942 at a mass rally in Manhattan, the current war “is not a war for the liberation of European nations,” but “a war for the liberation of all peoples, all races, all colors anywhere in the world.”⁴³⁰ As leader of the National Negro

⁴²⁹ Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land*, 47.

⁴³⁰ The transcript of Robeson’s speech is in the Robeson Archives at Howard University, quoted in Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 266.

Congress (NNC), Max Yergan wrote in the *Courier* “It must always be remembered that the Hitlerite scourge of today has its roots in the imperialism of which India and Africa have been the victims. Competition among the imperialist powers for more land and peoples to exploit brought on the fascist regime.” Initially reluctant to support the war because of the role the British Empire played in it, figures such as George Padmore, Richard B. Moore, Claudia Jones (Trinidad), C.L.R. James, Eric Williams (Trinidad), and more began to fear that an axis victory would mean the intensification of race hatred and colonialism. They also came to appreciate that the war would aid their cause against British and Dutch colonialism. They argued that the assurance of the right to self-governance and self-determination for the Caribbean, in the words of Richard B. Moore, “is unquestionably necessary to remove this major danger of war from the Western Hemisphere,” since “conflicts over colonies constitute the major source of war in the modern world.”⁴³¹

The 1930s and 1940s were a special moment for black civil rights activism, as both foreign blacks and southern blacks converged upon the cities, exerting a forceful push on the state for anti-colonial reform. By the 1940s, nearly a quarter of Harlem’s population in New York was of West Indian origin. Black activist diaspora diplomacy was much more influential than most historical studies have captured; they profoundly shaped black culture, politics, and protest, as well as the progress of Caribbean independence.⁴³² During the 1940s, when the labor programs began, both foreign and U.S.-born blacks in the United States together forcefully argued that their struggles against Jim Crow racial segregation were inextricably bound to the

⁴³¹ Turner and Turner, *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem*, 76. Richard B. Moore, “Declaration of Rights of the Caribbean Peoples to Self-Determination and Self-Government,” in Turner and Turner, 263.

⁴³² See Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (New York: Verso Press, 1999).

struggles of African and Asian peoples for independence across the globe. They articulated a common experience of racial oppression rooted in the expansion of Europe and the consequent dispersal of black laborers throughout Europe and the New World. Many civil rights activists who wrote out of the anti-colonial paradigm confined their critique and resistance to British imperialism, neglecting the role of United States expansion.⁴³³ There were exceptions to the rule, as in the case of Walter White of the NAACP stating, in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, “the colored people of India, China, Burma, Africa, the West Indies, the United States, and other parts of the world will continue to view skeptically assertions that this is a war for freedom and equality.” Moreover, “Failure to solve this problem will inevitably mean other wars,” caused by “the continuation of white imperialist exploitation of colored people.”⁴³⁴ Within the context of the British West Indies, the United States seemed to be a source of radical hope regarding a proposed West Indian Federation of islands that would signal independence and self-government for the British Caribbean.

Black civil rights movement leaders therefore called on the United States through an incipient United Nations to end colonialism and racism, towards the independence of all African nations and the British West Indies.⁴³⁵ During the course of the 1940s, civil rights activists came

⁴³³ Carole Boyce Davies, Meredith Gadsby, et al., eds., *Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 48.

⁴³⁴ “F.D.R., Churchill Asked to Consider Color Problems,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 28 August 1943, 9. Quoted in Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 42.

⁴³⁵ Black activists attempted to use the UN as a forum in which to gain the support for civil rights struggles in the United States, a delegation of black leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard B. Moore attended the 1945 San Francisco Conference to demand black self-representation. Attendees decided that the promotion of the progressive development of the peoples of colonial territories should be directed toward “independence” or “self-government.” The AACC seemed a step in that direction but anti-colonial civil rights leaders wanted self-representation and self-leadership in such organizations. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 75-84; Turner and Turner, *Richard B. Moore*, 79-80.

to put significant pressure on the U.S. state as a source of global political change, to end global colonialism as part of the “war effort.”⁴³⁶ The UN became a symbol of that strategy, as demonstrated by the 1945 UN conference in San Francisco, in which forty-six nations met and declared war on Germany and Japan. On April 6, 1945 W. E. B. Du Bois organized a Conference on Colonialism in Harlem. Richard B. Moore gave a presentation of the approach that the West Indies National Council (WINC) should project at the UN meeting in San Francisco. His opinion was that “the West Indies were a shield for the continent of America and had played an important role in the war. They have been under the control of European powers for well nigh 300 years, and have contributed very largely to the amassing of great fortune by nationals of those European powers controlling them....the amount of self-government granted is negligible.” He argued that race was central to the problem: “they always divided the colonies into two groups, the whites in one with ‘dominion status’ and the blacks and browns in a status of ‘complete subjugation and utter exploitation.’” Moore stated that independence of the Caribbean peoples was a necessary requisite for world peace and the central provisions of the Atlantic Charter. “All forms of imperial rule [must] give way peacefully to independence of all subject peoples.” Will you not in this new world Charter “proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof?”⁴³⁷

It should be noted that the 1936-7 labor uprisings in the Caribbean, which had emerged in response to widespread unemployment and dropping wages in the Caribbean were central to Moore’s perspective. The British colonial government ruthlessly repressed the increase in uprisings from 1937-38, through mass shootings and arrests. New York black civil rights

⁴³⁶ Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 7.

