

**THE WAGES OF BORDERS: POLITICAL ECONOMY, LABOR ACTIVISM,
AND RACIAL FORMATION IN THE IMPERIAL-MEXICALI BORDERLANDS,
1937-1979**

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Abstract

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The Wages of Borders: Political Economy, Labor Activism, and Racial Formation in the Imperial-Mexicali Borderlands, 1937-1979, is a historical investigation of the paradoxical formation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands that encouraged and facilitated the movement of capital while simultaneously restricting and regulating the movement of workers. Centered in southeast California's Imperial Valley and the city of Mexicali in the Mexican state of Baja California Norte, *The Wages of Borders* traces the transition toward and celebration of a borderless capitalist landscape that led to passage of neoliberal deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994. At the same time, this dissertation explains the simultaneous entrenchment of racial and national borders to contain and control workers' movements and the strategies that working peoples used to challenge and transcend those borders after the end of the joint U.S.-Mexico guest-worker Bracero Program in 1964. Through critical examination of elite

economic visions for the borderlands and workers' use of collective bargaining, labor boards, and healthcare as both reification and resistance of elite planning, *The Wages of Borders* captures how laborers attempted to forge both nation-based solutions and cross-border alliances to address the transnational realities of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

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During the question portion of a public lecture I delivered at San Diego State University, Imperial Valley Campus, an audience member asked me a question I struggled to answer. It was not a question about policy, unions, race, or border making. The person asked me, “How did you get so much passion for this?” I wrestled with many streams of thought as each competed for space in my mind. I was trained to think critically, think historically, and constructively respond to inquiries, especially in front of a microphone and a lectern. I continued to search for a response. While much of my dedication to history stems from my drive to understand the past and understand its legacies in the present, I have not done it alone and would not be able to complete this project without the selflessness and investment from many people. My apologies in advance to those people not mentioned here.

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Introduction

During the 2018 Mexican presidential election, three-time candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador ran on a leftist and nationalist platform that appealed to the masses of the voting public. Known by his initials, AMLO conjured up the spirit of the much-lauded former president Lázaro Cárdenas, who in the 1930s incorporated labor into the mainstream political machine, redistributed land to peasants, and nationalized the oil industry. AMLO's political party, *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* (National Regeneration Movement, MORENA, Mexican Spanish for "dark brown") not only won the election, it also broke from the two dominant parties in Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party and the National Action Party. AMLO promised more resources for public education, better pensions, government accountability, respect for indigenous peoples and rights, and vowed that Mexico would not yield to the demands of U.S. president Donald Trump to "build the wall." Yet, AMLO soon entered into two key agreements with the Trump administration: renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement and detaining Mexican and Central American migrants in northern Mexico. The two agreements between leftist and conservative national governments highlight the centrality of competing ideas of movement on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, neoliberal political economies and immigration issues, and elite views of working-class peoples as secondary actors in transborder spaces.

The Wages of Borders: Political Economy, Labor Activism, and Racial Formation in the Imperial-Mexicali Borderlands, 1937-1979, examines how border making, as a project of racialized mobility and capitalism, intersects with labor organizing and class identities for the peoples that live in the liminal space of the late twentieth-century U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Informed by political economy, border studies, labor studies, critical race theory, and oral history, *The Wages of Borders* traces the links between border regimes and quotidian life on both

sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Through the study of race, labor, transborder organizing, *The Wages of Borders* theorizes movement and what I term the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics to illuminate the ways workers shaped and utilized state institutions and union activism to respond to their transborder lives.

In order to unpack the history of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands during a significant shift in political economy, notions of labor and workers, and changing border regimes on both sides of the border, *The Wages of Borders* asks, how was the development of the borderlands influenced by economic and political powerbrokers on both sides of the border during the mid-twentieth century? To what extent did these elites push for a fluid Imperial-Mexicali borderlands? In what ways did workers in the region's most visible economic sectors, agriculture in the Imperial Valley and industry in Mexicali, respond to changes in labor markets and strategize to uphold and advance labor rights? What impact did both political economy projects and labor organizing have on ideas of Mexican labor and border hierarchies?

The Wages of Borders reveals the historical processes embedded in racialized border security projects, trade deals favoring U.S. capital and Mexican economic power brokers, and the strategies of working peoples on both sides of the border. Utilizing local newspapers and state documents from the United States and Mexico, I explain elites' promotion for cross-border openness rather than firm border control. Juxtaposing records from the United Farm Workers, labor arbitration cases from maquiladora (assembly) workers in Mexicali and farmworkers in California, and oral histories with field and industrial workers, I demonstrate how the development of worker strategies through vigilante policing, exclusive citizenship, inclusive healthcare, and labor courts were uneven national solutions for transborder realities.

By examining the movements of labor and capital through policymakers, businesspeople, and workers, I argue that movement was the central facet of border spaces that defined, challenged, and reinforced power relations between and within Mexico and the United States. I use the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics to demonstrate how workers succeeded in recruitment, negotiations, and organizing only by depending on one another regardless of citizenship status, place of residence, and disinvesting from draconian policies of immigration policing and deportation. *The Wages of Borders* also asks scholars to understand the power of Mexican and Latino/a migrants and labor unions to expand the concept of an “American” working class, one that challenged transnational companies in labor arbitration boards in California and Baja California and pushed for healthcare on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The title of this project, *The Wages of Borders*, calls for a nuanced interpretation of the (re)making of the borderlands. The title underscores W.E.B Du Bois’s articulation of the “psychological wage” in his seminal work, *Black Reconstruction*, where white workers elevated themselves above black workers through a white supremacist view of societal and workplace relations. David Roediger later expanded the race “wage” idea in his classic study, *Wages of Whiteness*, by showing how whiteness came to dominate the privileged position of white wage laborers as opposed to African American slaves and free blacks. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson defined capitalism and capital accumulation as racial capitalism; that is, capitalism was built on the foundations of white supremacy and the legitimation of white history as opposed to

subaltern histories.¹ There were numerous borders—labor, class, citizenship, belonging, gender—where meanings of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands were waged and contested.

The Imperial-Mexicali borderlands is an agricultural, industrial, and commercial hub in a hostile desert. The constructed region is located in the eastern portion of southern California and Baja California and bounded by Riverside County to the north, San Diego County and Tijuana to the west, and Arizona and Sonora to the east. Geographically, the region is in the western Sonoran Desert and situated between the low-level mountain ranges of the Chocolate Mountains to the northeast, the Sawtooth and Laguna Mountains to the west, the Salton Sea to the north, sand dunes to the east, and the Colorado River and its delta to the south. Summer temperatures constantly top 100 degrees and winters rarely produce crop freezes, making the area ideal for year-round farming. Winds from the west and north signal cooler weather during periods of higher temperatures while wind systems from the south and east foretell bursts of warmer and humid weather. Regardless of the direction of the winds, each aerial movement guarantees an increase in dust while sweeping away smog that stagnates in the shared valleys' air.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the Imperial-Mexicali valleys was constructed in a contrast unlike any area of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The Imperial-Mexicali valleys was bifurcated by the U.S.-Mexico border and painted by disparate urban and economic planning policies. Largely dominated by agribusiness in Imperial County and manufacturing in Mexicali, these designed economies reveal the ways that commercial and political powerbrokers imagined the borderlands, what historian Geraldo Cadava identifies in his inquiry, “How two borderlands

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Brooklyn: Verso, 1991); Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2000).

so close together developed so differently.”² In 1960, the Imperial Valley contained over 500,000 acres of farmable land and irrigation channels in excess of 1,000 miles to feed a wide range of truck crops. There was little doubt that the valley was marked for and by agriculture. This ensured that early twentieth-century settler yeoman farmers fantasies and verdant fields dominated the valley’s visual and economic landscape. Mexicali’s optical horizon was the inverse of the Imperial Valley’s. To be sure, agriculture and animal husbandry formed key factors in Mexicali’s economy, but Mexicali and Mexico’s post World-War II emphasis shifted to manufacturing, seen via policies such as import-substitution, the duty-free zone, and courting of U.S. transnational firms. Industrialization was complemented by an expanding urban environment and economy with dozens of *colonias* (neighborhoods), streets, and thoroughfares.

For twenty-two years, growers in the Imperial Valley used the Bracero Program to both fill the ranks of deportable Mexican labor and also create a tense atmosphere for agricultural unions, as discussed in chapter 3. The conclusion of the Bracero Program signaled a change in labor and immigration policy, but not a cessation to growers’ demand for Mexican workers. Growers moved quickly and extended the use of Mexican workers that possessed “green cards,” either resident aliens or visitors. This “commuter” system was already in effect on the Canadian and Mexican borders. Even as the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act placed immigration quotas on the previously excluded Western Hemisphere, it also enabled family reunification, which many longtime residents used, and growers also helped arrange paperwork for some workers. Both the Bracero Program and the 1965 act also gave rise to increasing numbers of undocumented migration, which was often also a form of “commuter” labor.

² Geraldo L. Cadava, “Borderlands of Modernity and Abandonment: The Lines within Ambos Nogales and the Tohono O’odham Nation,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no.2, (1 September 2011), 362.

The differences in Imperial Valley's and Mexicali's political economies reveal elites' disparate economic and urban planning unlike other twin cities or twin areas across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. A key distinguishing feature of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands was and remains its political economies and inverse spatial layout. To be clear, these economic landscapes were designed and maintained by elite political and economic interests. In the early twentieth century, agriculture was the dominant industry on both sides of the border. Water from the Colorado River flowed into to the valleys via canals, sustaining vegetable, fruit, and cotton production on both sides of the border. Indeed, cotton was the economic giant in Mexicali until the 1960s witnessed a combination of water salinity, bollworms, and falling cotton prices, as discussed in chapter 2. Through a combination of the Mexican government initiatives, especially the Bracero Program, the designation of Mexicali as the state capital of Baja California, the duty-free import zone (*zona libre*), the border modernization policies of the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (National Border Program) and the transnational capital-friendly Border Industrialization Program collectively pointed to Mexicali's primary investment in industry. By the mid-1950s and throughout the 1970s, U.S. transnational companies like Kenworth Mexicana and Mextel dotted Mexicali's urban landscape. Indeed, between 1970 and 1979, maquilas in Mexicali grew from 22 plants with 5,000 employees to 77 plants with 7,965 workers, respectively.³ Moreover, prior to its closure in 1975, Mextel was the largest private employer in Mexicali. A once remote outpost in the early twentieth was transformed into a major urban and commercial zone throughout the period of this study.

In the Imperial Valley, however, growers maintained an unprecedented level of power to maintain the economic status quo. With slightly over 500,000 acres of farmed land in 1960, that

³ Leslie Sklair, *Assembling for Development: The Maquila Industry in Mexico and the United States* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 81, 93, 99.

figure increased to 612,751 acres in 1976. The Imperial Irrigation District, the valley's water and electricity company, created a list of "million dollar crops" that included twenty agricultural products ranging from cattle (\$107 million), lettuce (\$69 million), sugar beets (\$37 million), cantaloupes (\$14 million), and asparagus (\$8 million).⁴ This half-billion dollar industry provided little incentive for growers and policymakers to change course. In between the lucrative fields were the valley's principal cities of Brawley, Imperial, El Centro, and Calexico. Unlike Mexicali, agribusiness accommodated minimal urban development, thus preserving the primacy of agriculture in the Imperial Valley throughout the period of this study and beyond. Importantly, in both the Imperial Valley and Mexicali, the lines between policymakers and business actors were often blurred. The heads of the U.S. transnational companies in Mexicali, Gustavo Vildósola Castro and Edmundo Guajardo, benefitted from family members who voted on policy in the state congress. Growers in the Imperial Valley likewise maintained a stronghold in the Imperial Irrigation District and had a fellow grower, Victor V. Veysey, serve both in the California state assembly and Congress. Political and economic powerbrokers wielded their influence to metamorphosize the shared valley for capital accumulation, creating an unparalleled juxtaposition along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Together, U.S. and Mexican economic and immigration policies shaped population growth in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. According to Norma Fimbres Durazo, a scholar of the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, the *zona libre* was integral to "maintain the region's population" while the "Bracero Program...strengthened the migratory flow into the City of Mexicali as an obligatory crossing point" to the United States by peoples mostly from the central

⁴ "Imperial Irrigation District Annual Inventory of Areas Receiving Water, Years 1976, 1975, 1974;" Agri-Business," Imperial Irrigation District 1976 Annual Report, box 23, folder 7, Ben Yellen Papers, Special Collections, UC San Diego Libraries, La Jolla, CA.

Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas.⁵ Throughout the 1950s and 1970s, the U.S. side remained emerald with pockets of asphalt, concrete, and stucco in cities like Brawley, El Centro, and the border town of Calexico. In 1950, the entire Imperial County contained 62,975 people and increased to 92,110 in 1980. Mexicali's urban center clustered and extended in all directions from the international port of entry adjacent to Calexico. In 1950, the city of Mexicali (as opposed to the larger municipality/county level of the same name) contained a population of 64,609, a figure that exploded to 349,931 in 1980.⁶ Additionally, only one of the valley's cities, El Centro, had a larger population of 20,000 in 1980. Mexicali's urban sprawl pushed agriculture further away from the city, signaling Mexicali's priorities and providing a visual contrast to the Imperial Valley's primary investment in agriculture and smaller cities.

The divergent population figures and political economies illuminate the significant influence of Imperial and Mexicali economic and political elites to shape the landscape. Indeed, the contrasting economic projects in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands differentiate the area from other twin spaces on the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S.-Mexico border contains a series of ports of entry stretching from Tijuana-San Diego in California to Brownsville-Matamoros in Texas. While some twin cities and twin areas contain large urban environments, especially Tijuana-San Diego, Nuevo Laredo-Laredo, Ciudad Juárez-El Paso, and Matamoros-Brownsville, others contain more modest populations on both sides of the international border. These spaces see larger populations on the Mexican side of the border than on the U.S. side. The Imperial-Mexicali borderlands fits within the latter profile, but with Mexicali as a city alone—again, not

⁵ Norma Fimbres Durazo, "Capitalist Development and Population Growth in the County of Imperial, California, and Mexicali, Baja California," in *Imperial-Mexicali Valleys: Development and Environment of the U.S.-Mexican Border Region*, eds. Kimberly Collins, Paul Ganster, et al., (San Diego: SDSU Press, 2004), 47-49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

including the larger municipality boundaries—far outpacing the entire Imperial County unseen in other twin cities or twin areas.

The Wages of Borders is periodized during a pivotal, yet understudied, moment in labor, migration, and economic histories of the United States and Mexico. The crux of this study's analysis is between the years 1964 and 1979, which signal both a post-Bracero Program labor market and the development of neoliberalism prior to the often-cited North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994). The focus on capital-friendly borders was complemented by increasing attention on immigration reform. That is, the movement of capital was promoted while the mobility of bodies was restricted. The end of the Bracero Program in 1964 and the initiation of the Border Industrialization Program in 1965, are central facets of a changing borderlands. As I argue in chapter 2, scholars must even look to earlier periods of U.S. and northern Mexican commercial dealings to interrogate a growing transnational economic culture intent on establishing a flexible U.S.-Mexico border. Nevertheless, the end of the Bracero Program and start of the Border Industrialization Program altered the ways Imperial Valley growers and Mexican industrialists engaged their respective state and federal governments and workers. For example, up until the late 1970s, the Mexican federal government aimed to prevent the migration of its citizens to the U.S. out of concern that Mexico would be deprived of workers. Maquiladoras were touted as job creators and a solution to rising unemployment, especially for women. Yet, these were dependent on Mexican policies of low wages, low tariffs, assembly for export, and ease of capital flows into Mexico, what scholars like Judith Stein identify as the core components of deindustrialization in the U.S. Even as Baja California and Mexicali business elites pushed for the maquilization of the northern borderlands, the Mexican

federal government worked to convince citizens to stay in Mexico as early as its cooperation with the U.S. during “Operation Wetback.”

The end of the Bracero Program triggered an active response from Imperial Valley growers with a complementary open border logic to Mexicali elites. As argued in chapter 1, growers worked to not only continue the Bracero Program beyond 1964, they warned of an economic and migration doomsday for the valley without deportable labor. Growers and even the valley’s agricultural landscape depended on removable and exploited Mexican workers. With the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Mexico was placed under a numerical quota, yet growers were able to get around the quota by employing Mexicans with permanent resident visas (“green cards”) obtained during the Bracero Program or through family reunification. The latter group of visas did not fall under the numerical of the 1965 immigration act. Seen together, the end of the Bracero Program, the quotas under the 1965 act, and grower activism reveal the U.S. federal government’s concern with immigration and valley growers’ efforts to maintain previous Mexican labor networks open. As seen in chapter 1, even as the U.S. secretary of labor called 1964 the “year of transition” away from bracero labor, many workers on the ground noted the similarities in workplace hierarchies and composition of the labor force.

The post-Bracero Program and pre-NAFTA period is vital to understanding the influence of the Imperial Valley and Mexicali on concepts of racialized Mexican labor on both sides of the border. Neoliberalism aims to create a borderless world to promote the movement of capital, yet this movement is rooted in regional and global inequalities. The international border marked a drastic contrast not only of economic landscapes, but also between the wages a person could obtain for similar work. One of the main driving points of the Bracero Program was that braceros could be paid at lower wages and could be deported or blacklisted for complaining about

working conditions. The notion of low-paid Mexican labor in the fields bled into U.S. transnational corporations' rise of offshore manufacturing and assembly, where Mexicali boosters not only touted Mexico's favorable maquila taxes, they also marketed Mexican labor as exponentially cost efficient in comparison to U.S. workers. With U.S. transnational corporations like Kenworth trucks and Mattel toys establishing operations in Mexicali, business leaders in that city celebrated their arrival as one of progress. The notion of progress reproduced both Mexicali *and* the Imperial Valley as a zone of low-wages and high returns, a shared space where the populations on both sides were heavily Mexican and Mexican descent.

The Wages of Borders directs attention to the important pitched confrontations between labor and capital on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. While the first two chapters of *The Wages of Borders* document business and political elite decisions, chapters three through five highlight worker agency on both sides of the border as they wrestled with shifting landscapes and attempted to construct a borderlands that responded to their needs and desires. As chapter 3 demonstrates, U.S. agricultural unions in the Imperial Valley struggled with the movement of braceros, Mexican commuter workers (those who lived in Mexicali and worked in the Imperial Valley), and undocumented workers. Unions like the National Farm Labor Union and the United Farm Workers (UFW) at various times attempted to organize field workers, often borrowing the language of the state in deportation and policing the border to safeguard their members' jobs from Mexican workers regardless of legal status. This racial formation was supported across the social and political spectrum as U.S. agricultural workers attempted to distinguish themselves from unsanctioned Mexican Others while the U.S. Border Patrol profiled Mexicans as perennially suspicious. The end of the Bracero Program contributed to commuter workers as a central facet of farm workers in the Imperial Valley and other areas along the U.S.-Mexico

border. Their active participation in the United Farm Workers compelled the union to be open about its recruitment of members, abandoning a previous union requirement that potential UFW members reside in the U.S., yet not wholly relinquish use of the Border Patrol against strikebreakers.

Through the lens of transborder organizing on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands, *The Wages of Borders* excavates an important and understudied aspect of the United Farm Workers and labor on the borderlands. Transborder organizing was critical to the life of the United Farm Workers. In order to attract and retain union members, the UFW listened to demands by commuter field workers, those who lived in Mexicali and worked in U.S. fields. As discussed in chapter 5, commuter workers wanted the union to offer healthcare in Mexicali so that spouses and dependents could access medical care not provided through the Mexican national health service and not have to cross into the valley for care. The latter was especially crucial for Mexicali field workers since 72-hour visas could encounter setbacks between time of application and issuance, a delay that many workers preferred to avoid for sick family members. The Chicano Movement in the Imperial Valley, though numerically small in comparison to major urban areas, also responded to migrant healthcare needs in the valley. Both medical programs were complementing strategies that sought to transcend the limits of borders by providing access to healthcare to migrant fieldworkers and their families. Though growers and conservative voices continued to see the border as a site of exploitable labor, the UFW and the Chicano Movement's *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* (Farmworker Healthcare Clinic) offered a counternarrative that understood the borderlands as a place of opportunity to launch an innovative social and labor policy that challenged the confines of a regulated and bifurcated border space. The transborder nature of field labor in the Imperial Valley signaled to the UFW and *Clinica* that their success

depended on efforts to organize and welcome peoples beyond borders or U.S. citizenship. By doing so, both organizations showed the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics as a departure from capitalism and U.S. nationalism. By looking at the UFW and Chicano Movement in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands, scholars may glean the importance of on-the-ground responses in an increasing neoliberal landscape.

In addition to organizing and recruiting members, labor unions on both sides of the border used labor law to push back against growers and industrialists. After the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, workers in the valley's vital economic sectors could access labor arbitration boards and push for execution of labor rights. Mexicali housed the *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board, JLCA) and the Imperial Valley and California contained the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB). Through a previously unused transborder analysis of labor boards, chapter 4 shows that workers at Mextel and the California fields often questioned the applicability of law to their context and at times created new case law in the process, including the recognition of farmworker dilapidated housing to allow the UFW access to these previously hidden-in-plain-sight dwellings. Workers in Mexicali and California used their hearings to ensure that the law was applied to employers while also creating new state-recognized definitions of workers through their legal challenges, including migrant and undocumented workers. The labor arbitration boards were thus critical sites where meanings of law, work, capital, and labor culture were debated, revealing the vacillating effectiveness of law as part of labor activism in both countries and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The labor boards on the California-Baja California Norte borderlands created alternative meanings of labor not reliant on ideas of passive Mexican workers.

Together, chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate what I term the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics. During the 1960s and 1970s, the United Farm Workers and laborers at the Mattel maquiladora in Mexicali, Mextel, demonstrated what I call the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics when they articulated critiques of U.S. capitalism or organized in both countries. The UFW initially relied on the U.S. deportation regime to assist its fight in the fields against growers who skirted labor and immigration law. Yet, the 1970s witnessed the UFW using the newly formed California Agricultural Labor Relations Board to seek lost wages and unjust dismissals for workers living in Mexicali as well as undocumented workers. Most striking was the UFW's healthcare plans, which offered medical clinics in Imperial and Mexicali at the same time as the Chicano Movement launched its own migrant health clinic in Imperial County. This imaginary "cast doubt on the extent to which capitalism penetrated and re-formed social life" and revealed the deployment of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *nepantla* to labor history, subaltern knowledges to challenge the power of the international border as a bifurcating force between peoples.⁷ The emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics "is a place of desired epistemological potential," where marginalized working peoples have demonstrated its transgressive power.⁸ The success and longevity of labor movements on both sides of the border relied on cooperation based on class and work.

⁷ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 170. At its core, *nepantla* knowledge and identity is embodied in a person existence within interstitial social, political, racial, political, and sexual spaces. This subaltern knowledge can be deployed in multiple settings as a survival mechanism in environment predicated on binaries and order. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), 29.

Historiography

Driving this study are critical interventions in border studies and labor studies. In her pioneering and influential work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as “an open wound” where distinct cultures meet to generate a borderlands culture. She also captured the economic and social implications of political economy on the borderlands, where U.S. capitalism and migration are constant features on both sides of the international boundary.⁹ Walter Mignolo echoes Anzaldúa’s insight as he pushes for an understanding of epistemological violence against marginalized knowledges, especially those that exist in the liminal space of social and political borderlands. He also points to the mutual constitution between “modern” and the colonial worldviews, indicating the intimacy between both worlds. Caroline Levine goes further and cautions against conceptualizing an overly-fluid borderlands, a formless world, “While it may be possible to rid ourselves of particular unjust totalities or binaries, it is impossible to imagine a society altogether free of organizing principles.”¹⁰ Levine’s point is not to censure a utopic vision, rather, it is to center forms of power so that multiple and moving oppressions and privileges may not go unnoticed to scholars. Even as *The Wages of Borders* argues for an emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics, it does so with a critical gaze on the material conditions and unequal power relations that necessitated this imaginary and was present throughout the period of this study.

Labor history on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands has received increased attention in recent years. Deborah Cohen and Mireya Loza have written important texts on the Bracero Program and the ways that braceros maneuvered through a disciplinary regime of deportation, though their studies largely end with the conclusion of the program and efforts by braceros to recoup

⁹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 25, 32.

¹⁰ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015), 9.

stolen wages from the Mexican federal government.¹¹ Lori Flores also points out that ethnic Mexican workers were often in competition over meanings of legitimate worker in California's Central Valley. More recently, Veronica Castillo-Muñoz has discussed the migration history of Mexicali and the gendered impact of agricultural colonization projects in Mexicali on women and bracero men, especially in relation to cotton and U.S. capitalism.¹² Benny Andrés has also provided a study on the development of a racialized system of white supremacy, labor, land, and water policy in the Imperial Valley and Mexicali before World War II. Jefferson Cowie discusses deindustrialization and offshore manufacturing (maquiladoras) as a “place-bound struggle over private investment,” where the creation of community-cum-company simultaneously constructed local barriers that prevented a regional and transnational labor movement when the company relocated to a new area and country.¹³

Along with labor history, *The Wages of Borders* engages with emerging literatures on the post-Bracero Program U.S.-Mexico borderlands. This growing field is well represented by historians Geraldo Cadava and Ana Raquel Minian. Cadava's book, *Standing on Common Ground*, provides a thorough analysis of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, directing attention to the ways that commercial interests fought for open borders, yet this same economic liberalism is what fed structures of inequality in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. *The Wages of Borders* is driven, in part, by Cadava's call to address the “pressing question” of the border by studying “how communities on either side of it [U.S.-Mexico border] negotiated their relationship to the international line and to one another, as well as how the interactions shaped

¹¹ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011); Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2016).

¹² Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016); Veronica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2017).

¹³ Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999), 11.

and reshaped the border's meanings into the twenty-first century."¹⁴ Minian's *Undocumented Lives* reveals undocumented migrants' ideas of place and citizenship as well situating the U.S. and Mexican state in affecting migration, issues especially acute between the Immigration Act of 1965 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.¹⁵ Collectively, these works reveal a type of common knowledge of struggle and movement for the peoples that live it, yet are often obfuscated in favor of simplified narratives rooted in binaries.

I offer a different perspective to post-Bracero Program literature. I propose that there was no end to the "American" working class since Mexican workers labored in United States agriculture and maquiladora workers worked chiefly for U.S. companies; that is, the American working class was much more diverse and transnational than the signifier, "American," permits. There is a temptation to unwittingly reproduce the language of the state, of "legal" and "illegal," with the latter existing as the scourge of the former, especially as it relates to labor organizing. *The Wages of Borders* underscores the necessity to approach labor in the borderlands beyond the dichotomy of "legal" and Other workers in a similar way that the UFW attempted to utilize and maquiladora workers sometimes expressed in Mexicali's *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board).

Recent literature on the United Farm Workers offer compelling interpretations of the union. Most tellingly, works by Frank Bardacke, Miriam Pawel, and Matt Garcia shed light on previously unwritten and unresearched facets of the union, allowing for strong critiques of the union's shifting directions and Cesar Chavez.¹⁶ The role of the truth-letting and shaming event

¹⁴ Geraldo Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 19.

¹⁵ Ana Raquel Minian, *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2018).

¹⁶ Frank Bardacke, *Trampling out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011); Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the*

known as “The Game” on UFW discipline and morale is particularly revealing of UFW leadership, but all three writers also situate their analyses based on the rank-and-file. Much of the literature on agricultural labor and the UFW tends to overwhelmingly favor the Central Valley, which formed the spiritual and geographic base of the UFW, along with the Coachella Valley and its grape industry. Perhaps unwittingly, the Imperial Valley is often bypassed as a micro region of agricultural labor organizing. *The Wages of Borders* intervenes in this literature by placing the Imperial Valley and Mexicali at the center. This move enables scholars to understand the efforts and challenges of the UFW in a transborder place unlike the fields of the Central Valley, especially as the union negotiated with its transborder members on meanings of healthcare and immigration.

Northern Mexico and the United States’ embrace of borderlands transnational industrialization via maquiladoras is the subject of extensive academic attention. Scholarly works on northern Mexico’s maquiladora industry center on three critical facets of maquiladoras. There are three key features of this literature. First, scholars connect the Border Industrialization Program and the rise of maquiladoras with the end of the Bracero Program.¹⁷ Scholars also highlight the feminization of maquiladora labor and employer assumptions of a docile labor force.¹⁸ More recently, scholars have shown the relationship between patriarchy, urbanization, and unchecked industrialization to the feminicides in cities such as Ciudad Juárez.¹⁹

Farm Worker Movement (Berkeley: UC Press, 2012); Miriam Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and the Struggle in Cesar Chavez’s Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Sklair, *Assembling for Development*; Alicia Schmidt-Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).

¹⁸ See *Women on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Responses to Change*, eds. Vicki Ruiz and Susan Tiano (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Norma Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana*, trans. Michael Stone and Gabrielle Winkler (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, UT Press, 1997); Devon Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: UT Press; CMAS Books, 1997).

¹⁹ *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).

I argue that maquiladoras must be understood as part of a longer trajectory of U.S. capitalism on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Interpreting maquiladoras as *the* process of industrialization in northern Mexico elides a much more dynamic history of transnational capitalism and border control where elite families worked in tandem with U.S. interests to influence Mexicali's development and identity. The focus placed on the Bracero Program-to-BIP progression presents a linear narrative belied by longstanding concerns of Mexicali's political economy and relationship to the U.S. It can also unintentionally reinforce the Mexican government's imagining of history and state duty. By analyzing the roots of the transnational firms Kenworth Mexicana and Mextel, I propose, scholars can understand the development of northern industrial exceptionalism that reproduced pejorative racial meanings of Mexican labor on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands that continue into the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1: Year of Transition?: Debates and Fears at the End of the Bracero Program

Introduction

In winter 1964, Mario Bustamante gathered his belongings and prepared to make his commute to work in the strawberry fields of the Central Valley, California. Born in 1943 in Mexico City, Bustamante moved to Mexicali, Mexico, when he was 20 years old. He decided to move for both personal and financial reasons. He already understood that part of his earnings were reserved for his mother in Mexico City; he also wanted to reunite with his father. His father preceded his move to the Mexican border city and worked for grower R.T. Englund, distributing food to braceros in the Salinas Valley. Recently arrived in Mexicali, Bustamante soon obtained a job at a butcher shop, preparing different cuts for the distinct palette of the Mexicali clientele. He sometimes waited along the U.S.-Mexico border fence to see if he could find his father amongst the numerous peoples returning/entering to Mexico from the U.S. Mostly, Bustamante saw hundreds of braceros dropped off by bus, marked by their work clothes and exhausted gait. Less than one year later, Bustamante joined the ranks of field workers from Mexico who labored alongside braceros at the tail end of the Bracero Program.¹ Mario Bustamante's transition from the butcher shop to the California fields, from Mexico City to Mexicali, from living in Mexico to a transborder life in California, was part of the larger political, economic, and labor changes occurring between 1960 and 1964. Bustamante formed part of the post-Bracero Program

¹ Mario Bustamante, interview by Michael D. Aguirre, January 4, 2016, El Centro, CA. Interview in author's possession. "Operation Wetback" was the name of the 1954 raids. However, I place the name in quotation marks for two reasons. First, leaving the name as an uncontested proper noun can potentially normalize the racial vernacular of the state. Second, the quotation marks draw the reader's attention to the project of containment of undesirable Mexican bodies that ostensibly would not impact "legal" Mexicans in the U.S. The quotation marks for "Operation Wetback" thus point to state's language of policing, race, illegality, and the notion that these ideas would not bleed to other social and political spheres.

agricultural working class that in many ways mirrored the previous labor, economic, political, and race project.

Stretching from the U.S.-Mexico border to the Salton Sea, the Imperial Valley's emerald hue was a testament to the power of growers to build social, labor, and agricultural environments. Since the establishment of the Imperial Valley, the notion of early settlers was to control the path of the Colorado River and realize a bucolic landscape dotted by perennial farm projects. Valley boosters painted an arid desert with the brushes of Thomas Jefferson's eighteenth-century yeoman farmers. As agriculture developed in the early and mid-twentieth century, so did cities in the valley and Mexicali. The most populous cities of the valley—Brawley in the north, El Centro in the middle, and Calexico adjacent to the international border—were each separated by roughly 10 miles. Residences, schools, stores, repair shops, churches, restaurants, and other facilities formed the nexus of the cities. Between each city and encompassing the majority of the valley's landscape were agricultural fields, cattle feed lots, and other farm related industries. Agribusiness was the most powerful and influential voice in the county's economic viability and development. In 1964, the Imperial Valley counted a gross farm area of 548,366 acres, with massive irrigation projects supplying the necessary water to spring crops in the arid Colorado delta.² Agribusiness also accounted for 10,881 workers in 1960, the most of any other single industry in the valley and was nearly 39 percent of the valley's employed population.³

In the early 1960s, dominant ideas of political economy, race, and citizenship were undergoing significant structural adjustments in the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands. Soon after

² Fifty-Fourth Annual Report, Imperial Irrigation District (El Centro, CA, 1964), 7.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Occupation Group and Class of Worker of Employed Persons, By Sex, for Counties: 1960," General Social and Economic Characteristics, California (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), Table 84, 6-422.

the end of World War II in 1945, the Bracero Program received pushback from U.S. labor groups and politicians. By the early 1960s, the program was under intense pressure from myriad groups including organized labor and church groups. The program was not renewed after 1964 and signaled an end to a twenty-two year government-agriculture accord that invested resources, labor, and racial hierarchies onto the land and peoples. At stake for growers with operations in the Imperial Valley and surrounding areas were both their economic livelihood and the maintenance of their elite racial identities that was dependent on the bodies of ethnic Mexican fieldworkers. Growers and their allies in the press and government illustrated the post-Bracero Program Imperial Valley as an area on the verge of economic collapse with crops left not harvested and profits rotting in the desert sun. The first post-Bracero harvest in 1965 was a commercial success, but a public relations failure for growers who invested resources to maintain access to workers from Mexico.

This chapter and chapter 2 investigate the competing visions of political economy on the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands during the critical years of the early 1960s. This period marks the end of the Bracero Program, the preservation of large-scale corporate agriculture in the valley, and the influence of industrialization and modernization projects in Mexicali. Both chapters focus on elite arguments on both sides of the international line to explain “how two borderlands so close together developed so differently” by demonstrating the power of borders to organize lives based on distinct elite visions of political economy.⁴ This chapter and chapter 2 reveal elites’ use of the state in both Mexicali and the Imperial Valley to forward their economic and social projects for the post-Bracero borderlands.

In this chapter, I argue that growers in the Imperial Valley fought to keep open access to

⁴ Geraldo L. Cadava, “Borderlands of Modernity and Abandonment: The Lines within Ambos Nogales and the Tohono O’odham Nation,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no.2 (1 September 2011): 362.

fieldworkers from Mexico up to the end of the Bracero Program. By the end of 1964, growers shifted strategies and tried to show the federal government's failure to meet their needs and praised the effectiveness of private growers. Moreover, growers lauded braceros for their skills while U.S. fieldworkers were troublesome and did not know the proper techniques necessary for field labor. In doing so, growers revealed their reliance on Mexican workers for their livelihood and the valley's economy. Even as U.S. Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz penned the 1965 report, *Year of Transition, Seasonal Farm Labor*, which discussed a shift from bracero to domestic labor, eventual better living conditions for migrant workers, and inspired this chapter's title, growers in the valley were positioned to maintain the primacy of agriculture and resist major structural changes to the valley's political economy through six decades' worth of investments, profitable harvests, and a transborder labor market. The purported year of transition, then, merits scrutiny.

Section 1: Securing Labor, Maintaining Race: The Bracero Program

The Bracero Program is popularly imagined and discussed as a single program when it was a series of agreements that were amended every few years. The renewal of the program was by no means automatic or uncontested. Through a discursive analysis of the logic and rhetoric of politicians, agribusiness, and labor leaders, scholars can understand the construction and perpetuation of workers from Mexico simplified as labor imports in a complex scheme of transnational capitalism. Indeed, the renewal of the program in 1947 was met with protestations in the House of Representatives. A key concern for Georgia Representative Stephen Pace was the unemployment figure in the United States and the need for non-U.S. citizen workers several years after the end of World War II, especially with returning servicemen without jobs. As Pace

put it, “I don’t understand why we [Congress] should be called upon to give our time to bring in more foreign workmen.” Pace went further and argued that mechanization would compound the unemployment issue, with 5-10 million fieldworkers displaced by technology over the next five to ten years. Growers, in effect, were the major benefactors of an extension of a wartime labor program.⁵

W.R. Ogg of the American Farm Bureau Federation countered Pace with two central arguments in his pursuit of an extension and, ultimately, a permanent labor importation program. First, Ogg argued that there was a lack of labor. Workers were indeed available in the United States, yet they did not want to perform field labor and elected to live in cities. As Ogg put it, “If they [U.S. unemployed] won’t work, the farmer cannot make them work.” When pressed by Missouri Representative Orville Zimmerman about low agricultural wages as a factor in low numbers of workers, Ogg casually elided a direct response. Instead, Ogg refocused the representative’s query on scarce labor. Ogg pleaded mercy for farmers, “we are up against it...The farmers need this extra labor for planting and harvesting their crops.”⁶ Ogg’s second argument rested on job displacement. He argued that no extension (or permanent) Bracero Program would be implemented without states demonstrating “they cannot get an adequate supply of workers who are willing and able to work.”⁷ That is, no “domestic” workers would lose their jobs to “foreign” workers since it could be objectively proven through statistics that farmworkers were in short supply. Ogg’s colleague in California, George Wilson, went further

⁵ *Farm Labor Supply Program: Hearings Before the Committee on Agriculture, House of Representatives, Eightieth Congress, First Session, on H.R. 1388, to Provide for a Continuance of the Farm Labor Supply Program up to and including June 30, 1948*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1947), 15-16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18. Sociologist Kitty Calavita shows readers that the Bracero Program involved multiple U.S. government institutions and bureaucrats, especially from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, who devised policy that was sometimes at odds with growers. However, she is clear, “Growers were the obvious beneficiaries of this infusion of hundreds of thousands of additional farm workers.” See Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24, 74.

and stated that braceros cost more than domestic workers due to bureaucratic expenses and bracero inefficiency. Wilson mentioned that farmworkers should be compensated at \$2 per hour, but was short of committing to his own recommendation.⁸ Wilson and Ogg both preferred hiring domestic farmworkers if readily and widely available. Braceros would be supplementing—rather than replacing—U.S. citizen workers while also ensuring U.S. farmers the necessary labor power to maintain their businesses. The farm labor supply program (Bracero Program) was extended until the end of 1947, renewed again under Public Law 893 in 1948, until finally reaching its more enduring iteration, Public Law 78 in 1951.

Ten years into its existence, the Bracero Program was met with another binational agreement, but one focused on apprehension and deportation of migrants. In late May and early June of 1954, the County of Imperial, the U.S. Border Patrol, and the Mexican military prepared for “Operation Wetback.” Kelly Lytle Hernández has revealed how the underlying framework of “Operation Wetback” was in place since the early 1940s as well as Mexico’s involvement in the dragnet. Indeed, Mexican soldiers policed the stretch of the border near the *centro* of Mexicali (opposite downtown Calexico) while Imperial County employees assisted the Border Patrol in removing brush that could impede the movement of border agents, vehicles, and could be used as potential cover by migrants. According to county supervisors, “The cost [of brush removal] will be more than balanced by the serving in crimes committed by wetbacks.” County officials presented “Operation Wetback” as an investment in public safety and private property.⁹

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹ “County Aids in Anti-Wetback Patrol Plan,” “Fence Thins Alien Border Flow,” *IYP*, May 27, 1954, 1; “Mop-Up Force To Halt Wetback Invasion Slated,” *IYP*, June 9, 1954, 1. “Operation Wetback” was the name of the 1954 raids. However, I place the name in quotation marks for two reasons. First, leaving the name as an uncontested proper noun can potentially normalize the racist vernacular of the state. Second, the quotation marks draw the reader’s attention to the project of containment of undesirable Mexican bodies that ostensibly would not impact “legal” Mexicans in the U.S. The quotation marks for “Operation Wetback” thus point to state’s language of policing, race, illegality, and the notion that these ideas would not bleed to other social and political spheres.