⁴³⁷ Richard B. Moore, Speech, 6 April 1945, W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner, eds. *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings, 1920-1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 79-80.

leaders' response to the uprisings of 1937 indicated a turning point in anti-colonialism. They made appeals addressed to the British and US governments, Pan American foreign Ministers, Caribbean leaders, delegates to the founding of the UN charter, and American political officials to demand federation with self-government and to end colonialism on the islands. In one such declaration in July 1940, Moore stated, "the political control of the peoples of these territories by non-American powers is now recognized to be a menace to the safety and security of all American nations. ... Any such menace can be removed only by the integration of the West Indian peoples into the Pan-American family of nations strictly on the basis of the right of self-determination. Only thus will it be possible to create an enduring foundation for genuine "Good Neighbor" relations."⁴³⁸

Such anti-colonial efforts had resulted in the AACC (and the labor programs) in the first place. In 1942, the U.S. government and the AACC touted labor programs part of the allied war effort, since their whole purpose was as "emergency labor importation programs," designed to fill the need for war essential defense labor. Since agriculture was considered a war essential industry, labor imported for the sake of that industry would be "defense" labor, marking the worker as allies for the United Nations. In fact, at the UN conference in San Francisco, Moore proclaimed that vital support had been rendered by the Caribbean peoples to the war effort: "despite the debilitating hindrances and galling yoke of colonial domination, the Caribbean peoples have loyally and unstintingly supported the UN in the present war against Nazi barbarism and fascist domination. In proportion to their size and numbers and the meager actual resources left to them after centuries of colonial retardation and impoverishment, they have made

⁴³⁸ Richard B. Moore, "Declaration of Rights of the Caribbean Peoples to Self-Determination and Self-Government," Submitted to the Pan-American Foreign Ministers' conference in Havana Cuba in July, 1940, in Turner and Turner, 263.

notable contributions to the armed forces *and in labor power*, finance, and essential materials such as oil, bauxite, etc.” However, Moore was also critical of the AACC by 1945: “The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission has conducted broadcasts, made studies, and held conferences, but has done practically nothing to implement the rights of these people to self government and self determination.” Moore urged several proposals at the UN conference, including “forthright recognition of the inalienable right of the Caribbean people to self government and self determination....genuine equality of rights both in fact and in law for all peoples everywhere and full democratic citizenship rights, including universal adult suffrage, for all people.” A central mode of concern of his was the means to rehabilitate and rebuild the economies there, to overcome the present plight of poverty. “It is now necessary for the British government to use its power to curb the depredations of the financial, planting, and big commercial interests in Britain and the West Indies in order to free the people of the West Indies from their present intolerable plight,” Moore stated.⁴³⁹

Such a statement was the reason the U.S. and British government had touted the labor programs as part of the effort to curb depredation on the islands and improve island economies in the first place. Migrant laborers’ contract rights seemed to signal the state’s attempt to ensure the equality of the workers as so-called “soldiers of the soil” in the “fight for freedom.” The U.S. government therefore advertised that the initial 8,800 Jamaican and 4,600 Bahamian laborers, employed in 16 states in 1943, “are making a vital contribution to the cooperative effort of the United Nations.”⁴⁴⁰ U.S. officials often powerfully convinced black civil rights leaders that the Caribbean labor importation programs were a step on the path toward Caribbean

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 271-278.

⁴⁴⁰ “The Caribbean Islands and the War: A Record of Progress in Facing Stern Realities,” United States Government Printing Office, (Washington, D.C., 1943).

economic federation and independence. When Amy Ashwood Garvey the Jamaican pan-Africanist and former wife of Marcus Garvey, who worked with public figures including C.L.R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois and George Padmore, and was a member of the Council on African Affairs (CAA) mentioned the labor programs, her concern was specifically that Jamaican women should be included as participants in the labor programs as domestic workers. She wrote a number of letters in 1944 that protested the recruitment of solely male West Indian workers in the U.S. Emergency Farm Program, asserting a gender bias in the programs. Like many of those engaged against colonialism, Garvey sought to “uplift” the Caribbean population by ensuring that they had access to jobs, whether in the United States or in the Caribbean, which would benefit the Caribbean economy and ensure the main goal of her activism: freedom and self-rule for the British colonies.⁴⁴¹ Some saw the AACC itself as an organization designed to aid the Caribbean island economies so as to prepare them for national independence, even though black opinion vacillated on whether the AACC was benevolent or a vehicle for U.S. imperialism, as expressed by Richard B. Moore. In the words of CAA leader Ralph Bunche, the main objective of the AACC was “to help the peoples of the Caribbean area realize that their problems are a matter of concern and interest to Washington and London, that they figure in the total pattern of the United Nations, and that something is being done to solve their problems.”⁴⁴² Bunche lauded the AACC as a “contributor to the goals of the United Nations,” in an era when many African American civil rights activists saw the UN as a forum to address issues of racial, colonial, and economic oppression, and as a site of radical hope for the global anti-colonial movement.

⁴⁴¹ Rhoda Reddock, “The First Mrs. Garvey and others: Pan-Africanism and feminism in the early 20th Century British colonial Caribbean,” *Feminist Africa* 19 (September 2014): 69.

⁴⁴² Ralph J. Bunche, “The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission: An Experiment in Regional Cooperation,” the American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations for the 9th conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations (January 1945).

Black activism was therefore shaped by a particular moment in which the U.S. government came to be perceived a site of hope for Caribbean independence, through the formation of a United Nations (UN).⁴⁴³ In fact, since the federal government proclaimed that the labor programs were meant to fulfill the benevolent mission of the UN, the workers seemed actors in the black anti-colonial civil rights mission of independence for the Caribbean. As Richard B. Moore had stated, “the Caribbean peoples have loyally and unstintingly supported the UN in the present warthey have made notable contributions to the armed forces and in *labor power*.” He saw the labor programs as a vital support rendered by the people of the Caribbean to back the formation of a UN and the eventual independence of the islands.⁴⁴⁴

Even further supporting the liberal vision of national independence for the islands through the labor programs was the vision of capitalism expressed by many black civil rights leaders in the 1940s that separated from or eschewed the U.S. Communist Party (CP).⁴⁴⁵ Some black civil rights activists saw capitalism as separate from imperialism, rather than its governing feature. For example, Max Yergan of the National Negro Congress (NNC) and CAA noted, “Raising the living standards and well being of the peoples of colonial countries to a new and higher level is an indispensable condition for gaining economic security in the postwar world. It is an indispensable condition for avoiding right here in the United States a repetition of the

⁴⁴³ Black radicals maintained that colonized peoples ought to have representation in international bodies if dependent areas would be administered under a trusteeship or League of Nations style mandates system to ensure their security on the path to independence. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 77; Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 2003).

⁴⁴⁴ Richard B. Moore, “Appeal to the United Nations Conference on International Organization On Behalf of Caribbean Peoples,” 25 May 1945, West Indies National Council, in *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem*, 271. It is also important to note that the vision of the UN was one contested by many black civil rights activists, as a delegation of members of the NAACP at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944 suggests.

⁴⁴⁵ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 243-248.

wholesale unemployment and privation that we experienced in the last decade.”⁴⁴⁶ Anti-colonialism was a necessary feature for economic expansion, he argued, since new markets (abroad) were required to prevent an economic collapse like the Great Depression in the United States and around the world. A large liberal and left faction in the United States shared the idea that more markets were needed, including Vice President Henry Wallace, supported by many black activists for the Democratic ticket after Roosevelt’s death in 1945. An article from the African-American newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted: “The only sane way out is the way visualized by such leaders as Henry Wallace and Philip Murray. It is to help industrialize the industrially backward—that is the colonial—countries on the basis of freedom and equality, and free and equal access to all raw materials and natural resources.” The thought was that the leading industrial nations should serve as anti-colonial collaborators in the world, rather than rivals, and should “forgo the luxury of imperialism and accept as equal [trading] partners the peoples who are in bondage today.”⁴⁴⁷ The goal of “colonies” taking their place as “equals” among nations within a capitalist world system sanctified the nation-state as a form of anti-colonialism.

Under “free trade” capitalism, the Jamaican and Bahamian labor programs came to be seen as a means toward economic and political independence on the islands. The sheer dollar amount of profits earned from wages alone seemed to signal the future economic independence of the islands. As the AACC upheld, “the economic significance to the West Indies of this

⁴⁴⁶ John Robert Badger quoting Max Yergan, “World View: Correct Policy for Africa,” *Chicago Defender*, 29 July 1944, quoted in Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 71. Yergan also argued that since the world economy was severely distorted by the political and economic exploitation of colonial peoples, “such markets can only be created by raising the purchasing power in those dependent areas where millions have hitherto known little but poverty and want.”

⁴⁴⁷ Kumar Goshal, “As an Indian sees it: Collaboration, Not Rivalry, Key to Post-War World,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 July 1944, quoted in Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 71.

highly successful operation [the labor programs] is shown by the fact that during 1945, the workers sent back to their homes in voluntary and compulsory savings a sum amounting to approximately \$20 million dollars.”⁴⁴⁸ According to an AACC report, while Caribbean workers earned only twelve cents per hour working on the U.S. military bases on the islands, Jamaicans and Bahamians working in the United States were guaranteed a minimum wage of thirty cents per hour. The result was economic progress, as the transportation of workers for work elsewhere seemed to alleviate unemployment and raise wages on the islands. Another report stated, “the war has brought increased money income to laborers throughout the Caribbean area. Even in Puerto Rico and Jamaica, where unemployment has previously plagued the population, wage rates have risen.” A state report further lauded the AACC for allowing the workers “comprising 8,800 Jamaicans and 4,300 Bahamians in 16 states” to make “a vital contribution to the cooperative effort of the United Nations.”⁴⁴⁹ In other words, the labor programs had proven the benevolence of the U.S. and British governments while gifting the Caribbean with the economic capacity to take its place as a quasi-nation among other equal nations in the UN.

Not all African American and Caribbean diaspora elements of the civil rights movement of the 1940s believed in the U.S.-led economic development of the islands or were interested in facilitating capitalism and “free trade” through equitable state sponsorship. Activist and scholar W.E.B. Du Bois did not see an AACC or a UN as a solution to racism or colonialism.