From the U.S. perspective, the operation's central goal was to secure the border from "undesirable persons." U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr. defined "undesirable persons" as federally unsanctioned farmworkers from Mexico laboring in the U.S. Adding to Brownell's definition were Representative John J. Phillips (representing Imperial and Riverside counties) and Senator Pat McCarran (Democrat-Nevada), both of who shared the sentiment, "Communists are filtering into this country behind a screen supposedly created by a flow of illegal Mexican aliens crossing the border daily." Undesirables were thus marginalized workers who threatened U.S. sovereignty, binational notions of a right to racialized employment, and communist political minorities. Tellingly, Phillips was hopeful that the Bracero Program would end the unsanctioned movement of workers into the United States. while also supporting a dragnet on the border. Brownell expected "Operation Wetback" to also limit the movement of undocumented workers *out* of the United States. Brownell, Phillips, Imperial Valley officials, and the Mexican military in Mexicali point to "Operation Wetback's" role in a larger scheme of borders, movement, and control that were complementary state actions aimed at the regulation of bodies and political ideas through approved government programs.

The buildup to "Operation Wetback" in the Imperial Valley was especially intense because the area was depicted as vulnerable to migrants through "the greatest peacetime invasion of the United States." Unsanctioned migration shifted from the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez area to the California borderlands and, according to Chief Border Patrol Inspector for the El Centro sector, Ed Parker, nearly half of all migrant arrests and deportations occurred in the Imperial Valley.¹⁰ Kelly Lytle Hernández notes that nearly one mile of 10-foot chain link fence was shipped to the International Water Commission to be erected in Calexico. The purpose of the fence was not solely to viscerally claim land or install an imposing vista on the international boundary, but also

¹⁰ "Valley Wets 50 Per Cent of U.S. Total," *IVP*, June 11, 1954, 1.

to push migrants further out of Calexico's boundaries and into an unforgiving desert and swift canal currents.¹¹ Indeed, there was also a military strategy to the fence. The difficult geography was seen by Harlon B. Carter, chief of the Border Patrol, as an impediment to migrants' movement by concentrating migration circuits to narrow spaces easily besieged by the Border Patrol strike force.¹² To complement the fence, Attorney General Brownell and Chief Carter committed to increase the presence of agents on the borderlands. The Border Patrol had 150 agents in the 190-mile El Centro sector and Carter added another 491 agents for the operation. This figure represented half of the total U.S. Border Patrol agents patrolling U.S. borders. The local press and Carter heralded the augmented patrol force as an exemplary body that would implement the "wet mop-up" and "roundup."¹³ The dual characterization of Mexican migrants as spilled water and undomesticated animals justified the increase in the size of the Border Patrol in the area, heightened a sense of national vulnerability, and transformed migrants into an unruly subhuman group requiring lessons in U.S. state power.

"Operation Wetback" was set to launch across U.S. cities on June 17, 1954, but authorities in the Imperial Valley began six days earlier when jeep-airplane teams conducted a series of surveillance runs. Jurisdiction for Border Patrol agents extended "as far north as patrolmen need to go to apprehend the migrant wets." Such geographically dispersed legal and surveillance power was intended to cause fear and consternation to migrant audiences, which was successful in compelling migrants to return to Mexico following preliminary raids. The early raids were also lauded for reducing the crime rate in Calexico as Calexico police sergeant

¹¹ Kelly Lytle Hernández, "The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943 to 1954," *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter, 2006): 421-444.

¹² David Galloway, "Alien Crackdown Called Permanent: Imperial Valley Ranches Raided; Mexicans Vanish as Drive Starts," *IVP*, June 17, 1954, 1.

¹³ "Border Supervises Wet Mop-up," *IVP*, June 10, 1954, 1; Howard Seelye, "Border Task Force Starts Next Week: Imperial Valley Focal Point for Federal-Decreed Alien Crackdown," *IVP*, June 11, 1954, 1. 256 agents were previously operating in California and Arizona and Carter pushed for a supplementary force between 500 and 750 new agents in these states.

Enrique Valle “point[ed] up the value of the drive against wets.”¹⁴ By the tail end of “Operation Wetback” in late June of 1954, 20,000 migrants were apprehended in the El Centro sector and deported to Mexico. This figure represented roughly one quarter of migrants arrested during the dragnet.¹⁵ Protection of U.S. power, sovereignty, and land claims were sealed in a major demonstration of policing.

“Operation Wetback” created two distinct sentiments in the Imperial Valley, both of which revolved around access to labor. On the one hand, the perception was that the “peacetime invasion” was halted as the valley was removed of unwanted migrants. There was the added social benefit of saving valley residents over \$150,000 in crime prevention and the public dole since undocumented migrants were branded as criminals and users of state funds. Interestingly, the county’s welfare director, Russell Gray, pointed out that deported migrants took their U.S. citizen children with them to Mexico—in other words, they were not transformed from children to burdens on the state. Gray also mentioned that and some U.S. citizen mothers went on welfare relief since they quit their jobs to rear their children after the “illegal Mexican women” they once hired have left amid pressure from the dragnet.¹⁶ The state benefited as well since a renewed Bracero Program earlier in 1954 potentially channeled migrants through the government-approved Bracero Program, legitimizing its existence in the process.¹⁷ B.A. Harrigan, secretary of the Imperial Valley Farmers Association (IVFA), stated that 135 new members joined the group after the renewed Bracero Program. According to Harrigan, members wanted a streamlined process to hire “legal” Mexican laborers in their fields, thus complying with federal

¹⁴ “434 Pick-ups Made as Illegals Return: Well-Publicized Hint Sends Wets Scrambling Back Across Border,” *IVP*, June 16, 1954, 1; “Operation Wetback: 6000 Illegal Mexicans Nabbed Throughout State,” “Calexico Crime Rate Vanishes in ‘Wet’ Roundup,” *The Morning Post*, June 15, 1954, 1.

¹⁵ “20,000 Wets Rounded Up In Operation,” *IVP*, June 28, 1954, 1.

¹⁶ “Citizen Kids of Wetbacks Leaving Too,” *IVP*, June 23, 1954, 1.

¹⁷ “Labor Center Funds Signed by President,” *The Post-Press*, April 11, 1954, 1; “Effects of Roudup,” *IVP*, June 28, 1954, 9.

law and investing in a division between “legal” and “illegal” workers.¹⁸ Indeed, the district director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Los Angeles, Herman Landon, commented that if farmers were concerned about securing labor for the harvest, they simply needed to go through the IVFA.¹⁹

On the other hand, non-IVFA members, often farmers with 180 acres or less, felt that “Operation Wetback” was an attack on them. They saw federal and local action in the dragnet as threatening their sole source of labor. Smaller farmers stated they hired unsanctioned Mexican workers out of economic necessity because housing and wage costs for braceros made them prohibitively expensive. Farmers hired laborers to work the fields ahead of the seasonal and dragnet schedule to avoid workers being apprehended and also sparing the farmer social and legal repercussions. One farmer viewed housing requirements like running water as “comforts” that he and his wife did not have during their first year of living in the valley. Another farmer admitted that the living quarters he provided, “aren’t too hot, but they are a darn sight lot better than what they live in Mexico.” Non-IVFA growers wanted a labor subsidy program similar to the one in place for crops since such subsidies assisted financial returns for growers and avoided the price and supply crisis of the Great Depression. Non-subsidized labor, “Operation Wetback,” and the Bracero Program all “forced” farmers to utilize unsanctioned workers, an action they framed as a violation of their desire to follow the law.²⁰

The IVFA and smaller farmers pointed to distinct, but shared realities grounded in Mexican laborers. Though a subsidized labor program did not exist per se, the federal government did operate labor processing centers, one of which was located near El Centro and

¹⁸ “Valley Wets 50 Per Cent of U.S. Total,” *IVP*, June 11, 1954, 1.

¹⁹ Dave Galloway, “Alien Crackdown Called Permanent: Imperial Valley Ranches Raided; Mexicans Vanish as Drive Starts,” *IVP*, June 17, 1954, 1.

²⁰ Howard Seelye, “Operation Wetback Old Story But Still Puts Small Farmer on Spot,” *The Morning Post*, June 15, 1954, 5.

managed by Walter Francis. When the Bracero Program was renewed and implemented in March of 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower authorized funds to be used to keep the labor processing centers open to ensure farmers access to braceros. Francis noted that 5,560 workers were contracted at the center since the renewal of the Bracero Program and approximately 600 workers since “Operation Wetback” began, the average for that period of time in previous years. This statement countered arguments made by California Governor Goodwin Knight, which claimed unsanctioned workers as the reason for unemployment of U.S. citizens and a rise in crime and disease.²¹ U.S. farmworker employment did not increase despite the renewed Bracero Program, the dragnet, or more IVFA members. Nevertheless, there remained a sense that the Bracero Program favored the IVFA, larger growers, and braceros themselves over smaller farmers.²² Although IVFA members and smaller growers differed in capital and perception, they shared a desire to recruit laborers from Mexico through a streamlined and inexpensive process sanctioned by the federal government.

Growers were also linked through their shaping of the valley’s dominant industry through race, citizenship, and wages. An official wage subsidy also did not exist, but growers practiced a de facto wage reduction. Because farmworkers were excluded from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, braceros earned a “prevailing rate” wage that was determined under the Bracero agreement. This wage was determined to ensure that “domestic” (U.S. citizen and resident) farmworkers would not face a financial battle with bracero and non-bracero Mexican workers, where the worker who accepted the lowest wage would be employed over other workers. In the valley, this prevailing wage equation translated to 70 cents per hour. According to Warren

²¹ “Labor Center Funds Signed by President,” *The Post-Press*, April 11, 1954, 1; “434 Pick-ups Made as Illegals Return: Well-Publicized Hint Sends Wets Scrambling Back Across Border,” *IVP*, June 16, 1954, 1.

²² Howard Seelye, “Operation Wetback Old Story But Still Puts Small Farmer on Spot,” *The Morning Post*, June 15, 1954, 5; “Slack Season: Demand for Labor Not Showing Rise,” *IVP*, June 23, 1954.

Brock, owner of the 2,000-acre Brock Ranch near El Centro, “the ‘prevailing rate’ seems to establish itself at about what braceros will work for. The same work offered itinerant domestic laborers goes begging...[and] most American farm workers wouldn’t take the work at any price in this desert country.”²³ Unsanctioned migrant workers were paid 60 cents per hour, 10 cents less than the already lowered wages. The revelation by Brock and the lamentation of smaller farmers who skirted employment and wage law underscores the dependence of growers on workers from Mexico at a reduced wage rate. Growers noted that Mexican American workers preferred to not work in the arduous heat and labor conditions of the valley’s fields that was in large part due to low wages. While working on U.S. farms, a precedent was established early on that racialized Mexican workers were not American workers that deserved wages commensurate with the space they worked, rather, wages were determined on race and citizenship. Growers, the press, and law enforcement officials, however, left the racial and social hierarchy that favored white growers unquestioned.

The seemingly routine renewal of the Bracero Program masked deeper issues with the program by the early 1960s. Pro-Bracero Program senators of the final renewal vote included Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) and John Tower (R-Texas), whose states were on the borderlands. Each supported an extension based on humanitarian consideration. Goldwater pointed out that braceros possessed a marked difference from non-braceros in Mexico based upon braceros’ visible increase in living standard. Goldwater knew this as fact rather than hypothetical by proudly stating, “in my home city of Phoenix I was one of the few people who spoke Spanish, and they [braceros] came to me to cash their checks.” In his trips to Mexico, Goldwater “made it a point to see what had been done with the money” and was pleased to see that braceros used

²³ Herbert D. Wilhoit, “Bracero ‘Never Had it So Good’ in the Valley,” *IYP*, April 14, 1954, 8.

their earnings to purchase farmland in Mexico.²⁴ Senator John Tower went further than Goldwater in his argument for the necessity of the Bracero Program. Tower reiterated similar tropes of Mexican workers being the only laborers willing to perform the back-bending labor of harvesting row crops and that bracero hires did not displace domestic workers. Tower invested in the image of a Mexican peon-turned-bracero, where braceros went before the “shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe [in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon] and take from their pockets all of their money, their few pitiful *centavos*, and drop them into a box which is near the shrine—everything that they have—in gratitude because now they have work, they can earn, they can eat, and they will have lodging.”²⁵ The reduction of braceros as destitute pious peasants enabled Tower to equate the end of the Bracero Program with nothing less than depriving Mexican workers of life. Moreover, Tower pinned the livelihood of all U.S. farmers, large and small acreage alike, on the program, where the alleged labor shortage would hurt the small acreage farmer to a larger extent than the prime beneficiary of bracero labor, large acreage growers.

Senators from border states were not the only politicians who sought to extend the Bracero Program. The ambassador of Mexico to the United States, Antonio Carrillo Flores, praised braceros’ (and the program’s) ability to increase wages and worker protections. In the capacity of spokesperson for Mexico in the US, Carrillo Flores ignored the indictments of US organized labor and argued that braceros drove up wages “to such an extent that in some localities the wages are higher than those paid to domestic workers, [which] represents the reason why this type of work is now looked upon as acceptable by the American workers.”²⁶ Carrillo Flores appeared to inadvertently violate the program’s legal structure since braceros

²⁴ *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, First Session, August 5-August 20, 1963, Vol.109, Part 11 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1963), 15212.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15210.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15204.

were not allowed to influence wage rates, whether by raising or lowering them. The ambassador also stated that the Bracero Program offered a model of occupational insurance, transportation, and food safety for domestic workers. He touted the efficacy of these regulations, which elided domestic workers since they did not have the power of the Mexican state to champion their labor rights.²⁷

The program was also billed as one of positive race relations since areas that legally discriminated against Mexican citizens were not allowed to address “the need for labor which only the Mexican could supply.” This remark was not solely aimed at discriminatory states such as Texas, which Mexico infamously prohibited from contracting braceros because of Jim Crow policies that targeted ethnic Mexicans. During World War II, the Mexican state depicted braceros as agricultural soldiers for democracy. This image was cemented in a 1942 photograph where nameless—but not expressionless—braceros formed the “V for Victory” sign with their index and middle finger. By 1963, the ambassador of Mexico re-imagined braceros as guarantors of ethnic Mexican civil rights, regardless of citizenship. For the ambassador—and the Mexican state—braceros not only formed the crux of the U.S. agricultural industry, they also pushed anti-discrimination legislation. Historian Mae Ngai has referred to the Bracero Program as “imported colonialism” to signal a colonial relationship between growers, law, and migrant workers.²⁸ Expanding this concept, braceros complicate this colonized relationship by showing how the U.S. demand for exploited labor potentially changed the national dialogue on race and labor. For instance, Ambassador Carrillo Flores’s assessment of the Bracero Program was that it altered the U.S. approach to labor relations and civil rights. Similarly, Senator Goldwater’s view that the program must be renewed was based on the financial benefits for workers from Mexico. While

²⁷ Ibid., 15204.

²⁸ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004), 95, 301 fn.3.

the realities and experiences of braceros themselves show the ambassador's—and several politicians in both countries—idealized narrative of the program, utilization of braceros as a political chip, these narratives were conceptualized on braceros' bodies and labor power. Extension of the Bracero Program was thus much more than a mission of international goodwill or charity; it was a matter of continuing a labor and race curriculum for U.S. lawmakers to apply to domestic workers.

A significant thread in Carrillo Flores's argument elaborated a central concern for Mexico City, Washington, D.C., and U.S. organized labor. The ambassador legitimized the Bracero Program because of a binational commitment to stymie unsanctioned labor migration from Mexico to the United States. Carrillo Flores praised the program for directing laborers into official labor channels rather than being undermined by both unsanctioned migrants and commuter workers, people with permanent resident visas. According to the ambassador, the program did not increase the number of bracero hires since 1960, but there was also no rise in the number of unsanctioned workers, "the conclusion being that the Mexican workers have understood and accepted the fact that if they cannot obtain work by contract [Bracero Program], it is because they would not obtain it either by entering the United States illegally." The program successfully disciplined unsanctioned migrant workers to the power of the Mexican state while passively critiquing the hiring of unsanctioned workers by U.S. growers.²⁹

Commuter workers also compromised the stability and discipline achieved by the Bracero Program, according to Carrillo Flores, who placed pressure on a job-scarce U.S. agricultural labor market. There was an embedded logic within the ambassador's remark, whereby Mexican citizens with a resident visa were relegated to a single occupation (fieldworker) rather than other types of jobs. The ambassador feared that transborder labor

²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, Vol.109, Part 11, 15204.

strategies of working and living the United States and Mexico simultaneously created “problems for both Mexico and the United States, since during the jobless seasons the worker with a residence visa will burden the economy on one of the two countries, with the same consequences of accepting ill-paid work, obtaining official assistance [welfare], etc.” The Mexican state reproduced the specter of unsanctioned migration and labor with an inflection usually reserved for reactive U.S. organized labor and lawmakers. Throughout his address, Carrillo Flores readily adopted the language of “wetback,” illegal, and bracero, at times distinguishing between the three, at other moments conflating them. The meanings and implications to each of these names and statuses were used for different purposes, but at their core were Mexican workers and their elite-imposed movement from one position of marginalized labor to another. The Bracero Program was the sole method to slow the process of pan-Mexican illegality regardless if a worker possessed a resident visa. The latter revealed the Mexican state’s acceptance and perpetuation of racial and labor tropes of transborder workers—and by extension, the borderlands itself—as threats to U.S. and Mexican labor, resources, and identity. Commuter workers were made part of the corpus of undesired workers since their participation in borderlands labor regimes resulted in similar effects of low wages, usage of welfare, and countless other social woes—the “etc.” in the ambassador’s statement. The mouthpiece of Mexico’s federal government viewed Mexican citizens as threats to the economic wellbeing of northern Mexico due to the government’s presumed inability to control the flows of peoples.

Section 2: Fearing Policy in the Imperial Valley, 1963-1964

Imperial Valley growers unsurprisingly also pushed back at the federal government’s debates on the termination the Bracero Program. For them, the main concern was their supply of

a deployable labor force and perhaps more importantly, the predictability of access to labor. As early as July of 1963, growers prepared for the possibility of the program ending through various uses of coded language. Herb Lee, president of the Imperial Valley Farmers Association, expressed concern over the increasing regulation of bracero labor in the Imperial Valley. Where braceros were once contracted for 18 months, new guidelines called for a six-month period, with only 15 percent of braceros allowed to stay for nine months. Farmers opined that it was more convenient to contract a bracero for six to eight weeks, then send the worker to Mexico, hire another bracero, and then contract a third bracero to replace the second worker. That is, the new regulations convinced farmers that three part-time braceros were necessary to complete the job of one full-time bracero. Some farmers went so far as to claim that “it takes more time getting the labor than its worth.” Herb Lee agreed, stating, “It would seem that the days of the Mexican workers in Imperial Valley are going to be quite restricted, if not abolished altogether.”³⁰ Importantly, Lee’s use of “Mexican workers” referred to braceros rather than Mexican citizens with U.S. residency cards or people of Mexican descent in the valley. For Lee and others, there was a direct connection between “Mexican workers” and braceros, signaling the synonymous meaning of both terms in the social and labor construction of ethnic Mexicans in the valley.