Representing the NAACP at a conference of Americans United for World Organization at the Department of State in 1944, he argued, “the emphasis on nations and states and the indifference

⁴⁴⁸ Anglo-American Caribbean Commission. *Report of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission to the Governments of the United States and Great Britain for the Years 1942-1943* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 13.

⁴⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *The Caribbean Islands and the War: A Record of Progress in Facing Stern Realities* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 38-41.

to races, groups, or organizations indicated that the welfare and protection of colonial peoples are beyond the jurisdiction of the conference's proposed governments."⁴⁵⁰ Du Bois knew that if there were such a global forum of nations, black people would have little or no voice in it. Similarly, Paul Robeson told a friend that he thought President Roosevelt's reformism would have as its chief result the guarantee that capitalism would exist for another fifty years. And, George Padmore (of Trinidad) argued that the United States would emerge from the war not as a liberating force but as the dominant imperialist power, using dollar diplomacy rather than outright annexation to control the key commercial and strategic routes on the African continent and the islands of the West Indies.⁴⁵¹

Furthermore, Claudia Jones, an early critic of the U.S. Empire, recognized the ability of U.S. imperialism to camouflage or mask itself. She migrated from Trinidad to Harlem in 1924, where she later joined the CPUSA through the Young Communist League (YCL) and became one of the Communist Party's leading theorists on black women's exploitation. Jones located the heart of U.S. imperialism in the establishment of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission. She argued that the AACC built up U.S. capitalist interests in the Caribbean, as a source of cheap food and raw material, a market for British and U.S. products, and as a "reservoir of cheap labor." The federal government's goal of attaining a "reservoir of cheap labor," Jones argued, is what continued to drive Caribbean emigration, resulting in "Anglo-American rivalry," but also collaboration, creating a relationship for exploitation. She argued against the dangers of "bargaining between the two imperialisms" to "resolve economic

⁴⁵⁰ "Dumbarton Oaks Proposals Exclude Colonies—Du Bois," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 28 October 1944, as quoted from Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 77.

⁴⁵¹ Quotes from Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 255, 258. Also see George Padmore, "The Second World War and the Darker Races," *Crisis* 45, no. 11 (1939), quoted in Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*, 42.

problems” as well as the dangers of “look[ing] increasingly to the United States for salvation.”⁴⁵²

Jones argued that the United States could never be an escape from colonialism, advancing her own critical vision of the relationship between racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism that was critical of the Caribbean contract labor programs.⁴⁵³

Caribbean Independence and the Perpetuation of Guestworker Programs

The black anti-colonial civil rights movement in the United States was entirely different from the movements for independence on the islands. Like many black civil rights activists engaged in Pan-Africanism, Eric Williams believed in the eventual independence of the Caribbean as an end to colonialism and imperialism. Williams saw a federation of islands in the Caribbean as the key to independence, as a federation would grant the Caribbean sufficient economic pull to serve as an equal among nations. Before a federation was possible, it was key that the U.S. government help to reform the island economies after colonialism had ended. As a member of the AACC, Eric Williams viewed the AACC, and, by implication, the labor programs, as a statist solution to various economic and political problems in the Caribbean. In the 1950s, he supported “Operation Bootstrap” as an approach fundamental to the economic growth of the islands, looking to Puerto Rico as a model. Operation Bootstrap or Operación Manos a la Obra (1948) was the name given to a series of U.S.-led state projects that attempted to transform Puerto Rico into a developed industrialized economy by opening up its economy to free trade. In an attempt to diversify the Puerto Rican economy away from sugar plantation production, the United States encouraged companies to invest millions of dollars there by

⁴⁵² Claudia Jones, “American Imperialism and the British West Indies,” quoted in Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 60-61. In this article, Jones warns about the danger of accepting U.S. capital investments.

⁴⁵³ Jones was prophetic in her critique of the AACC. While the AACC was a potential vehicle for Caribbean and Latin American interests, by 1945 it had failed to achieve any economic reconstruction in the region.

relaxing import duties and taxes. Such economic development displaced hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers, resulting in widespread unemployment and poverty.

To remedy the problem of unemployment, Operation Bootstrap resulted in a labor importation program in which Puerto Ricans, like Mexicans and Jamaicans, could migrate to the United States for temporary agricultural employment. The Puerto Rican government established a Migration Division within its Department of Labor in 1947 and began the scientific study of migration as a policy to relieve the island's poverty and unemployment. Most job placements were initially in agriculture, but by 1953 the island's branch of USES increasingly began placing workers in industrial positions, including jobs on railroads and in factories in the United States. Through newspaper advertisements, educational films, and other forms of publicity, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and its Migration Division stressed the many advantages and benefits of traveling to the mainland on a state-issued labor contract.⁴⁵⁴

William's work at the AACC (later the Caribbean Commission (CC) had given him considerable insight into Operation Bootstrap with Puerto Rico. His influential speech, "Economic problems of Trinidad and Tobago" given in Woodford Square in July 1955, was concerned in large part with demonstrating the relevance of a Puerto Rican solution to Trinidad's development problem. Many Caribbean officials saw Operation Bootstrap as transforming Puerto Rico into a showcase for what American development policy could do for Latin American countries and therefore as a model or prototype that other Latin American countries should adopt as well. Operation Bootstrap's importance as a model for other countries became evident in the Cold War, when many Latin American and Caribbean countries took a capitalist strategy that

⁴⁵⁴ Lilia Fernandez, "Of Immigrants and Migrants: Mexican and Puerto Rican Labor Migration in Comparative Perspective, 1942-1964," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29, no. 3 (2010): 15-16.

relied upon private investment from the United States as a direct counter to Cuba's strategy, which sought independence from traditional American economic domination. Williams, in his struggle for the national independence of the islands, was primarily concerned with political independence and industrialization on the islands. Like Galarza, he was concerned with his region's development and uplift.⁴⁵⁵ To Williams, it seemed crop diversification, land reform, labor relief, and a labor importation program to bring money to the Caribbean could each be a sound solution to make economic development possible.

Williams did not see collaboration with the U.S. in his development campaign as a continuation of colonialism but rather as a form of economic aid. Williams stated in his December 1960 Massa Day Done speech, "the Second World War meant the end of Massa Day," or the end of colonialism and the rise of national independence. Williams upheld in the speech, "Men and women all over the world are on the march... They are resolved, as we must be, that there is no more imperialism within our own society than in the society of nations..." This he quoted from a book by politician Wendell Wilkie, *One World* (1940), a book that advocated increased U.S. global intervention after the war. In other words, empire was impossible to imagine within the concept of "nation." Williams wrote the speech as part of his campaign for office as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, having created his own political party: the People's National Movement (PNM). He further stated, "today, with the PNM, those who were considered by Massa unfit for self-government, permanently reduced to a status of inferiority, are on the verge of full control of their internal affairs and on the threshold, in their federation, of national independence." According to Williams, the PNM stood for the dignity for West Indian

⁴⁵⁵ Frazier, E. Franklin, and Eric Eustace Williams, *The Economic Future of the Caribbean*, Seventh Annual Conference of the Division of Social Sciences (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press), 1944.

labor, for the equality of races, interracial solidarity, economic development, education, and uplift, “without any special privilege being granted to race, colour, class, creed, national origin, or previous condition of servitude.”⁴⁵⁶ He would win office and become the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago less than one year after the speech, as the “father of the nation,” ending official British colonialism on the islands.

It is important to note that when Williams entered politics, he did so with a personal commitment to expose colonialism and imperialism. Before becoming Prime Minister, Williams went on a political campaign against the U.S. Chaguaramas Base in Trinidad, attacking past policies of both Britain and United States in the Caribbean, using the base in Trinidad as a rallying point for Trinidad’s nationalism in 1959. By March 1960, he used the base location issue as the embodiment of national independence, a test of Trinidad’s political will such that the United States eventually “gave” the base to Trinidad.⁴⁵⁷ His actions expressed anti-colonialism towards the United States, even as he enticed U.S. investments. While Williams exposed the military bases as vestiges of imperial rule, he was unable to view economic intervention or “free trade” as imperial processes, blinded by the promises of self-representation under nationhood and national development. Like many involved in the black anti-colonial movement, he did not realize that “nation” itself was part of the problem, or that seeking statist-solutions might further perpetuate imperial processes on the islands. As Williams’ support of Operation Bootstrap demonstrates, the link between the state and empire remained separated from the nationalist project in places like Jamaica and Trinidad, as political leaders sought to gain the “equality of

⁴⁵⁶ Eric Williams, “Massa Day Done,” in *Eric E. Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence*, ed. Selwyn Reginald Cudjoe (Wellesley, Mass.: Calaloux Publications, 1993), 253-254.

⁴⁵⁷ This base had emerged as part of the Bases-for-Destroyers deal the United States had signed with Great Britain in 1940. Ken Boodhoo, *The Life of Eric Williams* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002), 102, 112-113.

nations” for the Caribbean. In 1963, Williams committed Trinidad to the principles and objectives of the UN in solidarity with the western world, for a world trading arrangement that recognized the rights of the less developed countries.⁴⁵⁸ Just as when he was a member of the AACC, Williams did not mind foreign investments in the Caribbean, as long as the islands had self-representation. He could not see his nation-led anti-imperialism as a factor in both eliding and innovating on former imperial processes.

As in the case of Puerto Rico, the “bootstrap” approach failed in Trinidad, as unemployment rose from six percent in 1956 to fifteen percent by 1966.⁴⁵⁹ By 1970, the characteristic feature of the Trinidad economy was its highly dependent nature—dependent on foreign ownership over the economy, external trade, and foreign aid resources. Meanwhile, the Caribbean economies became increasingly dependent on the Caribbean guestworker programs, both as an added source of income and as a solution to the continued problem of unemployment on the islands. For example, Norman Manley’s People’s National Party (PNP) in Jamaica did not challenge the administration of the farmworker programs. The Jamaican media published few disparaging accounts of the inequalities, exploitations, and contract violations of the Caribbean labor programs, resulting in very little public outcry against the programs. Instead, the labor programs came to be seen as an “aid program” in which Caribbean workers were given the opportunity to earn the money that they received from U.S. growers. The PNP was thus inclined to defend the labor programs, even as Jamaicans and other Caribbean workers sought out contract jobs even more desperately. Faced with either rural unemployment many rallied for the labor programs, such that when radio stations announced that U.S. recruiters were coming on a specific day, ten men would arrive for every job available. By 1960, forty percent of Jamaican

⁴⁵⁸ Boodhoo, *The Life of Eric Williams*, 115, 121.