Lee’s and other growers’ frustration was rooted both in government regulation and an overall decline in the deployment of bracero labor. Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, stated that the use of “foreign” laborers in U.S. fields reached its peak in 1956 at 459,850 and dropped over half of that amount with 217,010 workers in 1962.³¹ In the valley there was also a similar trend. The peak number of braceros reached 14,000 in 1956 and was significantly reduced to 4,000

³⁰ Murphy Norris, “Use of Mexicans Drops: Less Than Thousand Braceros in Valley,” *Imperial Valley Press*, July 2, 1963, 1-2.

³¹ Willard Wirtz, *Year of Transition, Seasonal Farm Labor, 1965: A Report from the Secretary of Labor* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1965), 11.

braceros during 1963's harvest.³² Government officials and growers offered two main reasons for this reduction in labor, mechanization and changing migrant labor patterns. Indeed, the California Growers Farm Labor Committee sought to address these concerns by making domestic recruitment and mechanization a priority for what it saw as the end of the Bracero Program in 1966, rather than 1965.³³ Don Mitchell has noted the promise of mechanization as the solution to labor in the fields and also how automation of field work was not the norm in the early 1960s. Indeed, Precision Systems, Inc., a manufacturer of farm equipment, went so far as to advertise its newest cotton harvester as the "Iron Bracero."³⁴ With an advertised weeding and thinning speed of 10 acres an hour, braceros (and other farmworkers) were transfigured beyond cogs in a machine to the making up the whole machine. As the "Iron Bracero" indicated, bracero labor set a standard that technology pursued to replicate: controlled, mobile, and predictable. If the Bracero Program were indeed to end, part of its legacy would continue in technological and marketing nomenclature.

The end of the Bracero Program was not solely an economic concern for local elites. Eric Thor, economist at UC Berkeley, addressed the IVFA and warned members that the Bracero Program was set to end on December 31, 1964, with no possibility of being renewed. Thor advised the IVFA and "non-believer" farmers—those who denied the program's end—that they needed to mechanize operations, demonstrate the IVFA's dependence on braceros, and show the social ramifications of excessive non-valley domestic worker recruitment.³⁵ The latter directly challenged the position taken by the Department of Labor and unions, which argued that domestic labor—ethnic Mexican labor—could fill any shortages. Thor mentioned that the IVFA

³² Murphy Norris, "Use of Mexicans Drops: Less Than Thousand Braceros in Valley," *Imperial Valley Press*, July 2, 1963, 1-2.

³³ "Farmers Want Bracero Program Phased Out," *IVP*, July 10, 1963, 2.

³⁴ "This is the Iron Bracero," *IVP*, May 11, 1964, 4.

³⁵ "IV Farmers Warned: Bracero End Real," *IVP*, April 10, 1964, 1, 10.

make arguments to show that domestic labor could only be employed an average of 130 days per year and “other local employment opportunities in the off-season are all but non-existent,” meaning these workers would soon stress the dole if they would not migrate. Thor’s warning of the increase in welfare applicants indicated the lack of non-farm opportunities in the valley’s political economy. The continuation of the Bracero Program under Thor’s suggestions further demonstrated an unwillingness to conceive an alternative industry in the valley since growers built much of the political, racial, and economic infrastructure for their own interests.

Growers and their allies sought to monopolize the ability to write the script of inclusion and exclusion in the valley’s workforce and body politic. Thor suggested that the children of non-valley recruited domestic workers would flood the local systems, insinuating that the children of IVFA members were now at risk as well.³⁶ El Centro police chief Paul Wheeler pointed out the main challenge faced by law enforcement and social services was the freedom of mobility of domestic workers. Moreover, W.P. Boyden, head of the Imperial County welfare department, worried about of the “alarming rate” of growth of welfare in California.³⁷ Braceros posed little inconvenience on police and welfare workers since they were housed in camps and were disciplined by threats of deportation under the international labor contract.³⁸ Imperial County supervisors went so far as to approve a study to detail the consequences of an influx of migrants to the valley.³⁹ The creation of U.S. citizen workers as a threat to the valley showed the competing logics of labor between unions and growers as well as who was able to claim ownership and belonging in the valley. As was discussed, the UPWA sought to abolish the Bracero Program because it deprived U.S. workers of jobs. Yet, Thor and Wheeler argued that

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “Labor Problem Here Puzzles All-Star Body,” *IVP*, Sept. 4, 1964, 1,7.

³⁸ “Bracero End Poses Problems For Law,” *IVP*, July 23, 1964, 1.

³⁹ “Study Due IV Labor,” *IVP*, May 4, 1964, 1; “IV Farm Invasion Fear ‘Groundless,’” *IVP*, Aug. 7, 1964, 1. Though the study was approved, the county did not proceed with the study even months later.

migrants from outside of the valley were also dangerous subjects regardless of citizenship. While braceros were the ideal workforce for growers because of their deportability and presumed lack of social participation outside the fields and camps, domestic migrant workers could not be deported. Yet, much like braceros, domestic migrant workers were nevertheless seen as not belonging to the Imperial Valley. Domestic migrant workers were constructed with similar language from the immigration category, “likely to become a public charge.” The formation of racialized itinerant labor in the fields was a quality that applied to fieldworkers in general, who were expected to work and move rather than establish a home in the valley. The belonging of growers and their allies, on the other hand, was not a topic of debate.

State officials and growers remained concerned about farm labor availability. Pat Crow, manager of the California Department of Employment’s local Farm Placement Office, dismissed fears of a valley flooded by non-local domestic workers by citing the decline of bracero labor, a lack of low-income housing (referring to farmworkers’ housing needs), and established migrant patterns for local and mobile workers that already provided enough labor. Farm Labor Office San Diego district supervisor, Ed Peters, added, “there is no significant amount of farm labor anywhere in the country that is free to move the Imperial Valley.” Indeed, by September 1964, no domestic migrants families arrived in the valley.⁴⁰ Despite the imagery of farmworkers as an invasive species, growers made attempts to comply with the U.S. Department of Labor’s push to hire more domestic workers. Ed Hayes, Herb Lee, and Joe Anderholt of the IVFA traveled to Washington, D.C. to help establish the National Council of Agricultural Employers. The council was intended to streamline worker recruitment across the United States to ostensibly prevent any

⁴⁰ “IV Farm Invasion Fear ‘Groundless,’” *IVP*, Aug. 7, 1964, 1. “Labor Problem Here Puzzles All-Star Body,” *IVP*, Sept. 4, 1964, 1,7.

difficulties with the acquisition and control of field labor.⁴¹ For Wheeler, Thor, and Ambassador Carrillo Flores, the Bracero Program was as much a question about maintaining the economic status quo as it was about controlling particular types of deportable labor.

The concern over access to labor meant that growers and state officials entered into a period of experimentation with youth labor. The DOL already ran “day-haul,” “live-in,” and youth “cadet” programs. These programs were confined to northwestern and eastern states, with no such DOL program existing in the West.⁴² Between 1963 and 1964, valley growers supplemented their regular workers with local high school students. In July 1963, growers hired 239 students through the Farm Labor Office to harvest and thin onions, tomatoes, and garlic. The students were not allowed to harvest watermelon or cantaloupe because of weight regulations for youth labor.⁴³ By July of 1964, the Farm Labor Office, the Youth Employment Committee, and the IVFA worked together to place 358 youths in the fields. 260 of these youths were over 16 years old and the remaining 98 were under 16. Ed Hayes remarked that several of the youths dropped out of the program because they were not accustomed to the arduous work of topping, weeding, and tying under the hot valley summer.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the DOL claimed that more youth were attracted to sugar beets—a crop that utilized bracero labor—once the DOL convinced growers to allow long-handled hoes instead of short-handled hoes.⁴⁵ The latter was known to fieldworkers as *el cortito* and later became a central health concern for Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Growers were clear that these labor programs were not intended to supplant braceros. Instead, the youth programs served as a public relations campaign to project

⁴¹ “Hayes Making Trip for Ag Hires,” *IVP*, May 8, 1964, 1.

⁴² Study of Population and Immigration Problems. Administrative Presentations (III): Admission of Aliens into the United States for Temporary Employment and “Commuter Workers;” Presentations by the Dept. of Labor and the Dept. of Justice (Immigration and Naturalization Service) [to] Subcommittee No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963), 11.

⁴³ “Farm Work Is For Kids, But They Won’t Replace Braceros,” *Desert Farm News*, July 2, 4-5.

⁴⁴ “Valley’s Youth Proving Its Mettle In Hot Fields,” *IVP*, July 15, 1964, 8.

⁴⁵ “Study of Population and Immigration Problems,” 12.

fieldwork as both unskilled and needing a consistent supply of bodies capable of withstanding the abuse of the fields. Youths could enter the fields in a novelty fashion, working alongside highly skilled fieldworkers—whether bracero or domestic worker. The youths could then leave the fields, as seen in July 1964, and allow growers to claim that youths were an unreliable source of labor while ostensibly showing good faith efforts at securing non-bracero labor.

A key possibility for securing field labor was Public Law 414, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. Historian Cindy Hahamovitch classifies the H-2 program as the “longest running guestworker program in U.S. history.”⁴⁶ Among other provisions, PL 414 was intended to admit non-U.S. workers, especially workers from the British West Indies and Canada, to work in the United States where there were labor shortages. Importantly, such workers were termed “non-immigrant aliens” and still subject to deportation; that is, temporary and removable peoples. PL 414 was mostly used in the eastern United States, but was soon looked as a potential replacement for the Bracero Program. Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz indicated he was more interested in recruiting “American” farmworkers with wage increases rather than exercising PL 414 and ending the Bracero Program in 1964 rather than Governor Brown’s five-year phase-out plan.⁴⁷ Wirtz noted that California had 400,000 unemployed workers and sought to see if a relationship existed between wages and unemployed workers going to the fields. Moreover, Wirtz hypothesized applying provisions of the War on Poverty and Manpower Training Act to attract domestic workers to the fields. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) vacillated on the stipulations of PL 414 between October and December of 1964. One provision rested on growers providing housing for domestic farmworkers. Representative Pat Martin (R-CA) was incensed at

⁴⁶ Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013), 6.

⁴⁷ “Seek Labor To Replace Braceros,” *IVP*, Oct. 7, 1964, 1; “‘Emergency Task Force’ Will Seek Farm Labor,” *IVP*, Dec. 14, 1964, 1; “Brown Urges Dual Farm Work Plan,” *IVP*, Nov. 14-15, 1964, 1.

the housing proposal of PL 414. Martin pointed out that no such housing provisions were ever made during the Bracero Program. Enactment of the housing stipulation for domestic farmworkers, for Martin, “would represent the biggest fraud ever pulled on the farmers of California.” Moreover, Martin argued, “Farmers need assurance that they will have adequate *supplementary* labor when the new year starts,” (emphasis mine). Representative Martin’s concern rested with growers and the costs of labor rather than workers themselves. Indeed, Martin wanted supplementary labor necessary for harvests, labor that could be counted on to leave the area after the harvest. In this view, growers were vulnerable to decisions from the “ivory-tower boys” of the DOL despite the department’s attempts to secure labor, whether from the United States or Mexico.⁴⁸

In the election season of 1964, grower access to farm labor also received support from local politicians on differing sides of the political spectrum. Democratic candidate for state assembly, Cruz Reynoso sought to have grower labor demands met with ease, but not with PL 414. Reynoso was from Brea, California in Orange County. He completed his law degree at UC Berkeley in 1958 then spent six months at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico) studying Mexican constitutional law. In 1959, Reynoso began practicing law in El Centro. Reynoso pledged to protect farmers from price fixing by wholesale buyers. Reynoso, much like the Democratic administration of John F. Kennedy-Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, wanted to attract more workers to the fields via labor protections. Reynoso favored broad minimum wage legislation in California. Reynoso recognized the wealth and profits generated by the valley’s agricultural political economy and he felt “that all our residents should share in our county’s richness.” With the termination of the Bracero Program at the end of the year, Reynoso argued that

⁴⁸ “Farm Labor Plan Called Huge Fraud,” *IVP*, Oct. 8, 1964, section 2, 3.

unemployment insurance for farmworkers “would attract workers to replace braceros. The farm laborer works just as hard as those receiving unemployment insurance and is just as entitled to it.”⁴⁹ Closer to the election, Reynoso challenged the incumbent Republican state senator, Victor V. Veysey, on not securing field labor before the December 1964 deadline.⁵⁰ Reynoso envisioned the continuation of the valley’s agricultural political economy, but one that was based more on worker protections and less on an exploitable labor class subject to deportation. As Don Mitchell has pointed out, Imperial Valley growers invested much in the land and made it intensely difficult for a rapid change in political economy. Reynoso’s candidacy to the state assembly was a reform of the visceral racial capitalism of Imperial Valley’s agriculture.

Republican state assembly incumbent and Brawley grower, Victor V. Veysey, epitomized the yeoman fantasy and its power to control the valley’s political economy. Veysey was elected to the California state assembly in 1962 and was a former professor of industrial relations and business economics at the California Institute of Technology and Stanford University, but by 1949, he turned his attention to agricultural ventures in the Imperial Valley. Veysey personally knew of the benefits of bracero labor since he utilized the Bracero Program in his fields. At least one bracero lost a limb while operating a machine on Veysey’s operations. Braceros were not allowed to operate farm machinery per agreements in the Bracero Program, yet Veysey was not prohibited from continuing his use of bracero labor after this incident in 1959.⁵¹ As a state assemblyman, Veysey favored protecting vegetable growers and U.S. beef through country of production labels; in effect, a trademark of nationalist consumerism and production. He proposed a measured economic diversification with the introduction of the agricultural-related industries

⁴⁹ “Candidates for Assembly: Cruz Reynoso,” *IVP*, May 28, 1964, 1, 8.

⁵⁰ “Candidates Address Holtville Meet,” *IVP*, Oct. 7, 1964, 1.

⁵¹ Case of Ramón Contreras, box 5, folder 19, Ben Yellen Papers, Special Collections, UC San Diego Libraries, La Jolla, CA.

of a beef slaughterhouse and textile mill.⁵²

Veysey's campaign remarks gave an indication that Veysey planned to secure post-Bracero Program farm labor without providing details of obtaining this labor. When critiqued by Democratic challenger Cruz Reynoso about not producing an "adequate" farm labor plan, Veysey commented that Reynoso was correct, but only because Veysey was a minority voice in the state assembly and he "had fought the power politicians in Sacramento in vain." In an address to the Meadows Union Farm Bureau in El Centro, Veysey voiced his support for PL 414, but did so with an argumentative tactic that placed PL 414 beyond his charge and strictly under the federal government. According to Veysey, "The people at the border here [immigration officers] have no instructions whatever as yet on its [PL 414] applicability here and now to provide farm labor for our fields." Veysey simultaneously approved—but did not advocate for—PL 414 while placing responsibility of PL 414's enactment and the valley's political economy on the federal government. Veysey himself was steeped in the yeoman fantasy, especially the narrative of victimhood at the hands of urban and elite politicians.⁵³ Moreover, the use of "our fields" reveals a deeper sense of Veysey's vision of the valley's political economy and belonging. Though Veysey referred to growers in his statement, he also addressed the entire valley. Veysey included those not directly involved in the valley's agricultural political economy to see themselves intimately tied to it. Veysey revealed the valley's role in the larger system of racialized political economy by tying the futures of valleyites to the success of growers and their ability to secure migrant and deportable farm labor. The fields belonged to not just growers, but to all valleyites; racialized and exploited labor benefitted the entire valley. Importantly, those

⁵² "Candidates for Assembly: Victor V. Veysey," *IVP*, May 29, 1964, 1,10.

⁵³ "Candidates Address Holtville Meet," *IVP*, Oct. 7, 1964, 1. For a detailed and thorough discussion of farmers and the federal government, see William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

who worked the fields were denied the space to belong in the valley. With the glowing endorsement of the editor of the *Imperial Valley Press*, Veysey summarily defeated Reynoso in November and kept local power for growers.

The *Imperial Valley Press* made little effort to mask its political, racial, and economic predilections. The *Press* endorsed Republican candidates during 1964's election cycle—with the notable exception of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. Though the *Press* did not endorse Goldwater, Virgil Pinkley (editor of the *Press*) wrote favorable articles on Goldwater and frequently published letters to the editor by local conservative Albert Graham.⁵⁴ Graham questioned the merits of study abroad programs and academic research in Mexico, for example, in Teotihuacán, the ancient Mesoamerican city. Because Graham “can't even pronounce that [Teotihuacán],” and that U.S. tax dollars are partially funding the research, Graham understood this more as wastefulness by a federal government that needed the compass of free enterprise rather than plans implemented by Lyndon Johnson.⁵⁵

The November election marked both the maintenance of grower power in the valley and the federal government's goal of ending the Bracero Program. The Johnson administration and Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, were clear in desiring to end the program, but opaque on the details, procedures, and policies. Within this bureaucratic murkiness, Veysey continued his push to secure farmworkers from Mexico after 1964. During a December DOL hearing about the future of farm labor in California, Veysey voiced his displeasure at groups and individuals who stated there was sufficient domestic labor to terminate the Bracero Program with little to no profit losses. Veysey dismissed such views as “whistling in the dark,” meaning opponents of PL 414 possessed a false sense of security in the unknown future speculated through flawed facts.

⁵⁴ Virgil Pinkley, “A Profile on Barry Goldwater,” *IVP*, July 15, 1964, section 2, 5.

⁵⁵ “Voice of the People,” *IVP*, July 14, 1964, 6; “Voice of the People,” *IVP*, Aug. 19, 1964, section 2, 4. Graham sometimes provided the name A.L. Graham.

Veysey made no qualms about his position and veracity on farm labor as he informed the DOL that he spoke “as a farmer and a legislator.” Veysey echoed the argument by UC Berkeley economist Eric Thor when he declared the valley dependent on non-domestic farmworkers. There was already an instance during the 1964 October harvest where lettuce and sugar beets spoiled in the fields due to warm weather and a lack of labor. Mechanization of field labor was in development, such as Precision Systems’ “Iron Bracero,” but was not in the immediate horizon for widespread use. Veysey plainly stated, “California will still need thousands of imported seasonal agricultural workers, at peak periods in 1969, despite all possible efforts to mechanize.”⁵⁶ Veysey continued to advance that deportable laborers from Mexico were the sole remedy for an economic disaster.

Beyond PL 414, a local and nationalist source of farmworkers for the California and the valley were unemployed laborers. Secretary of Labor Wirtz noted that there were 3.5 million unemployed peoples and 200,000 bracero positions that needed to be filled after the Bracero Program ended in 1965. California Governor Pat Brown stated, “There are now more than 400,000 unemployed in this State. Our job must be to make the fullest and the most effective use of our labor supply right here in California and to do this you may need to reappraise farm wages, health, and retirement plans, housing and all other fields that concern working men and women.” In a survey conducted by the Institute of Industrial Relations at the University of California, Los Angeles, researcher Fred Schmidt found that nearly half of the unemployed interviewed would work in the fields and most of these respondents also said they would move with their families for fieldwork.⁵⁷ Both Brown and Schmidt focused their efforts on workers

⁵⁶ “Domestic Farm Labor Plan Hits,” *IVP*, Dec. 8, 1964, 1.

⁵⁷ “Wirtz Sure Domestic Farm Labor Available,” *IVP*, Dec. 22, 1964, 1; California. Governor Edmund G. Brown and United States Department of Labor. *Hearing on Farm Labor: To Seek Solutions to California Farm Manpower Problems Caused by the Pending End of the Mexican National Program Upon Expiration of Public Law 78*,

from California to show that the state did indeed have workers willing to labor in the fields and to sidestep arguments about the high costs in the transportation of interstate fieldworkers.

Unemployed workers, however, were by no means an automatic replacement for bracero labor. In order to attract unemployed workers, Secretary Wirtz proposed a series of reforms, chief among them an increased wage rate. Wirtz stated that \$1.25 per hour was the new post-Bracero hourly wage. The Secretary, however, stopped short of pushing reforms of health and unemployment insurance advocated by the California Federation of Labor and Cruz Reynoso during the 1964 election for state assembly. For growers and their allies, unemployed workers were “useless...unavailable...social misfits.” Victor Veysey placed responsibility of joblessness on the unemployed “because of their [lack of] schooling...lack of motivation...warped social outlook...[and] the relative attractiveness of idleness.”⁵⁸ Rather than interpret unemployment as a facet of capitalism, unemployed workers were undesirable precisely they were perceived as unable or unwilling to participate in the economy, much less in field labor that required skill, training, and care with crops.

Near the end of December of 1964, the Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz condensed the various post-Bracero Program labor proposals into a hybrid solution. The various proposals of post-Bracero Program labor ranged from an extension of the program, a five-year phase out of the program, a reduction in crop acreage, the use of PL 414, youth labor, unemployed workers, and hiring of more domestic workers. Indeed, the press was critical of the potential post-Bracero labor and economic landscape, satirically referring to it as a “smorgasbord of possibilities.”⁵⁹ That is, there was something at the table for seemingly all to enjoy, but no clear theme or

December 31, 1964, [transcript]. Sacramento, 1964, 3; Fred Schmidt, “After the Bracero: An Inquiry into the Problems of Farm Labor Recruitment, Supplemental Report,” (Los Angeles: UCLA; Institute of Industrial Relations, December 1964), 1-8.

⁵⁸ “Domestic Farm Labor Plan Hits,” *IVP*, Dec. 8, 1964, 1.

⁵⁹ “Bracero Answer Not Easy,” *IVP*, Sep. 8, 1964, 9.

direction of a misguided labor and harvest bounty. Wirtz concluded that growers must have preferential hiring of domestic farmworkers. Only when farmers could adequately demonstrate to the DOL that domestic workers were unavailable or in short supply to fill labor demands, the DOL agreed to “import foreign laborers under current immigration laws.” The immigration law was PL 414. Wirtz further added that farmworkers must be paid \$1.25 per hour on January 1, 1965, with an increase to \$1.40 on March 1, 1965. Wirtz also placed limits on the use of “foreign workers” by an individual grower to 120 days. Lastly, the DOL required growers who utilized domestic workers to provide housing, transportation (later modified to round-trip costs incurred by growers), pay guarantees, food, and workers’ compensation insurance.⁶⁰

The Department of Labor’s new labor plan closely resembled the Bracero Program, but geared for the United States rather than Mexico. Guaranteed transportation, work days, workers’ compensation, and housing were all part of PL 78. Indeed, this influence net gain for U.S. workers via the Bracero Program was precisely what Ambassador Carrillo Flores argued during his statement to the Senate in 1963. In October of 1964, Victor Veysey remarked that immigration officers did not know of the applicability of PL 414 in the Imperial Valley. One month later, an unnamed spokesperson for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) plainly stated in relation to PL 414 and the end of the Bracero Program, “The bracero program is not ending, it’s just changing its name.”⁶¹ The contrast in public officials’ statements and the link between PL 78 and PL 414 demonstrates elites’ uncertainty of the post-Bracero Imperial Valley as well as the maintenance of the Bracero Program’s logics of agriculture’s political economy. Veysey was unsure of 1965’s labor and harvest landscape. For him and other growers, the homogeneity of the area’s labor and capital (land, crops, water) appeared with craquelure that

⁶⁰ “New Rules Launch Farm Labor Race: Growers Doubt \$1.25 Will Aid,” *IVP*, Dec. 21, 1964, 1; “U.S. Farm Labor Criteria Boosted,” *IVP*, Dec. 28, 1.

⁶¹ “Valley Growers Seek to Retain Mexican Labor,” *IVP*, Nov. 9, 1964, 1.

threatened the integrity of the valley's political economy. Like other politicians and county officials, Veysey pushed the federal and state governments for clear statements and guidelines of the post-Bracero valley. Less than one month after his comment on immigration officials' unfamiliarity with PL 414, the INS spokesperson provided insight into the machinations of the valley's political economy from the fields to the port of entry. There was little intention to overhaul labor practices twenty-two years in the making, further showing how growers and the federal government continued to view Mexico as a source of labor, bracero or by some other name. The end of the Bracero Program served as a conduit for alternative ways to speak about race and labor in the valley that remained grounded on the labor power of Mexican bodies.

Both growers and labor groups critiqued the use of preferential hiring of domestic workers and modest labor protections. Labor groups often remarked that braceros were protected much more than domestic workers because PL 78 was an international agreement, with oversight from the Mexican and U.S. governments. Even before Wirtz decided the post-Bracero labor plan, labor was wary of the \$1.25 wage rate and the use of PL 414. As the Citizens for Farm Labor put it, use of PL 414 was "immoral and probably illegal."⁶² Growers and their allies, on the other hand, argued that the \$1.25 wage rate and the end of the Bracero Program was discriminatory toward California growers since wage rates were already the highest in this state than the rest of the country.⁶³ Republican California Senator Thomas H. Kuchel protested the DOL wage rates and urged that lower wage states, especially Arizona, be ordered to raise its pay standards since similar crops grown in California and Arizona were "frequently destined for the same markets." One spokesman for growers stated that California growers "cannot remain competitive with foreign growers" because of the new DOL regulations and all of California's agricultural

⁶² "Labor, Growers: Both Sides Attack 'Phase-Out' Plan," *IVP*, Dec. 8, 1964, 1.

⁶³ "Growers Accept \$1.25 Wage Rate," *IVP*, Dec. 24, 1964, 1.

political economy was at risk.⁶⁴

With two days left in 1964 and the Bracero Program, Imperial Valley growers deployed a Janus strategy. Despite their vocal protests and reluctance to accept federal policy, California and Imperial Valley growers agreed to comply with federal guidelines for the post-Bracero landscape. Growers agreed to the \$1.25 per hour wage and paying for roundtrip transportation costs, and minimal housing for domestic workers. Roundtrip transportation expenses furthered the notion that domestic workers, much like braceros, were intended as itinerant workers with little claims of belonging to the valley. The first labor request was for 4,000 workers for citrus orchards in Southern California.⁶⁵ The Imperial Valley Growers and Shippers Association also put in their first labor request of 1,800 workers for 41,000 acres of lettuce. The 1,800 domestic workers was a 1:1 replacement of braceros after 1964. Ed Hayes remarked that an additional 1,000 workers were needed by January 10, 1965 at the height of the lettuce season. Hayes and the Imperial Valley Farmers Association relied on the recruitment teams established by the DOL to find the necessary fieldworkers.⁶⁶

The other side of the Janus strategy emerged less than a week later when growers rescinded their labor request. The reason for the cancellation was discussed in deceptively simple terms. Growers were concerned over a “‘deluge’ of unqualified workers whom it was impossible for growers to screen out.” The cancellation highlighted the high skill set required for lettuce work, but also the IVFA’s loss of control over farm labor. After growers and their allies invested decades and countless hours lobbying in the press and Congress into the image of ethnic Mexican bodies as being the only suitable types for “grub” and stoop labor—the very image that

⁶⁴ “Kuchel Charges Discrimination,” *IVP*, Dec. 30, 1964, 1; “Wirtz Sure Domestic Farm Labor Available,” *IVP*, Dec. 22, 1964, 1.

⁶⁵ “Farmers Give First Job Orders,” *IVP*, Dec. 23, 1964, 1;

⁶⁶ “Growers Accept \$1.25 Wage Rate,” *IVP*, Dec. 24, 1964, 1.

justified low-wages in the fields—growers pushed back against themselves. The workers that the DOL contracted were not vetted by the IVFA, unlike bracero labor that was inspected in both the United States and Mexico. Herb Lee, president of the IVFA, related growers' displeasure and unease of being "compelled to hire" domestic workers due to federal regulations rather than performance. Interestingly, Lee remarked, "we know that many skilled workers are being obtained, from other areas, in view of the high wages here." Not only were California wages seen as discriminatory and ineffective by growers, they were now part of the solution to end the valley's labor woes. Moreover, the "deluge" of workers harkened to the previous arguments made by El Centro police chief Paul Wheeler, where domestic workers caused a strain on resources, now with the added dimension of stressing harvests and profits in the fields.⁶⁷

The cancelled orders also undermined arguments that the Imperial Valley was dependent on braceros to fulfill labor needs. As Ed Hayes pointed out, the order was a 1:1 switch from bracero to domestic labor. Yet, growers opted to "operate at this time short-handed with experienced workers." Lee noted that growers already began a training program for workers that would continue into 1965. Growers preferred to let domestic workers "sit somewhere out of the way" rather than train the new hires. Experienced lettuce crews—composed of domestic workers since the Bracero Program was at its nadir—also refused to have their crews mixed since it affected the amount that could be made on piece rate.⁶⁸ Lee's final comment of the year to the *Imperial Valley Press*, the mouthpiece of grower interests and the advocate of the valley's agricultural political economy, was that growers were prepared to "assume the risk and the burden of finding our own help." That is, growers relied on the state to negotiate an international labor plan, yet now they were ready to be independent yeomen once more.

⁶⁷ "Growers Cancel Order for Labor: 'Deluge' of Untrained Domestic Workers Feared," Dec. 31, 1964, 1.

⁶⁸ This figure, according to Herb Lee, ranged from \$2-\$3 per hour.

Debates about the end of the Bracero Program and the valley's social and economic wellbeing fell into two main camps: steadiness and ruin. Virgil Pinkley, editor of the *Imperial Valley Press*, wrote two editorials that promoted the continuation of the Bracero Program. On October 12, 1964, Pinkley opened his editorial with the unequivocal statement, "It must now be abundantly clear even to the most politically minded that California agriculture needs Mexican or bracero labor." Pinkley lambasted state and federal efforts of recruiting domestic and unemployed workers and higher wages. The result of these plans "have been indifferent to poor." Pinkley chastised Governor Pat Brown as being "a captive of labor bosses" in his plan to end the Bracero Program, despite the governor's five-year phase-out plan. Most telling of the argument strategy utilized by Pinkley was his de-politicization of grower interests, labor, and race. Pinkley's opening statement presented agricultural interests as apolitical, with labor and church groups focused on dismantling the Bracero Program and damaging the valley's political economy. Growers and their allies, however, were grounded in their appeals to extend the Bracero Program. For them, an extension was unbiased and objective response that guaranteed the harvests and the valley's economic survival. Pinkley validated Herb Lee's perspective as "an expert, not a politician talking for labor support or on a subject of which he has little or no knowledge." Lee's interests in promoting the Bracero Program and bracero labor was objective because it saved the valley's political economy and peoples from economic disaster, similar reasons Victor Veysey provided when Veysey argued for the use of PL 414 to save "our fields."⁶⁹ For growers and their allies, Governor Brown's only recourse to assisting agriculture was vocally advocating for the Bracero Program and continuing the hegemonic race and labor relations with Mexico.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "Candidates Address Holtville Meet," *IVP*, Oct. 7, 1964, 1.

⁷⁰ Virgil Pinkley, "California—Real Test Tube," *IVP*, Oct. 12, 1964, 8.

Pinkley's final editorial for 1964 highlighted a sense of urgency for the Imperial Valley and its agriculture political economy. Pinkley reiterated several arguments he made in October, especially the de-politicization of continuance of the Bracero Program, calling the politics around its end "a gigantic political football." Pinkley appeared to be exhausted in his efforts, but not resigned to the finiteness of the Bracero Program. Pinkley offered many of the same arguments of growers and politicians with the additional prognostications of subsidy crops, inflation, and morality. Pinkley noted that loss of bracero meant that growers would turn to growing subsidized crops to protect against risk and profit losses. There was already an abundance of subsidized crops, meaning that markets would be glutted and prices uncontrolled.⁷¹ The increase in farm wages by the DOL and agreed by the IVFA would drive food prices up, despite the "wages paid to field labor...represent[ed] a very small part of the cost to the consumer."⁷² With a final seal of morality, Pinkley questioned justice and the impartiality of the federal government, labor, and church groups. He called the end of the Bracero Program "wrong" and its conclusion "compounds the felony against farms and especially in California." Growers and the valley's political economy were in unknown waters owing to executive decisions made without their full interests in mind. Yet, as the INS spokesperson stated in November, the new labor and race regime in the post-Bracero borderlands was a transfer in nomenclature, "The bracero program is not ending, it's just changing its name."⁷³

Section 3: Unfulfilled Prophecies: The Valley's First Post-Bracero Harvest

⁷¹ Pinkley's assessment of subsidies ironically failed to mention that farm subsidies implemented during the New Deal alleviated the total collapse of U.S. agriculture.

⁷² Wirtz, *Year of Transition*, 22.

⁷³ Virgil Pinkley, "Politics and Farm Labor," *IVP*, Dec. 31, 1964, 8; "Valley Growers Seek to Retain Mexican Labor," *IVP*, Nov. 9, 1964, 1.

As peoples across the Mexicali-Imperial Valley borderlands celebrated the beginning of 1965, the Bracero Program expired. According to growers and their allies, 1965 would demonstrate the necessity of the Bracero Program and deportable laborers from Mexico. Imperial Valley and California were on a road of economic, social, and racial dislocation. Images of braceros boarding buses as “homeward bound” appeared to mark a victory for opponents of the Bracero Program and a defeat for the Imperial Valley Farmers Association and grower-politician Victor Veysey.⁷⁴ The lettuce season of 1965, however, revealed the imbricated investment of capital in the fields (water, land, machinery, chemicals, seeds) and socioracial hegemony in the Imperial Valley.

Divinations that revealed a catastrophic post-Bracero valley contended with an abundance of labor power. Ed Hayes seized the initiative early on and traveled to Mexico City in an attempt to broker a labor deal with Mexico’s federal government. The deal did not manifest and growers were prepared to harvest and pack less lettuce rather than have inspectors refuse poorly harvested lettuce. Even as domestic workers from other parts of the state arrived to work in the Imperial Valley, the IVFA turned them away.⁷⁵ Bud Antle, a grower with thousands of acres in California and Arizona, chastised the Department of Labor and its work regulations for domestic workers. Antle stated that he already provided higher wages, unemployment insurance, and collective bargaining agreements. Antle went so far as to claim that some “unqualified” workers tried to get a job in the fields because they would have access to a physician. After allegedly turning workers away, growers risked losing access to Mexican workers via PL 414. Yet, Pat Crow, manager of the Farm Labor Office in El Centro, noted that there was actually an

⁷⁴ “Curtain Closes on PL 78,” *IVP*, Dec. 31, 1964, 1; “Homeward Bound,” *IVP*, Jan. 1, 1965, 5; “The Last Bracero,” *Monthly Desert Valley Farm News*, Jan. 5, 1965.

⁷⁵ “Some IV Lettuce To Be Lost Through Worker Shortage,” *IVP*, Jan. 1, 1965, 1; “‘Unqualified’ Workers Still Applying; Seek Valley Farm Jobs,” *IVP*, Jan. 5, 1965, 1.

“oversupply of domestic workers for the lettuce harvest” and no competition for labor from surrounding agricultural regions, including Arizona.⁷⁶ For the valley’s first harvest, growers were prepared to absorb a modest reduction in profits, yet the post-Bracero labor landscape proved to be much more amenable.

Growers also contended with a successful lettuce season in 1965. Their grave predictions of the post-Bracero Program valley indicated the region’s total assured economic collapse. Two weeks into the post-Bracero Program political economy, Imperial County agricultural commissioner, Claude M. Finnell, reported that valley lettuce not only exceeded shipments from 1964 up to January 15, but there was also an overall increase of 4,702 acres for lettuce. Finnell later stated that tomato acreage was reduced by 507 acres and spring onion acreage increased by 53 acres.⁷⁷ Two of the primary points of growers’ vision of the post-Bracero Program valley was a lack of labor to harvest efficiently and effectively with threats of reduction of acres planted, and relatedly, profits for the entire valley in a proto-trickle-down economic fantasy. The gloom outlook for the valley’s chief crop was further eroded in early February as unseasonably warm weather caused a faster harvest period than usual. Valley lettuce glutted the market and threatened profit margins with price being driven down. The lettuce season proceeded “despite...transition from bracero labor to domestic workers” to such an extent that the state intervened, much like the New Deal and the negotiation of PL 78, and ordered a temporary halt in the harvest to correct lowered prices.⁷⁸ As prices recalibrated upward, so did profits. Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz went so far as to call growers’ insistence that use of domestic workers

⁷⁶ “Lettuce Growers Fight For Crop—Charge ‘Shabby Treatment’ By U.S.,” *Monthly Desert Valley Farm News*, Jan. 5, 1965, 2-3; “State Threatens Growers With Cut-Off of Labor,” *IVP*, Jan. 5, 1965, 1.

⁷⁷ Figures for lettuce acreage were 33,219 in 1964 and 37,921 for 1965. “Acres, Lettuce Shipments Exceed Those For Last Year,” *IVP*, Jan. 15, 1965, 6. Tomato acres in 1964 were 2,603 in 1964 and 2,096 in 1965. Spring onion acres were 2,512 in 1964 and 2,565 in 1965. “Valley Tomato Acreage Drops,” *IVP*, June 4, 1965, 7.

⁷⁸ “Market Control Halts Valley Lettuce Flow,” *IVP*, Feb. 2, 1965, 1; “Lettuce Harvest Proceeds Rapidly,” *Desert Farm News*, Feb. 2, 1965, 5; “Lettuce Again Halted,” *IVP*, Feb. 4, 1965, 1; “TV Votes Continued Lettuce Control,” *IVP*, Feb. 5, 1965, 1; “Lettuce Harvest Control Review Set By Board,” *IVP*, Feb. 10, 1965, 6.

drove up prices “a plaything of the truth.”⁷⁹ Ironically, a lack of labor would have driven up crop prices, profits, and provided evidence for grower claims. Instead, the first post-Bracero Program harvest in the Imperial Valley was troubled by nature—an element growers were not able to control—rather than labor availability—an element growers sought to control.

The first year of the post-Bracero Program in California was marked more by grower desires for braceros rather than loss of profits or the end of agriculture in the state. Instead, national sales of bracero-worked crops like lettuce were up \$18 million while asparagus, tomatoes, and cucumbers also saw sales increases from the previous harvest.⁸⁰ Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz noted that Stockton and Salinas (both in California) and Michigan were the only areas that were impacted by the end of the Bracero Program, not the Imperial Valley. Unsurprisingly, the growers in the Central Valley pushed for the use of Mexican workers via PL 414. By late August, California tomato growers convinced Wirtz of a labor shortage and 9,500 Mexican “braceros” were approved for work in the fields. Another 8,100 “braceros” were approved in late September. As a spokesperson for the Tomato Growers Association, noted, “We had a pretty fair year despite our screaming.”⁸¹ The extensive use of farm machinery in tomato fields accounted for the drop in requests of workers from Mexico, yet “braceros” contributed to the success of the tomato harvest.

Another legacy of the Bracero Program in 1965 was the contracting of workers. Mexican laborers were first processed in Empalme, Sonora, the small coastal town on the Gulf of California, and then hired at the port of entry in Calexico-Mexicali. Empalme was the location of the Mexican processing center during the Bracero Program while in the United States, the

⁷⁹ “Domestic Farm Workers Causing Big Farm Losses,” *IVP*, June 7, 1965, 3; Wirtz, *Year of Transition*, 22.

⁸⁰ Wirtz, *Year of Transition*, 18.

⁸¹ “9,500 Braceros Approved For California Jobs,” *IVP*, Aug. 27, 1965, 1; “17,600 Braceros Admitted Into State,” *IVP*, Sept. 27, 1965, 1; “Mechanical Monster Bracero Substitute,” *IVP*, Oct. 11, 1965, 1.

workers were no longer transported to the Bracero reception center in El Centro. Some workers sought to bypass Empalme, but were told by Mexican authorities in Mexicali that PL 414 contracts were signed at Empalme rather than in Mexicali.⁸² During the debates on the end of the Bracero Program in 1963, Herb Lee opined nearly two years earlier, “it would seem foolhardy to close the existing migratory station at Empalme, Sonora, Mexico, and the station at El Centro.”⁸³ The desire for a Bracero economy in both the United States and Mexico kept the doors at Empalme open and hiring was relocated at the U.S. to the port of entry.