⁴⁵⁹ Boodhoo, *The Life of Eric Williams*, 58.

men headed to the United States for employment.⁴⁶⁰ Eventually, the Jamaican Labour Party (JPL) in Jamaica used the farmworker program as a means to secure the patronage and vote of Jamaican workers, such that the Caribbean labor programs became a means for the state to secure approval in the Caribbean after British colonialism had ended, rather than a point of anti-colonial critique.⁴⁶¹ Backed into a corner by poverty exacerbated by U.S.-led investments and loans, the new anti-colonial governments ensured the guestworker programs remained a feature of the now independent Caribbean nations throughout the rest of the twentieth century until today.

Conclusion

When U.S. officials took on an anti-colonial agenda it became increasingly difficult for them to discern the difference between “economic,” “social welfare,” and “security” interests in the Caribbean. The pursuit of national-security assets in U.S.-British West Indies relations (military bases) and the creation of the AACC demonstrated this difficulty well; both created political and economic stability on the islands to ensure “free trade” within a pattern of Anglo-American “collaboration” in empire. By the end of the 1940s, the United States search for U.S. national security was global in scale and sought to secure military power and a favorable economic order as a means to protect U.S. prosperity—by keeping the Caribbean and Latin America open to U.S. investments and open as a source of cheap and exploitable labor.⁴⁶² As

⁴⁶⁰ Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land*, 101-102.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 191-193.

⁴⁶² Parker, *Brother’s Keeper*, 10, 30, 35; David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Co-operation* (London: Europa Publications, 1981), 174. Note: After the war, the AACC became the Caribbean Commission (CC) in 1946 as the organization joined with France and the Netherlands. By the time of the Cold War, the Caribbean Commission retracted from its reformism on the islands, solely seeking to prevent communism from growing in the region.

seen in the case of Eric Williams and the independence of Trinidad, the end result was the continuation of U.S. influence and access to Caribbean markets and resources. During the Cold War, U.S. state officials folded the British colonies into its hemispheric security arrangements and retreated from any type of “reform” at all. Once U.S. state officials had taken on the mission of anti-colonial advocacy and sanctified the nation-state (through, for example, the access to “rights” and economic remittances of the labor programs, which would set the British West Indies on the path to independence), they then used the nation-state as a device to govern the islands, and, later, the globe, advancing U.S. expansion and empire.⁴⁶³

At the heart of the United States granting of liberal subjectivity to colonial and postcolonial populations was the concept of racial equality, for it was only through racial equality that self-government and independence could be granted to former colonial possessions. Racism never went away, but, rather, was replaced by a type of racism that disavowed white supremacy and upheld liberal anti-racism as the key to the democratic future of all nations. While the labor programs promised health, education, sustenance, security, and greater access to political rights, these measures, extending universalizing inclusion to the workers, resulted in racialized exclusion and deportation. If the workers expressed self-governance, in the presumed agency assigned to them by the labor contract agreements, they were automatically deported, nullifying the “free consent” offered to them through the labor programs. The self-determination and happiness promised them by the labor programs, as well as the extension of independent

⁴⁶² From 1946 to 1948, further labor riots characterized the islands, as the military bases and the extraction of oil, bauxite, and other resources from the region had failed to benefit workers. The continuation of the labor programs was therefore needed as a measure and continued means to pacify worker unrest.

⁴⁶³ For more on the anti-imperial movement in Latin America, see Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

nationalism to British colonial subjects in the Caribbean, was therefore a ruse to secure the labor of colonial populations seemingly without force or enslavement, even as the British Caribbean achieved what many black activists in the Caribbean and the United States had desired all along: post-colonial independence. The British West Indian labor programs therefore demonstrate that imperialism and nation are impossible to disaggregate, since the concept of “nation” perfunctorily implies empire.

Epilogue

Civil Rights for Whom? U.S. Civil Rights and the Labor Importation Programs

Familiar narratives and images of the civil rights movement rarely include U.S. labor importation programs with Mexico, but, through this project, I discovered that the labor programs had everything to do with civil rights. In 1957, Ernesto Galarza titled his first book against the exploitation of the Bracero Program, *Strangers in Our Fields: Based on a Report Regarding Compliance with the Contractual, Legal, and Civil Rights of Mexican Agricultural Workers in the United States*. As the title suggests, Galarza's critique of the Bracero Program had everything to do with the "contractual," "legal," and "civil rights" of the Mexican agricultural laborer. So had his initial support of a state-managed Mexican labor migration program. Although it is true that U.S. guestworker programs have not figured prominently, if at all, in historical narratives of the long civil rights movement—conceived and framed primarily as a black-white movement focused on state reforms—my research suggests that their coincident emergence in the 1940s largely explains their eventual disaggregation in historical interpretations and political imaginations. The importation and racialization of Mexican workers in and through the Bracero Program, I argue, helped to define conceptions of civil rights in the ensuing decades.

Back in 1941, on the eve of U.S. entry into World War II, A. Philip Randolph spearheaded a popular campaign for the civil rights of African Americans. Having led the formation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first predominantly black labor union, he called on African Americans to march on Washington to demand an end to racial segregation in the U.S. military and to racial discrimination in employment in the defense industries. Under mounting pressure, President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to create the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) through Executive Order 8802 in June 1941. Galarza supported the

measure and pressed for the extension of similar protections to Mexican American workers, including braceros. The second stipulation of the Bracero Program contract agreement stated: “Mexicans entering the United States as result of this understanding shall not suffer discriminatory acts of any kind in accordance with the Executive Order 8802 issued at the White House June 25, 1941.” With very limited authority to begin with, the FEPC never had the resources to ban discriminatory acts, particularly those committed by employers against braceros. The promise of equal opportunity-- “regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin”—and federal enforcement nevertheless proved crucial to legitimizing U.S. labor importation programs and to bolstering U.S. standing in the world.⁴⁶⁴

As Randolph and others organized for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, including the iconic March on Washington for “jobs and freedom” in 1963, Randolph spoke out against the Bracero Program. In 1958, he launched the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor (NACFL) as a fact-finding agency and lobbying force whose goal was to build public awareness of the substandard living conditions of farm laborers in the United States. The organization, according to an NAFCL pamphlet, desired to “help these fellow Americans attain equal protection under our laws....[and] create better understanding of the needs of the poorest and least protected of our working people—the farm workers.”⁴⁶⁵ Between 1959 and 1964, with Randolph serving as co-chair, the NACFL held multiple hearings on farm labor and rural poverty

⁴⁶⁴ Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: the March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for FEPC* (New York: Atheneum, 1969); Merl Elwyn Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement : The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Cornelius Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

⁴⁶⁵ “Farm Labor Organizing, 1905-1967: A Brief History,” National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor (July 1967). Available at University of California, San Diego Libraries and accessed online on 8 June 2016: <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/essays/essays/history%20of%20farm%20labor.pdf>.

and sent out information letters to its members in its campaign to obtain collective bargaining rights for farm workers. Like the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU), the NAFCL worked with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to abolish the Bracero Program, “primarily concerned with the adverse effects which the bracero program has had.” Randolph characterized the Bracero Program as a “federal subsidy in the form of cheap labor.” An information letter by the NAFCL stated, “adverse effect can be minimized by the Department of Labor but it cannot be eliminated until this country puts an end to all programs of cheap imported labor.” The NAFCL called not only to end the Bracero Program, but also for “a firm policy to protect the rights of domestic workers.” It sought to unionize domestic farmworkers and to prevent growers from hiring braceros to replace domestic workers during strikes. “I question whether there is a need for importing braceros from out of state....,” a witness testified at a hearing, “there is absolutely no question that they replace American citizens in jobs.” Though not unconcerned with the program’s adverse effects on braceros, the NAFCL was concerned foremost about the rights of “American citizens,” not the rights of braceros. Referring to braceros as “cheap imported workers who are in a strange land, unable to speak the language, unfamiliar with American concepts of fair labor standards, and who, because they can be deported at a moment’s notice, are easily intimidated,” the NAFCL argued that it was “no longer meaningful to speak of reforming the programs.”⁴⁶⁶

If Randolph and Galarza disagreed on the possibility of reforming the Bracero Program, they both emphasized the foreignness of braceros and racialized Mexicans against “American”

⁴⁶⁶ NAFCL Information Letter #19, April 1962; Statement of Frederick Van Dyke of the NAFCL, 7 March 1961; Letter from Fay Bennett, Secretary of the NAFCL, 26 October 1961; NAFCL Pamphlet, “PL-78 How it Works,” Letter to A. Philip Randolph, from Myer Feldman, Deputy Special Counsel to the President, RG 211, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Entry 25, Box 2, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

workers in the process. In part as a result of the racial politics of the Cold War, “civil rights” had become the rights of those who lived within the United States and claimed U.S. citizenship. By the 1950s, in response to the anticommunist crusade, many leaders of the civil rights movement and the labor movement focused on “protecting an American standard of living,” not waging a global campaign against colonialism and labor exploitation.⁴⁶⁷ Randolph’s call to end the Bracero Program rested fundamentally on appeals to the federal government to protect American workers, an argument that excluded “guestworkers” from the inclusionary goals of the civil rights movement. Envisioning racial equality for citizens within the United States pushed braceros and other contract workers out of the picture.

Labor importation programs likewise sanctified the nation-state form, helping to usher in a U.S.-led international order. Civil rights leader and political scientist Ralph Bunche, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 and a “Medal of Freedom” by President John F. Kennedy in 1963, began his career as an investigative researcher and writer for Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (1944), a landmark study on the racial limits and contradictions of U.S. democracy. During World War II, Bunche worked in the Office of Strategic services (OSS), the precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency, as a senior analyst on colonial affairs. He later became one of the leaders of the Institute of Pacific Relations and in 1945 participated in the preliminary planning of the United Nations. Bunche’s international vision emerged in part from what he saw as the success of the Anglo American Caribbean Commission (AACC), which had helped to create the British West Indies labor programs. The AACC, in his mind, marked a new era of international organization and cooperation—a regional association of and for “dependent territories” or colonies. In quick order, Bunche argued, the

⁴⁶⁷ Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

AACC “presented an impressive demonstration of the possibilities in institutionalized regional cooperation” and established a precedent for the United Nations.⁴⁶⁸ With the United States guiding “emerging nations” through the transition to independence, Bunche imagined a gradual dismantling of the old colonial order.