The continued importation of workers from Mexico in the post-Bracero period and references to “braceros” indicated the vital connection between Mexico, workers, and agriculture. Willard Wirtz termed 1965 the “year of transition” from reliance on braceros in the fields and the shift to domestic workers. Even with the September peak of 17,600 “braceros” brought from Mexico to work in tomatoes and 20,300 for other crops in 1965, Wirtz noted, “the total man-months of bracero employment in 1964 was 508,000; in 1965, it was 27,000—a reduction of 95 percent.” California utilized 21,000 more workers in August 1965 than in the previous year and nationally, an average of 20,000 domestic workers in crops once worked by braceros. These changes in the citizenship of workers—not ethnoracial composition—led Wirtz to declare, “the period of any large scale use of foreign labor is ended.”⁸⁴

Masked by Wirtz’s enthusiasm over the DOL’s policies was the continued importation of workers from Mexico. The link between Mexico and importation of laborers established during the Bracero Program remained in the post-Bracero period with 20,300 workers imported to work in the United States, mainly California. Wirtz interpreted this reduction a success for domestic

⁸² “Aspirantes,” *La Voz*, May 19, 1965, 3A; “Wirtz Approves Importing 1,000 More Braceros,” *IVP*, May 20, 1965, 1; “Ready for Work,” *IVP*, Aug. 30, 1.

⁸³ “Bracero Center Closing Called Pact Breach,” *IVP*, Sept. 25, 1963, 1.

⁸⁴ Wirtz, *Year of Transition*, 5-6, 10, 27.

workers with little consideration of the continued reliance of fieldworkers from Mexico as the salve of California agriculture. Moreover, the use of the noun “bracero” by Wirtz and the press revealed how workers from Mexico continued to be braceros. That is, workers from Mexico were still viewed as importable, exploitable, temporary, and deportable. There was also a continued concern for “braceros” and health concerns, specifically the screening of communicable diseases. The debate was less about Mexican bodies as incubators of disease—which was established during the invasive medical exams that included the use of DDT. Rather, the concern rested on which state agency should be responsible for screening and treatment.⁸⁵ The naming and labor practices established during the twenty-two year Bracero Program partially validated the INS spokesperson’s claim of a continued Bracero Program.⁸⁶

In the Imperial Valley, 1965 was remarkable not solely for the maintenance of grower profits, but also for the growers’ silence regarding PL 414 workers. The *Imperial Valley Press* failed to report or communicate any significant grower profit losses in the first post-Bracero Program year. Initially, growers were concerned about the availability of workers, whether domestic or from Mexico. Growers were simultaneously concerned with the reserve labor pool and the skills of potential fieldworkers. These reasons are what prompted the Imperial Valley Farmers Association to request 1,800 workers from the state in late December of 1964 only to renege days later. The major reason why valley growers were not petitioning the federal government for PL 414 workers (or “braceros”) was the reliance on permanent resident workers, commonly referred to as green card workers; that is, peoples who possessed permanent resident cards. Peoples with permanent resident cards were non-U.S. citizens who were “resident aliens”

⁸⁵ “Tunney Urges Medical Exams For Braceros,” *IVP*, Sept. 22, 1965, 10; “17,600 Braceros Admitted Into State,” *IVP*, Sept. 27, 1965, 1; “Board Orders Study of Bracero TB Tests,” *IVP*, Oct.5, 1965, 2.

⁸⁶ “Valley Growers Seek to Retain Mexican Labor,” *IVP*, Nov. 9, 1964, 1. The INS spokesperson is also referred to throughout this chapter to show the visions of the state in its relationship with growers and workers from Mexico.

of the United States. This meant that they were permanent residents of the United States (unlike PL 414 workers), but not citizens. Importantly, peoples with permanent resident cards could freely travel/commute between the United States and country of origin, live in both countries, and also work in the US. Permanent resident cards contrasted with the “border crossing card,” which was a 72-hour pass to travel and purchase within 150 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, but not work. On the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, peoples who possessed a permanent resident card were overwhelmingly from Mexico and resided in Mexicali, the Imperial Valley, or both simultaneously. In November of 1964, it was estimated that between 6,000-8,000 *mexicalicenses* (residents of Mexicali) held a permanent residency card. By February of 1965, it was estimated that 3,000 *mexicalicenses* with permanent residency passed through Calexico’s port of entry to work in the valley’s fields.⁸⁷ If the person who possessed a permanent residency card (green card)—or *mica*, in Spanish—resided in Mexicali and worked in the United States, they were referred to as a commuter worker, green card worker, or the pejorative term, “green carder.” However, a permanent resident card holder from Mexico living on the northern side of the border could still be termed a commuter worker since they were residents, rather than citizens of the United States. It is important to note that workers with permanent resident cards were considered “domestic” workers since they were immigrants to the United States. Permanent residents also entered into numerous job sectors in the valley, especially retail, housekeeping, and agriculture. Many former braceros were granted permanent residency cards during and after the conclusion of the Bracero Program.

⁸⁷ “Braceros Replacing Green Card Workers,” *IVP*, Nov. 14-15, 1965, 5; “New Target: Workers Enlisted By Union,” *IVP*, Feb. 12, 1965, 1.

Hiring fieldworkers who possessed permanent resident cards at the port of entry in Calexico was an established procedure that gained importance after the Bracero Program.⁸⁸ Fieldworkers crossed the port of entry between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m., gathered near Second Street and Imperial Avenue, then boarded buses and trucks provided by contractors as part of the commute from Mexicali to the fields of the Imperial Valley. During the Bracero Program, contractors complained that braceros prevented permanent resident card workers from being hired.⁸⁹ With the program gone in 1965, growers and contractors increasingly used permanent resident card workers to complement other workers, whether residents of the Imperial Valley, Mexicali, or migrant workers from other parts of California and the United States. During the lettuce harvest in January of 1965, Pat Crow, manager of the Farm Labor Office in El Centro, noted that there was an “oversupply of lettuce workers for the lettuce harvest.” The composition of the abundant domestic labor pool was both U.S. citizens of Mexican descent and permanent residents. Crow mentioned that at Calexico’s port of entry, “not only Mexican-Americans are hired everyday by Valley farmers, but Green Card workers from Mexicali also find jobs.”⁹⁰ The domestic labor pool in the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands was further augmented by *mexicalicenses* who worked extra-legally either with the border crossing card or as undocumented workers. Though the figures are unreliable, the end of the Bracero Program ushered in a period of increased undocumented workers from Mexico as Mexican workers sought field jobs and growers willingly hired them. Moreover, there was no penalty for growers who employed such workers. Rather, punishment rested with the worker. The post-Bracero period relied on grower strategies practiced during the program’s twenty-two year existence.

⁸⁸ The border crossing was the site of protest by the United Packinghouse Workers of America-Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee on January 5, 1961.

⁸⁹ “Braceros Replacing Green Card Workers,” *IVP*, Nov. 14-15, 1965, 5.

⁹⁰ “Farm Labor Office Says: Lettuce Workers In ‘Over-Supply’ As Of Right Now,” *IVP*, Jan. 14, 1965, 1.

Virgil Pinkley, editor of the *Imperial Valley Press*, painted the relationship between permanent resident card workers and the Imperial Valley as symbiotic. In permanent resident workers, the Imperial Valley could have its answer for the seemingly perpetual and unqualified “farm labor problem” while permanent resident workers could “upgrade the families” by living in the valley. The valley’s cities, especially Calexico, also stood to benefit from federal funding for low-income housing for farmworkers since permanent resident fieldworkers would be cited as evidence of housing needs. Pinkley mentioned that cities must decide “if getting the families of Green Card farm workers into federally financed housing represents a desirable addition to the area.” That is, the dilemma posed by permanent resident workers and their families was their existence in the area that also understood them to be a solution to the post-Bracero quandary. Pinkley believed that permanent resident workers and their children could follow in the wake of persons of Mexican descent in the valley, who “have been well integrated into Imperial Valley life,” ranging from employment in schools to mainstream electoral politics. The crux of Pinkley’s struggle was the differential inclusion of *mexicalicenses* as fieldworkers first followed by other white-collar professions at least one generation later. Pinkley was speaking of the complex meanings of citizenship on the borderlands and the American liberal principles of opportunity, immigration, integration, assimilation, and success. The question remained on the desirability of *mexicalicenses* living permanently in the valley.

Conclusion

From the earliest defenses of the Bracero Program in 1947 up to the overwhelmingly profitable winter harvest in 1965, growers and policymakers demonstrated their dependence on Mexican workers for their livelihoods and the Imperial Valley’s agricultural political economy.

Growers and their allies legitimized their concerns over possible labor scarcity through depictions of a valley gone socially and economically awry without exploitable and deportable Mexican labor in the fields. Growers and policymakers ensured their access to Mexican labor, whether through the Bracero Program, the H-2 program, or immigration plans. In the words of U.S. Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, 1965 marked the “year of transition” in U.S. agribusiness. The transition was the stated move away from braceros under the Bracero Program and preference for domestic workers in U.S. fields and living wages for farmworkers.

This chapter has also demonstrated that the transition proclaimed by Wirtz and lamented by growers was a rhetorical gesture. The goal was to improve the lives of farm laborers on a vague timeline rather than to change the agriculture political economy that structured the Imperial Valley. The bureaucratic transition contended with the powerful ideas of agribusiness and the temporary and deportable labor of Mexican workers, whether domestic or commuter. The Bracero Program, “Operation Wetback,” and commuter immigration regulations served as dual efforts to maintain the flow of Mexican bodies into the fields and limit Mexican belonging to those very fields. As Mario Bustamante noted, there was no major change at the conclusion of the Bracero Program. Institutional and social practices outlasted the program and informed the post-1964 landscape, where *Braceros* were replaced with *braceros*, but agribusiness remained constant.

As chapter 2 will show, Mexicali and Mexico were also focused on a period of transition in the 1960s, but one focused on modernization and industrialization projects rather than agriculture. This distinct vision of the borderlands was one of several links that Mexicali powerbrokers connected to U.S. capitalism throughout the twentieth century.

Chapter 2: From Cotton to Hot Wheels: Political and Economic Dynamics in the Fluctuating Mexicali-Imperial Borderlands, 1937-1967

Introduction

Between 1967 and 1969, two companies shared opposite fates, yet intertwined legacies. In April 1967, members of the Guajardo family in Mexicali opened a maquiladora tied to the Mattel toy company. The maquiladora, Mextel (Mexico-Mattel), soon became Mexicali's largest single employer and a staple of Mexicali's economic life. Two years later on May 15, 1969, the *Asociación Algodonera del Valle* (Cotton Association of the Valley) announced that it was closing its doors and would no longer represent cotton farmers in Baja California's state government and Mexicali's municipal government. The end of a business corporation was a common occurrence, yet there was a palpable difference with the dissolution of the *Asociación*. The director of National Chamber of Commerce called the news "regrettable...because this was a valuable organization...that worked on the community's problems." The director of the Mexican Employer's Association called the breakup "lamentable" because the organization "contributed its efforts toward the economic development of this city [Mexicali] and the valley."¹ More than the opening of a toy assembly factory and the end of a cotton interest group, the two events marked larger shifts in Mexicali's identity as a cotton empire to one of urban and industrial transformation on the borderlands.

The start of Mextel and the end of the *Asociación Algodonera* were part of larger transnational shifts in political economy, capitalist visions, and labor relations on the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands. Business elites and policymakers in Mexicali understood relations with the

¹ "Consideran Lamentable la Desaparición de la Asociación Algodonera del Valle," *La Voz de la Frontera*, May 15, 1969, 1A, 5A. This newspaper will hereafter be cited as *La Voz*.

Imperial Valley and the United States as both a geographic necessity and mainstay of Mexicali identity. Since the early twentieth century, United States capitalist ventures and Mexican businessmen and government officials formed intimate relationships that shaped Baja California as a distinct cotton region of Mexico. Beginning in 1937, the Mexican federal government designated northern Baja California and the westernmost portion of Sonora as a duty-free zone (*zona libre*) and pursued import-substitution industrialization after World War II. Both policies created the space for Mexicali elites to argue for economic autonomy as a regional and commercial identity. Yet the backdrop of transnational U.S. capital loomed large and revealed the joint modernization projects in the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, what Geraldo Cadava theorizes as the “national and internationally shared ideologies of modernization and economic development.”²

From the 1930s to the late 1960s, Mexicali also underwent a series of spatial and architectural changes in relation to larger national and global economic trends. Indeed, the city’s population experienced a nine-fold increase, from 29,985 people in 1930 to 281,333 people in 1960.³ In close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexicali’s downtown skyline was highlighted by the central cathedral, *La Catedral de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe), which shared the visual landscape with the *Hotel del Norte* (Hotel of the North) by the early 1950s. Farther from the international border fence, buildings like the *Cervecería de Mexicali* (Mexicali Brewery), the *Universidad Autónoma de Baja California* (Autonomous University of Baja California), the hospital *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*

² Geraldo L. Cadava, “Borderlands of Modernity and Abandonment: The Lines within Ambos Nogales and the Tohono O’odham Nation,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (1 September 2011): 371.

³ Norma Fimbres Durazo, “Capitalist Development and Population Growth in the County of Imperial, California, and Mexicali, Baja California,” in *Imperial-Mexicali Valleys: Development and Environment of the U.S.-Mexican Border Region*, eds. Kimberly Collins, Paul Ganster, et al., (San Diego: SDSU Press; Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias, 2004), 47-49.

(Mexican Social Security Institute), and the mega-cotton gin *Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacífico* (Industrial Soap Company of the Pacific) demonstrated Mexicali's emphasis on city planning while pushing agriculture further away from the city limits. In the late 1970s, construction of Mexicali's *Centro Cívico* (Civic Center) was completed and housed the main offices of municipal, state, and federal government bureaucracies, marking Mexicali's status as the capital of the state of Baja California. Dense *colonias* (neighborhoods) such as *Baja California* to the west, *Prohogar* to the southeast, and *Carbajal*, *Hidalgo*, and *Palaco* to the south were within an eight-mile radius from the international fence. The *colonias* created a maze of streets, blaring car horns, and multi-chromatic homes (at times with workshops or restaurants attached) that residents navigated on a daily basis. Mexicali's landscape was indicative of a move away from agriculture as the defining characteristic of the city to one of urban development and industrialization.

This chapter interrogates Mexicali's political economy from the late 1930s to the 1970s as a matrix of local planning, government oversight, and U.S. capitalist power in the (re)making of Mexicali's economic structures and modernization goals. This period marks significant change in Mexicali's political and economic structures as the city and region was transformed from a cotton latifundia of the U.S.-owned Colorado River Land Company to a manufacturing zone that included Kenworth Mexicana (heavy trucks and trailers) and Mextel (assembly factory for Mattel toys), both of which were directly linked to U.S. companies. By highlighting cotton, Kenworth Mexicana, and Mextel, this chapter shows peasants' relegation to a secondary role in the industrialization and modernization scheme while also showing the intimate connections between the heads of Kenworth Mexicana and Mextel to U.S. economic interests. Indeed, the establishment of the machine shop *El Águila* by Mexicali industrialist, Gustavo Vildósola Castro,

and the incorporation of the Mextel toy assembly factory in 1967 by members of the Guajardo family mark the chapter's periodization. The logics of capitalism on the borderlands demand excavation to understand Mexicali visions that at times placed the city at odds with the central government as it formed complex relationships with the United States and the Imperial Valley.

This chapter argues that the involvement of U.S. capital and Mexicali's proximity to the border were utilized by Mexicali elites in an effort to create an exceptional space of autonomy from Mexico City. Moving beyond the post-Revolutionary era, I contend that intimate relations established by the Guajardo and Vildósola families through cotton production was a key aspect that influenced and, in part, financed the prioritizing of industrialization in Mexicali. I show that Mexicali agents of capitalist development and modernization linked local and national policies to transnational U.S. capital, demonstrating the mutual constitution of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Section 1: Cotton (De)Throned

Early in Mexicali's history, U.S. interests as much as Mexican state projects greatly influenced its political economy and social organization. By far, the most significant factors of U.S. involvement in early twentieth-century Mexicali were the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC) and cotton production. According to Sergio Noriega-Verdugo, a scholar of the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, "No single company was more influential than the Colorado River Land Company...It was responsible for most of the region's infrastructure, including hydraulics, transportation, and finance."⁴ *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harrison Gray Otis led a group of investors to form the CRLC in 1902. The CRLC obtained their landholdings from Guillermo

⁴ Sergio Noriega-Verdugo, "Economic Overview: Employment Patterns in the Municipality of Mexicali," in *Imperial-Mexicali Valleys: Development and Environment of the U.S.-Mexican Border Region*, eds. Kimberly Collins, Paul Ganster, et al. (San Diego: SDSU Press; Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias, 2004), 116.

Andrade, who was tasked by the Mexican federal government to colonize the area as a buffer to U.S. expansion and to mark the state's control over Cucapa Indians.⁵ The firm was incorporated in Mexico and over the course of a few years, the CRLC purchased 832,337 acres (1,300 square miles) of Mexicali's valley. This land grab included the vast majority of acreage in the valley of Mexicali. In 1912, the CRLC turned to cotton as its main product and, eight years later, the CRLC "proclaimed itself the largest cotton ranch in the world."⁶ While Mexico's economy suffered because of World War I, Mexicali grew in large part because of expansion of the cotton industry. Similarly, the Great Depression caused cotton prices to slump, yet Mexicali cotton became profitable again in 1935.⁷

Mexicali's growth and economic health were linked directly to the CRLC's cotton enterprise and use of Chinese workers. The CRLC not only controlled the land, it also attempted to circumvent Mexican control by not leasing land to Mexican citizens. Instead, the CRLC imported and relied on Chinese tenants to farm the land. Yet, Chinese workers recognized the high profit margins of cotton and pushed for higher wages through labor strikes against the CRLC.⁸ Towards the end of the Great Depression, Mexican residents wanted to tap into the reinvigorated cotton market and challenged the CRLC's monopolization of land. Rather than wait for gradual land purchases for the "Mexicanization" of Baja California—as conceived in 1930 by President Pascual Ortiz Rubio—campesinos staged a takeover of the CRLC's

⁵ Sergio Noriega-Verdugo, "Economic Overview," 115-116. Geraldo Cadava and José Antonio Lucero both illustrate the ambiguity of colonial power for the Tohono O'odham and push back against "political boundaries simply as colonial impositions on Native peoples." While this dissertation is not a history of indigenous peoples in the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, their arguments must be heeded. The goal of colonizing Baja California was the central government's desire to control lands it claimed that required migrants from other parts of Mexico rather than fully incorporate the Cucapa into Mexican identity. See Cadava, "Borderlands of Modernity and Abandonment," 362-383; José Antonio Lucero, "Friction, Conversion, and Contention: Prophetic Politics in the Tohono O'odham Borderlands," in "Lived Religion and Lived Citizenship in Latin America's Zones of Crisis," special issue, *Latin American Research Review* 49 (2014): 171.

⁶ Benny J. Andrés, *Power and Control in the Imperial Valley: Nature, Agribusiness, and Workers on the California Borderland, 1900-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2014), 43.

⁷ Noriega-Verdugo, "Economic Overview," 116; Andrés, *Power and Control*, 153.

⁸ Andrés, *Power and Control*, 100.

headquarters in 1937. Called the *Asalto de las Tierras* (land assault/invasion), President Lázaro Cárdenas supported campesinos under a banner of Revolutionary nationalism and he expropriated most of the CRLC's landholdings in Mexicali. Campesino expressions of revolutionary nationalism blended smoothly with the central government's vision of a mestizo nation controlled by Mexican citizens rather than U.S. investors or Chinese Others.⁹ The CRLC was purchased in 1946 by the Mexican National Finance Bank and renamed the Mexican Company of Colorado River Lands, ending the CRLC's 44-year land and infrastructural dominance of the area.¹⁰ The expropriation of CRLC lands and power holdings was not a repudiation of cotton; rather, it was the Mexican government's refusal to allow Baja California to exist as a blatant extension of U.S. interests.