By insisting on the U.S. state’s capacity to grant freedom to Mexican migrant workers—either through their inclusion or exclusion—and to the colonies of the British West Indies, Bunche, Randolph, Galarza, and others helped to make those workers and (future) nation-states subject to U.S. state power. Projecting liberal agency onto Mexican and British West Indian workers—they were “voluntary” contract workers—simultaneously made them subject to the U.S. state, in the interrelated processes of recruitment, regulation, and deportation. It was the *creation* of these workers as liberal subjects that provided the U.S. government with the *capacity* to expel them. Liberal inclusion produced the condition of possibility for state violence and U.S. hegemony after World War II. Throughout his long career, Galarza attempted to reconcile liberal inclusion and state violence, never quite recognizing that one produced the other. The crux of the problem of “guestworker” importation programs and of national independence in the Caribbean was that they maintained the fiction of the liberal promise of freedom and thereby served as the means through which Mexican and Caribbean workers became racialized subjects of an expanding U.S. state, within and beyond national borders.

Some black leaders refused to limit their visions of social justice to state-centered reforms. Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), for example, criticized the

⁴⁶⁸ Ralph J. Bunche, “The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission: An Experiment in Regional Cooperation,” *The American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations for the 9th conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1945); Robert A. Hill and Edmond J. Keller, *Trustee for the Human Community: Ralph J. Bunche, the United Nations, and the Decolonization of Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

domesticated civil rights movement that had become focused on “individual rights” and “integration.” Desegregation was not enough, he argued, because it was about the individual black citizen rather than “the black community.” Instead of turning to the federal government for state-mandated equality, Carmichael spoke of connecting a solidarity between black people in the United States and Latin Americans against U.S. imperialism, through concrete working relationships. In a speech titled “Solidarity with Latin America” at the First Conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (1967) in Cuba, he stated: “We share with you a common struggle, it becomes increasingly clear; we have a common enemy. Our enemy is white Western imperialist society. Our struggle is to overthrow this system that feeds itself and expands itself through the economic and cultural exploitation of non-white, non-Western peoples—of the Third World.” “Anglo society has been nearly successful in keeping all of us, the oppressed the Third World, separated and fragmented....” he continued. “At the present moment, the power structure has sown the seeds of hate and discord between African Americans and Spanish-speaking peoples in the large cities....we recognize this as the old trick of ‘divide and conquer’ and we are working to see that it does not succeed this time.” Carmichael called for global solidarities since “[o]ur destiny cannot be separated from the destiny of the Spanish-speaking people in the United States and of the Americas.” “Our victory will not be achieved unless they celebrate their liberation side by side with us,” he concluded, “for it is not their struggle, but our struggle together.”⁴⁶⁹

Carmichael was aware of the power of the U.S. state over the lives of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the grave limits of looking to the state for progressive

⁴⁶⁹ Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation,” (September 1966) and “Solidarity with Latin America,” (July 1967) in *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2007), 35, 101, 104.

social change. He stated, “the food that Ralph Bunche eats doesn’t fill my stomach.”⁴⁷⁰ For Carmichael, a state-centered approach to racial equality through state-managed desegregation was becoming the problem, not the solution. “Integration speaks not at all to the problem of poverty, only to the problem of blackness,” he argued. “Integration today means the man who ‘makes it,’ leaving his black brothers behind in the ghetto as fast as his new sports car will take him. It has no relevance to the Harlem wino or to the cotton-picker making three dollars a day.”⁴⁷¹ By extension, the celebration of national independence and international cooperation, as embodied by the labor importation programs, had little relevance to the daily struggles of Caribbean and Mexican contract workers in the fields. Carmichael’s observations compel us to reckon with the intimate historical connections between the politics of race, immigration, and anticommunist repression.

Caribbean and Mexican workers engaged in their own efforts to challenge the power of the state over their lives, developing their own language for critiquing the labor programs. For example, one bracero contested the “freedom” of the labor programs, pointing out that it was better to avoid a labor contract: “it is better to be a free worker. . . .that way you can choose your boss. This way they tell you you have to fulfill your contract before you can transfer to another job. They will not let you pick your boss. It makes us feel like we have been sold.”⁴⁷² For these workers, the promise of contractual rights or “civil rights” never came to fruition. Placing the labor programs with Mexico and the Caribbean in relation to one another and in relation to different historical contexts demonstrates how liberal reformers within and outside the U.S. state

⁴⁷⁰ Stokely Carmichael, “Who Is Qualified?” *New Republic* (January 1966), in *Stokely Speaks*, 11.

⁴⁷¹ Stokely Carmichael, “What We Want,” *New York Review of Books*, vol. 7 (September 1966), in *Stokely Speaks*, 5-6.

⁴⁷² Galarza Interview at Camp McCallum in Salinas, California, 4 October 1955, Box 18, Folder 6, Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Ernesto Galarza Papers (EGP).

elided and reproduced race and empire under the guise of civil rights and international collaboration. I do not mean to suggest that we dismiss or abandon the meanings and language of civil rights and anticolonial national independence. But my dissertation challenges us to ask a deeper question. Civil rights and freedom, but for whom and at what costs?

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