Land practices established by the CRLC continued to impact the Mexicali Valley into the mid-twentieth century. This trend continued in Mexicali even after the CRLC was purchased in 1946 and also encouraged the continued production of cotton. One of the central goals of President Lázaro Cárdenas's *ejido* system was to combat campesino landlessness. In Mexicali, CRLC land expropriation was supported under this logic and 44 *ejido* communal landholdings—roughly 100,000 hectares (386 square miles)—were established between 1937 and 1938.¹¹ Moreover, individual plots on ejidos were 20 hectares, which was “much larger than land reform elsewhere in Mexico and thus helped farmers grow cotton for the international market.”¹² While the CRLC appeared to be slated as a relic of the recent past, familiarity with cotton and the possibility of profitable markets helped white bolls outlast the company that introduced the plant

⁹ Andrés, *Power and Control*, 73, 153-54; Jason Oliver Chang, “Outsider Crossings: History, Culture, and Geography of Mexicali's Chinese Community,” (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2010), 128-161, (AAT 3555613).

¹⁰ Oscar Sánchez Ramírez, “Development of the Structure of Agriculture in the Mexicali Valley in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Imperial-Mexicali Valleys*, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹² Noriega-Verdugo, “Economic Overview,” 116.

to the desert. Through crop introduction and large landholding practices, the CRLC influenced the Revolutionary government and regional identity.

Non-CRLC capital investment also promoted the primacy of cotton in Mexicali. The firm Anderson, Clayton and Company (ACCO) and its subsidiary in Mexicali, the *Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacífico* (Industrial Soap Company of the Pacific) owned and financed key components of cotton production. To be clear, the *Jabonera* focused heavily on cotton processing rather than soap manufacture.¹³ ACCO was founded in 1904 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and relocated to Houston, Texas in 1916. By the late 1930s and mid-1940s, ACCO was the world's largest cotton company and the principal financier of cotton in Mexicali.¹⁴ ACCO developed a working, though tenuous, relationship with President Lázaro Cárdenas. During the *Asalto de las Tierras* and ensuing repatriation of lands, ACCO was able to secure its holdings in Mexicali by agreeing to invest in the National Ejido Credit Bank (Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal), essentially financing Mexicali's ejido system by 5 million pesos in 1939. ACCO flexed its global cotton hegemony to protect its investments and "reassured Cárdenas that its vast marketing system in Europe and Asia" could sell Mexico's cotton worldwide.¹⁵ Through the *Jabonera*, ACCO provided necessary credits to the Colorado River Water District Number 14 (*Distrito de Riego Número 14 del Río Colorado*), the irrigation district established by the federal government.¹⁶ The Cárdenas-ACCO accords aligned U.S. capital and production interests with those of the Mexican federal government.

¹³ The *Jabonera* did begin as a soap manufacturer, but upon ACCO's controlling shares in the company, cotton ginning and processing became its focus. See Aidé Grijalva, "Agro-Industry and Cotton in the Mexicali Valley: The Compañía Industrial Jabonera del Pacífico," in *Estudios Fronterizos, Nueva Época* 15, no.30 (July-December, 2014): 5, 9-11.

¹⁴ Casey Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton along the Mexico-Texas Border* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 118; "Anderson, Clayton and Company," Texas State Historical Association, accessed, May 22, 2017, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/dia01>.

¹⁵ Walsh, *Building the Borderlands*, 121-122.

¹⁶ Grijalva, "Agro-Industry," 12, 14-17.

Financial capital and government sanctioning meant little for cotton in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands without irrigation. The 1944 Binational Water Treaty was a key international agreement that legally protected Mexican water claims to the Colorado River.¹⁷ Water already arrived to the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands via the All-American Canal (constructed in 1932 through 1942), but questions of water usage remained.¹⁸ The treaty allocated Mexico 1.5 million cubic feet of the Colorado's water per year. Previous estimates put Mexicali's water usage at 1.8 million cubic feet.¹⁹ This limit, however, must be taken with respect to the Colorado River basin states of Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California. As Eric Boime points out, "Mexico comprised only 1/25 of the entire [Colorado] river basin...yet it was granted a tenth of the Colorado's estimated total flow (almost a full fifth when adjusted for actual flows and for groundwater usage)."²⁰ That is, one-tenth of the Colorado was marked for Mexicali's 2,000 square miles while the remaining nine-tenths of the river was designated for over 244,000 square miles on the U.S. side of the basin. The 1944 water agreement coincided with a rebounding cotton market and the subsequent expansion of cotton in Mexicali. Irrigated lands in Mexicali nearly doubled between 1945 (230,261 acres) and 1955 (497,261 acres). Cotton production reached its zenith in 1955-1956 with nearly 829 square miles reserved for the coveted bolls, what Thomas Scott Waller identifies as "almost 95% of the valley's total acreage," and made Mexicali the seat of Mexico's cotton empire.²¹ The jump in

¹⁷ The 1944 Binational Water Treaty was ratified in the US in 1944 and Mexico's Senate in 1945.

¹⁸ This U.S.-first thinking was built into the Boulder Canyon Project Act of 1928, which authorized the Boulder Dam (renamed Hoover Dam) and All-American. The canal's very name and route sought to elide the linkages between the United States and Mexico by delivering water to the area solely on the United States side of the border first, then Mexico, with the Colorado Delta receiving a trickle. The goal was to bypass Mexico in water delivery issues. See Eric I. Boime, "Fluid Boundaries: Southern California, Baja California, and the Conflict Over the Colorado River, 1848-1944," (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002), 49, (AAT 3071055).

¹⁹ Thomas Scott Waller, "The Politics of Agricultural Water Conservation in the Border Region of the Californias," (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 1993), 79-81, (AAT 9411381).

²⁰ Boime, "Fluid Boundaries," 279.

²¹ Waller, "The Politics of Agricultural Water Conservation," 91.

production was due in large part to high international cotton prices, doubling between 1944 and 1954.²²

Despite the seeming limitless trajectory of cotton monoculture, several environmental pressures stressed the cotton-based political economy in the early 1960s. Though Mexico and Mexicali were guaranteed access to the Colorado, the river's waters contained elevated salinity levels. Half of the Colorado's salinity was derived naturally from the course of the river through particular soils and rocks. The other half owed to human activity, namely irrigation in the United States. Water that was used to irrigate fields north of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands was reintroduced back to the river, carrying greater amounts of salt from newly leached fields. By far, the most glaring increase of salinity came with the completion of the Wellton-Mohawk cut in February of 1961. 50,000 acres of Arizona's Wellton-Mohawk Valley were flushed and its wastewater was circulated into the Colorado slightly north of the Morelos Dam, near Los Algodones, Baja California Norte (near Yuma, Arizona). The Morelos Dam was located near the split between the All-American Canal for the Imperial Valley and Mexicali. The Wellton-Mohawk cut increased the river's salinity from 1,500 ppm in February to 2,700 ppm by the end of 1961. For comparison, the Colorado's salt content that reached the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands prior to the Wellton-Mohawk cut was 600 ppm. Waller points out that successful irrigation of certain crops are still possible at 2,000 ppm, "But it requires greater amounts of surplus water to leach the salts from the soil, as well as an advanced system of drainage."²³ While Imperial Valley growers actively flushed their fields and installed underground drainage tiles to avoid seepage of salty water, campesinos in Mexicali did not possess the same access to capital or government support as Imperial Valley growers to level fields or install underground

²² Ibid., 91.

²³ Waller, "The Politics of Agricultural Water Conservation," 108.

tiles. Complicating matters further was the federal government's delayed actions on behalf of Mexicali farmers.

The salinity crisis was a problem that occupied two administrations in both Mexico and the United States. Mexicali and Mexico complained to the U.S. about the salinity levels as early as 1961 and the Committee for the Defense of the Mexicali Valley staged two demonstrations in Mexicali in May and June 1964.²⁴ Students at the Autonomous University of Mexico saw U.S. salinity inputs as an act of aggression that violated the 1944 water agreement and demanded that the United States pay \$480,000 in restitution for Mexicali's ruined soils.²⁵ In early September 1964, amidst preparations and local conflicts regarding the Bracero Program, President Lyndon Johnson reassured President Adolfo López Mateos that "the only serious problem between Mexico and the United States" was the Colorado's salinity. López Mateos optimistically predicted that the water issue could be resolved by winter 1965.²⁶ Four years later, campesinos in Mexicali Valley still struggled to cultivate vegetables and cattle feed because of the water quality.²⁷ Although United States and Mexico rehabilitation of Mexicali's agricultural lands were launched in 1968, it was not until 1973 that the International Boundaries and Water Commission agreed on Minute Number 242. This agreement updated the 1944 treaty and established salinity levels at 115 ppm, "favorable financing" for the "improvement and rehabilitation of the Mexicali Valley," tile drainage, and dumping of Wellton-Mohawk water in a non-Colorado channel.²⁸

²⁴ "Anti-Salinity Program Underway," *Imperial Valley Press*, June 9, 1964, 1; "Salinity Solution Forecast," July 1, 1964, *Imperial Valley Press*, 1. The Committee for the Defense of the Mexicali Valley planned a nation-wide protest in August, but called it off due to preliminary accords reached by the International Water and Boundary Commission in August 1964; see, "Salinity Problem Said Eased by U.S.," *Imperial Valley Press*, Aug.4, 1964, 1.

²⁵ "Mexican Students Ask U.S. Damages," *Imperial Valley Press*, Aug.20, 1964, 1.

²⁶ "Presidents to Confer on Salinity," *Imperial Valley Press*, Sept.1, 1964, 1.

²⁷ "La Salinidad Sigue Afectando Cultivos en las Colonias," *La Voz*, May 19, 1969, 4A.

²⁸ International Boundaries and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, Minute No. 242, Mexico City, Aug. 30, 1973, 2-5, box 88, folder: Colorado River Salinity Water-Environment Project File, Victor V. Veysey Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

Rehabilitation projects were completed until 1977, years after cotton lost its profit allure.²⁹

The arrival of the pink bollworm to the region complicated cotton monoculture even further. During the Colorado River Land Company's cotton development of the Mexicali valley, neither the bollworm nor boll weevil were present, and a plague was of little to no concern to cotton farmers in the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands.³⁰ The region's immunity from boll-eating insects unmistakably ended in the mid-1960s. The pink bollworm made its way to the Mexicali-Imperial growing areas through Arizona, then Palo Verde in northern Imperial County, and finally to Imperial-Mexicali.³¹ Growers, campesinos, and government officials were aware of the bollworm's danger. Coupled with salinity issues, the effects of the bollworm infestation reduced Mexicali's cotton production in half, from 4.4 bales per hectare in 1965 to 2.3 bales per hectare in 1970.³² The use of pesticides was an avenue that the federal government pushed, yet was too costly for many campesinos. As late as September 1972, campesinos continued to report issues of invading insects. When campesinos sought indemnity for lost crops due to pests, the *Aseguradora Nacional Agrícola y Ganadera*, S.A. (National Agriculture and Livestock Insurance) refused to pay because the peasants did not use pesticides. Ironically, the peasants argued that the pesticides offered were weak and incapable of eliminating their pest dilemmas.³³ A political cartoon in *La Voz* satirized bollworms, cotton, and government officials. In the cartoon, one man remarks to another, "That 'pink bollworm' in Mexican cotton was the idea of a worm with political ambitions."³⁴ The cartoon ties the realities of the bollworm infestation with

²⁹ Whiteford, "Water in the Mexicali Valley," 28.

³⁰ Boime, "Fluid Boundaries," 108, 289-290.

³¹ "Bollworm Threat Alarms County," *Imperial Valley Press*, Oct. 11, 1965, 1.

³² Waller, "The Politics of Agricultural Water Conservation," 116-117, 145.

³³ *La Voz*, Sept. 12, 1972, record 1115-003, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico. Hereafter this archive will be referred to as DGIPS.

³⁴ "Gusanos...", *La Voz*, Sept. 14, 1965, 5A.

the larger political quagmire posed by reduced cotton in the region, a situation that could be exploited by a rising politician.

Environmental troubles with cotton were only compounded with the volatility of boom and bust cycles of international markets. The cotton market, much like the plant itself, was marked by a series of growths and cuts. The post-WWI, late Great Depression, and post-WWII cotton markets for Mexicali were healthy even as the Mexican economy waned. Market problems emerged for Mexicali cotton with U.S. cotton policy and the proliferation synthetic fibers. The United States was accused of manipulating cotton prices through their export subsidy policy. Because U.S. cotton was more expensive, the argument was that U.S. farmers were put at a disadvantage in comparison to other cotton growing countries. This issue was apparent during the Great Depression, namely after the repeal of the first Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. The cotton export subsidy was intended to be a temporary measure to protect Southern farmers, but it became part of U.S. trade policy, evidenced in the subsidy's existence into the 1960s.³⁵ To counteract this disadvantage, the export subsidy encouraged U.S. cotton to make its way to the international rather than internal market. The surplus product or reduced acreage was subsidized by the U.S. federal government and placed U.S. cotton at a cheaper purchasing price for other countries. While the United States understood its cotton export subsidy as a necessary measure to protect U.S. farmers, Mexico and other countries referred to it as dumping.

The United States heavily influenced global prices and its trade policies could negatively or positively affect regions like Mexicali.³⁶ In May of 1960, the International Cotton Advisory Commission met in Mexico City to discuss the seemingly routine points of production and

³⁵ "Cotton Exports and Export Subsidies," in *Editorial Research Reports 1939*, vol. II (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1939), 185-200, accessed June 4, 2017; <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1939090100>.

³⁶ "U.S. Election May Change Farm Prices: Foreign Market Tied to Extent of New Subsidies," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 16, 1960, J6.

consumption of bolls. Latin American countries presented a united front in their opposition to U.S. dumping. Julián Rodríguez Adame, Mexico's Minister of Agriculture, indicated that the meetings were business as usual, but the concerns brought forth by other Latin American countries showed the pushback the United States received to protect U.S. cotton growers against non-U.S. planters.³⁷ Dumping concerns continued unabated into the mid-1960s. In 1965 and 1966, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Orville L. Freeman, stated that the United States was not engaged in cotton dumping with Mexico. On one occasion, Freeman was "pounding his hands" as he emphatically declared that dumping "is never going to happen."³⁸ The defensive sentiments of goodwill by Orville and Lyndon Johnson, especially under the Alliance for Progress, meant little to Mexicali. At least twenty-five percent of Mexico's export revenues were generated from cotton and U.S. export subsidies lowered global prices.³⁹ The transnational network of cotton production and distribution meant that "cotton farmers in Mexicali were extremely vulnerable to such fluctuations in world cotton prices."⁴⁰ In 1965, the reduction in cotton prices negatively impacted Mexico and Mexicali by an estimated 400 million pesos and 85 million pesos, respectively. In an editorial, *La Voz* agreed that Orville and the United States were not cotton dumping in the crude sense, but rather through the export subsidies. *La Voz* bluntly critiqued Mexican government officials and the Alliance for Progress for their inability to check U.S. price manipulation. As the newspaper put it, "The price of the fiber [cotton] is already signaled by [Mexican] law, because the financial position of the United States so requires it."⁴¹ Interestingly, former secretary of agriculture, Julián Rodríguez Adame, put forward a plan to assist Mexican

³⁷ "U.S. Cotton Policy Scored by Latins: Group at 34-Nation Parley Seeks to Slow or Halt Flow of Subsidized Exports," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1960, 14.

³⁸ "U.S. Assures Mexico on Cotton Dumping," *New York Times*, June 8, 1966, 93.

³⁹ Henry Giniger, "Mexico Sees Test in Cotton Policy: Johnson Cooperation Pledge Stirs Hope on Prices," *New York Times*, April 19, 1966, 13.

⁴⁰ Whiteford, "Water in the Mexicali Valley," 29.

⁴¹ "¿Dumping? ¡No!", *La Voz*, Sept. 14, 1965, 5A.

cotton farmers by lowering their taxes. *La Voz* argued that the federal treasury could uphold Rodríguez Adame's plan more so than the "ruined economic structure of the cotton regions of Mexico."⁴² That is, the promise of cotton revenue slowly eroded.

The "ruined economic structure" of Mexicali cotton was on display with the slow closure of gins. One of the oldest gins in Mexicali, *La Algodonera del Valle, S.A.* suspended operations indefinitely on March 2, 1963, and released forty-four employees. Some of the workers were with the gin for ten years, others for twenty-two years, showing the power of cotton monoculture for steady employment for many of these workers.⁴³ In January 1972, Anderson, Clayton, and Company (ACCO), the global cotton hegemon, closed the *Jabonera's* doors and released 277 unionized workers. The workers were on strike since December 2, 1971, and ACCO liquidated its nearly 8-million-peso investment in Mexicali cotton.⁴⁴ Moreover, the termination of the *Asociación Algodonera del Valle* (Cotton Association of the Valley) on May 15, 1969 silenced one of the mainstay cotton advocacy groups in Mexicali. Whiteford captures the dramatic change for Mexicali cotton, "By 1975, only three of the 17 major cotton firms that had dominated life in the region remained."⁴⁵ The closures paralleled a reduction in lands for the cultivation of cotton, where 70.4 percent of cultivated lands in 1966 were reserved for cotton; by 1972, this was reduced to 29 percent.⁴⁶ By the early 1970s, cotton lost its primary role in Mexicali's economic life.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "La Algodonera del Valle suspendió sus labores segando una fuente de trabajo," *La Voz*, March 3, 1963, 1.

⁴⁴ "Dejo de parar la 'Jabonera'; Ayer los indemnizaron, reapertura en dos años mas," *La Voz*, Jan. 12, 1972, record 1112B-003, DGIPS.

⁴⁵ Scott Whiteford, "Troubled Waters: The Regional Impact of Foreign Investment and State Capital in the Mexicali Valley," in *Regional Impacts of U.S.-Mexican Relations*, ed. Ina Rosenthal-Urey (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1986), 30.

⁴⁶ Whiteford, "Troubled Waters," 29.

Section 2: Mexican-U.S. Commercial Linkages and Mexicali Identity

Despite the power of cotton for export, the commercial and industrial projects of import-substitution and the *zona libre* (duty-free import zone) formed the crux of Mexicali's political economy. In particular, the *zona libre* was the key project and since its creation in 1937, local commercial and industrial interests mounted determined and successful efforts to maintain it. The *zone libre* created economic, political, and legal possibilities elites seized upon to improvise on new forms of investment from the U.S. Even as the central government implemented import-substitution across Mexico, the northern borderlands was under an economic regime that sought to exploit the region's proximity to the U.S., and, consequently, directly link northern Mexico to U.S. capitalism. Along with the *zona libre*, the central government launched the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (National Border Program) in an effort to further bind the northern border to the U.S. via beautification projects and renovations for ports of entry. As this section shows, the Mexican federal government reinforced the northern borderlands as an exceptional economic space, which Mexicali and Baja California powerbrokers utilized to create their own regional and entrepreneurial identities.

Mexico's adoption of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), during the post-Revolutionary period was part of the "Revolution to Evolution" political and economic goal of the Mexican state.⁴⁷ Plainly, the goal of ISI was to limit the importation of goods and substitute them with domestic ones. ISI was theoretically accomplished via protective tariffs that triggered growth of domestic industry to meet a country's consumer needs. Mexico, like other developing

⁴⁷ Arthur Schmidt, "Making it Real Compared to What?: Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 25-27.

industrial countries of the Global South (the so-called Third World) adopted the ISI model and infused it with nationalist rhetoric, particularly from the Mexican Revolution.⁴⁸

While the ISI model was applied to most of Mexico, Baja California and the northwestern-most part of Sonora were exempted via the *zona libre* due to geographic and population concerns. The first iteration of the *zona libre* in northern Mexico was created just one year after the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and was limited to the state of Tamaulipas. It was later amended and extended to other northern Mexican territories and states, including Baja California, but expired in 1905.⁴⁹ President Lázaro Cárdenas established the second *zona libre* in 1937. It allowed for the importation of certain products duty free to the northwestern region of the country, a region that waned from its “exclusion from modernity.”⁵⁰ The president’s rationale was that the northwestern borderlands lacked economic integration with the main industrial sectors of the country. Because of this situation, Cárdenas permitted private and wholesale purchases from the United States to enter northwestern Mexico duty-free to meet the daily needs of residents.⁵¹

The *zona libre* was intended as a temporary measure to serve the needs of “provincial” residents—those from the northwestern borderlands—rather than a longstanding way of life.⁵² The larger aim was to distance the northwestern borderlands from buying in- and importing from

⁴⁸ Leslie Sklair, *Assembling for Development: The Maquila Industry in Mexico and the United States* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3-4.

⁴⁹ David Jesús Rincón Meza, *La primera zona libre en México: El distrito norte de Baja California, historia económica, 1858-1905* (Tijuana, Mexico: Editorial Marianela, 2004), 23, 44, 51, 73.

⁵⁰ Sarah Hill, “The Wasted Resources of Mexicanidad: Consumption and Disposal on Mexico’s Northern Frontier,” in *The Social Relations of Mexican Commodities: Power, Production, and Place*, eds. Casey Walsh et al., U.S.-Mexico Contemporary Perspectives Series, 21 (La Jolla, CA: UC San Diego; Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2003), 165. Hill’s case study is on Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, though similar sentiments permeated the northern borderlands. The *zona libre* preceded *artículos ganchos* (“hook items”) in Ciudad Juárez by thirty-four years.

⁵¹ The items allowed to enter duty free were not fixed and changed constantly. Mundane items such as lard and white paper were regulated, as were larger items like cars, yet even these could change on a weekly basis.

⁵² *Provinciales* was a term utilized throughout Mexico, including the northwestern borderlands, to denote the region’s presumed remoteness from central Mexico and reinforcing the legitimacy of importance of the central region for the rest of Mexico.

the United States to keep currency from leaving Mexico. The *zona libre* and the Bracero Program were major contributors to the Mexicali's population boom. In 1930, the Municipality of Mexicali (akin to county level) contained 29,985 people. By 1960, this figure exploded to 281,333 people. According to Norma Fimbres Durazo, a scholar of the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, the *zona libre* was integral to "maintain the region's population" while the "Bracero Program...strengthened the migratory flow into the City of Mexicali as an obligatory crossing point" to the United States by peoples mostly from the central Mexican states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas.⁵³

Contrary to its temporal origins, the *zona libre* was transformed into a critical piece of Mexicali's political economy and everyday life. When the federal government proposed new regulations or limitations to the *zona libre*, local politicians, industrialists, retailers, and Mexicali's largest circulating newspaper, *La Voz de la Frontera*, broadcasted their support for the *zona*. Governor of Baja California, Gustavo Aubanel Vallejo, the mayor of Mexicali, Carlos Rubio Parra, the National Chamber of Commerce from Mexicali and Baja California, the National Chamber of Industrial Transformation, and Mexicali industrialist Gustavo Vildósola Castro, among several others, all campaigned to keep the *zona* in force. Even groups not directly associated with commerce or industry, such as the *Liga Agraria Estatal* (State Agrarian League) supported the *zona*. Each of these groups and individuals expressed the necessity of the *zona* for Mexicali and Baja California to exist and thrive beyond the federal government's protective tariffs. Their collective voices demonstrated how federal ISI policies ran counter to the realities of Mexicali's experiences and needs on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. The federal government wanted to integrate Mexicali commercially and industrially to central Mexico, but

⁵³ Norma Fimbres Durazo, "Capitalist Development," 47-49.

elites in Mexicali preferred to keep their buying and economic development options open beyond Mexico City.

One main complaint against elimination of the *zona libre* was Mexicali's lack of industrial capacity for capitalist production. Businesspeople and consumers expressed Mexicali's industrial, commodity, and resource underdevelopment in terms of limited product choices and the subpar quality of items available in Mexicali. After two decades since the *zona*'s inception, electronic retailers in Mexicali were upset by a 1963 federal restriction on radios and record players because it could damage sales at their stores. As they argued, radios and record players were in high demand and Mexican plants were unable to keep pace with consumer needs.⁵⁴ In December of 1964, the State Agrarian League stated that the *zona* should remain "until Mexican industrialists are in a position to compete in quality and price with the United States." Peasants and small landholders in Mexicali were positively affected by the *zona* since they could purchase mechanical items from the United States such as water pumps at a reduced price and higher quality. Agricultural implements from Mexico, on the other hand, were more expensive owing to freight costs from distant producers. In his January 1965 meeting with federal officials, Alonso Esquer Parada, president of Baja California's Federation of Chambers of Commerce, also demanded the *zona* remain in effect until the state achieved an ideal level of economic development. Gustavo Vildósola Castro, president of Kenworth Mexicana, was concerned of the possibility of being forced to use domestic raw materials. Vildósola Castro noted that the "necessity" of importing raw materials because it was "prohibitively expensive and risky to utilize domestic materials."⁵⁵ The overall effect of potential limitations to the *zona* was that Baja

⁵⁴ "El comercio protesta por las restricciones a la zona libre," March 17, 1963, *La Voz*, 1.

⁵⁵ "La franquicia de la zona libre debe mantenerse indefinidamente," *La Voz*, Dec. 9, 1964, 1A; "Nueva defensa de la zona libre de B. Cfa," *La Voz*, Jan. 5, 1965, 1A, 3A, "Estimulante política de exportación e importación," *La Voz*, May 9, 1965, 6A.

California's economy was damaged by federal policies and showed Mexico City's favoring of nationalist rhetoric over the local needs of *mexicalicenses*.

Particularly indicative of the disharmony of consumer choice and protective tariffs emerged when the federal government ordered a temporary cease on the importation of vehicles in Mexicali. On January 20, 1965, the Federal Register of Automobiles issued an order at 9:00 a.m. to suspend all types of vehicle importation, used or new. Immediately, owners of car lots in Mexicali and individuals converged on the customs house to challenge the order. By 12:00 p.m., the central office of Mexican customs changed the order and allowed the importation of vehicles, but not to be handed over to their owners and instead be kept in a restricted area until the issue was further cleared by the federal government. The confusion continued as the general manager of Mexicali's branch of the National Chamber of Commerce, Aurelio Flores Valenzuela, stated that officials at the local customs house misinterpreted the order. Flores Valenzuela noted that the suspension should only have applied to vehicles valued over 40,000 pesos. Baja California's governor, Gustavo Aubanel Vallejo, stated that serious economic harm would result from the suspension and he sought a resolution "to this serious problem." The president of the Mexicali's National Chamber of Commerce, Alberto Bustamante Díaz, mentioned that vehicle import debate was part of a larger need to extend the *zona libre*.⁵⁶ By the next day, the director of the Federal Register of Automobiles, Ricardo García Villalobos, assured vehicle importers and sellers that the suspension was lifted across the *zona libre*, with the main restriction being the acquisition of an importation permit.

A vocal critic of the vehicle import suspension and protective economic policy was *La Voz*. Much like the strategy of the *Imperial Valley Press* seen in chapter 1 that linked the lives of

⁵⁶ "Suspendieron toda tramitación para la importación," *La Voz*, Jan. 21, 1965, 1A, 6A; "Presentimiento de que la zona libre pronto agonizará," *La Voz*, Jan. 21, 1965, 1A, 6A.

all valleyites with agriculture, *La Voz* connected the integrity of the *zona libre* with all *mexicalicenses*, not solely auto dealers. The latter were negatively impacted since aspiring dealers took out loans and were put at risk of not paying back the borrowed funds. Ultimately, “Juan Pueblo,” or John Q. Public, was the group that “was hit the hardest.” Vehicles made in Mexico could be purchased, but the paper pointed out that the vehicles contained manual—rather than automatic—transmissions and low-quality interiors. A person could take pride if they bought a vehicle with the label, “Made in Mexico by Mexican workers,” but it was an expensive statement. A person could travel by walking, bicycling, or clandestinely purchase a vehicle from a “friend from beyond the border,” meaning Imperial County, San Diego County, or the United States in general. The suspension might temporarily slow down the flow of pesos to United States, but “Mr. Joe Doe” (i.e. the United States) stood to benefit since Mexican dealers were effectively put out of business by the federal government.⁵⁷ As *La Voz* saw it, the decision to suspend vehicle imports was rooted in politics and nationalism rather than practicality for *mexicalicenses*.

The *zona libre* also offered a buffer for *mexicalicenses* against protective tariffs that placed the wants of a small group of central Mexican industrialists over local needs. In late December of 1964, the Secretary of Industry and Commerce, Octaviano Campos Salas, considered a tariff against the importation of dresses to stymie contraband into Mexico and loss of revenues to the U.S. companies. *La Voz* was quick to denounce the dressmakers who supported the restriction as a “wolf in sheep’s fur,” where Mexican dressmakers were the wolves, the fur was patriotism, and the vulnerable prey were residents of the northwestern borderlands. To further show the damage of ISI policies along with a measure of patriotism from *bajacalifornianos*, *La Voz* double downed on the ineffectiveness of protective tariffs. For the

⁵⁷ Editorial, “Los automóviles y la zona libre,” *La Voz*, Jan. 22, 1965, 5A.

newspaper, the *zona libre* was “a child of the law,” and in democratic systems, laws were supposed to “benefit the masses” rather than a minority of economic interests. Interestingly, the “masses,” referred to the residents of Baja California in an effort to demonstrate the inconsistency of ISI and Mexican democracy on the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands. More revealing was the confidence of *La Voz* when it wrote, “They [central industrialists] have not been able to achieve them [tariffs] in previous regimes, and we do not believe they’ll get one today.”⁵⁸ Mexicali and Baja California were poised to guard against unscrupulous ISI policies of the federal government and central Mexican business interests.

Another cardinal grievance by local elites was the favoritism of ISI policies for non-Baja California businesses. The press, industrialists, retailers, and local politicians claimed that protective tariffs unjustifiably benefited their counterparts from central Mexico and from older, more established northeastern border areas like Chihuahua and Nuevo León. The protective tariffs coerced *bajacalifornianos* (peoples of Baja California) to pay higher prices to offset freight costs from central Mexico (whether in raw materials or machinery), limited consumer choice for goods of lesser quality, and, most significantly, stymied Baja California’s and Mexicali’s economic growth.⁵⁹ Governor Aubanel and Tijuana’s Chamber of Commerce lambasted federal policies that provided a revenue subsidy for merchants and industrialists from the “interior” of Mexico who sold their products within a twenty-kilometer range. In December 1964, Aubanel sent a message to several federal agencies to push back against what he perceived as unfair treatment. Aubanel stated that the revenue subsidy should also include the *zona libre* so that all Mexican industrialists and retailers were treated equally under the law. Moreover, Aubanel was critical of customs officials who restricted the movement of Baja California

⁵⁸ Editorial, “Toma y Daca,” *La Voz*, Dec. 30, 1964, 5A.

⁵⁹ Editorial, “Toma y Daca,” *La Voz*, Dec. 30, 1964, 5A; Editorial, “La zona libre y la publicidad,” *La Voz*, Jan. 18, 1965, 5A.

products to the interior of Mexico by as much as three months. The governor called Baja California products “regional” and “national” goods to emphasize that the *zona libre* was part of Mexico and should not be placed at a disadvantage solely because of geography.⁶⁰

The 1965 Home Fair in Tijuana was an opportunity for elite *bajacalifornianos* to make a case for the *zona libre*. Opened on August 6, 1965 by the Secretary of Industry and Commerce, Octaviano Campos Salas, the fair was billed as a demonstration of national and regional industry as well as commercial capabilities. For example, Gustavo Vildósola Castro, president of the Kenworth truck company in Mexicali, escorted Campos Salas through the Kenworth exhibit with the latest Mexican-produced trucks serving as examples of industry for the secretary, the region, and Mexico.⁶¹ Proponents of the *zona* believed the fair could prove to central industrialists the inefficiency and headache of moving their finished products for sale to the northwest border. Central retailers were expected to learn that that the *zona* was about consumer choice they were unable to meet. Moreover, *bajacalifornianos* could show that they were not *malinchistas*—a term that signified a national traitor—so much as they were consumers with tight incomes.⁶² The 1965 Home Fair was thus a crash course for the central Mexican bourgeoisie of the realities of the northwestern borderlands and the bias of protective tariffs against *mexicalicenses*. Local policymakers demanded that the *zona libre* remain in effect until economic self-sufficiency was reached. Yet, the definition of ideal economic development was ambiguous enough that the *zona* seemingly required a perpetual existence. Campos Salas sympathized with Baja California and

⁶⁰ “Tratamiento unilateral de los empresarios del centro,” *La Voz*, Dec. 7, 1964, 6A.

⁶¹ “Fué emotiva la apertura de la ‘Feria del Hogar,’” *La Voz*, Aug. 7, 1965, A1, A8; “Servicios gráficos,” *La Voz*, Aug. 7, 1965, 9A.

⁶² Editorial, “La industria nacional en la Feria del Hogar,” *La Voz*, Aug. 2, 1965, 5A. “*Malinchista*” was built on the nationalist myth that Malintzin Tenepal—Malinche—betrayed the Mexica and the future nation of Mexico by aiding Hernan Cortés as his translator and intimate partner during the indigenous-Spanish assault against Tenochtitlán in 1519-1521.

assured the state that the *zona libre* would not be closed or reduced until national products were on track to replace foreign ones.⁶³

In the debates regarding renewal of the *zona libre*, critics stressed that Baja California business was mired in uncertainty over conflicts between federal oversight and local needs to remain duty-free. On July 8, 1977, a political cartoon appeared in *La Voz* that directly confronted this debate. Perched on a balcony, a frustrated and attractive woman in an evening dress beckons a man in a *charro* (traditional equestrian outfit, particularly from Guadalajara, Jalisco). The woman holds a rope ladder, waiting for her gentleman caller to ascend and embrace her. Across the window frame above the woman, “investments” is etched while the reluctant *charro*’s hat is labeled “entrepreneur.” While three rifle muzzles—marked “uncertain, free, zone—” are peek through bushes under the balcony, she yells to her suitor, “Come on, my nationalist...and [be] aggressive, don't be a coward!” For his part, the entrepreneur can only muster sweat beads and a few stalling incoherent sounds.⁶⁴ If the male entrepreneur was to fulfill the heterosexual norms of romance and intimacy, he needed to brave the rifles and reach the woman—investments. Yet, the unknown future of the *zona libre* was a clear threat to economic normalcy, expressed in heterosexual metaphor. In the context of the *zona* debates, doubt stymied otherwise normative economic relations for *mexicalicenses* and *bajacalifornianos*. Tellingly, the *zona libre* was renewed and then again for another five years in 1978.⁶⁵

In 1961, President Adolfo López Mateos launched the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (PRONAF, National Border Program) as part of a larger federal and private project of industrialization and modernity on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Historian Geraldo Cadava

⁶³ “La zona libre no desaparecerá en 1966; Hay simpatía nacional por Baja Cfa.,” *La Voz*, Aug. 7, 1965, A1, A8.

⁶⁴ “Empresario e inversiones,” *La Voz*, July 8, 1977, 5A.

⁶⁵ “El primer mandatario de la nación hoy presidio en esta ciudad una asamblea de evaluación de la Alianza Para la Producción,” April 22, 1978, record 1622D-015, DGIPS. Mexicali continues to be a *zona libre* entity in 2019.

identifies PRONAF “as the grandest of Mexico’s efforts to link the border region’s postwar economic and technological development with Mexican modernity itself.”⁶⁶ With an initial budget of 41 million pesos—later increased to 300 million pesos—and directed by Ciudad Juárez politician and retailer, Antonio J. Bermúdez, PRONAF was charged with a myriad of economic and social goals. PRONAF’s aims included border beautification, renovated ports of entry to attract U.S. investments and tourism, build local industry to create jobs and produce goods for local consumption, lower shipping fares for central Mexican distributors, and culturally integrate the northern border more with central Mexico.⁶⁷ Such lofty goals were intended to cease the flow of money to the United States and make Mexico and its northern borderlands less dependent on the United States.

Bermúdez went even further than the president and called PRONAF a moral and urban transformation of the northern border that sought to not only end underground economies of drugs and prostitution, but to also recreate urban spaces into production zones that could employ the large number of unemployed that called the northern borderlands home.⁶⁸ Unemployment and migration from central and southern parts of Mexico and a lack of a thriving job sector contributed to concerning unemployment figures. While migrants arrived to northern border cities with the plan to gain employment in the United States, the Bracero Program hired less workers and the end of the program in 1965 witnessed the repatriation of some 250,000 former braceros. Ciudad Juárez’s unemployment rose to as much as 20 percent. There was no single

⁶⁶ Cadava, “Borderlands of Modernity and Abandonment,” 370.

⁶⁷ “Programa Nacional Fronterizo, 1971-1972,” 1-6, box 2, record 6, Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Mexicali (AHMM), Mexicali, Baja California Norte; Bruce Munro, “PRONAF,” in *Mexico and the United States*, ed. Lee Stacy (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2003), 672-673; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 108-110.

⁶⁸ Antonio J. Bermudez, interview by Oscar J. Martinez, June 21, 1974, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas, El Paso, transcript, 6-7, 20, <https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/interviews/161/>; Cowie, *Capital Moves*, 110; Munro, “PRONAF,” 672.

rationale to develop PRONAF because the northern borderlands presented numerous order and control issues for the federal, states, and municipal governments.

Bermúdez's understanding of political economy on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands was filtered by his experience in Ciudad Juárez. He understood the health and vitality of Ciudad Juárez as linked to El Paso and vice versa. Bermúdez was born in the state Chihuahua and was a child of the northern borderlands. He witnessed the instability of the Mexican Revolution, believed in the necessity to work with counterparts in the United States (namely in El Paso), and was a firm supporter of ISI policies to bring the northern border closer to Mexico City. In Bermúdez's hometown of Ciudad Juárez, he launched his political career by being named president of the local Chamber of Commerce from 1927-1929, served as mayor of the city from 1942-1943, was elected federal senator of Chihuahua and soon relinquished this office to serve as head of PEMEX (Mexican Petroleum) for an unprecedented twelve years from 1946 through 1958. He later served as Mexico's ambassador to the Middle East until before he was selected by López Mateos to head PRONAF in 1961. He was a proponent of economic nationalism (Mexicans buying Mexican-made products in Mexico), what Bermúdez referred to simply as nationalism, yet he saw his version of nationalism and politics as independent acts. Indeed, Bermúdez rejected the PRONAF's proposed name, "Border Movement," because it rang of political overtones. He preferred his own name, *Programa Nacional Fronterizo*, precisely because it suggested technocracy and objectivity.⁶⁹

Bermúdez's economic nationalism signaled his staunch opposition to the *zona libre*. Bermúdez hotly debated fellow businessman and politician Ulises Irigoyen, who actively promoted the *zona* after the Revolution. Bermúdez portrayed the *zona* and the related *gancho* (hook/lure) items as a program that aided smugglers and contributed to the unpatriotic attitudes

⁶⁹ "Bermudez," interview, 6, 24-25.

of residents on the northern border—namely, those who advocated for the *zona*. The *zona* was a useful stopgap that served the population of Baja California in the late 1930s, but the extension of rail lines and telecommunications made the *zona* obsolete by the early 1960s. The money being spent in the U.S. by border residents was detrimental to local Mexican businesses and upset the delicate balance that Bermúdez believed was key to a thriving economy on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. PRONAF and its numerous projects, including Bermúdez’s industrial parks, were expected to reorient the northern borderlands towards the orbit of central Mexico; that is, to make the north Mexican by Mexico City standards. Bermúdez was also proud that he was able to confine the *zona libre* to Baja California and the northwestern-most part of Sonora.⁷⁰ For Bermúdez, *provinciales* eyed their relationship with the U.S. with more interest in contrast to compatriots south of the *zona*.

Mexicali critics challenged PRONAF’s actions in Mexicali, but not its overall agenda. This was a dual strategy to highlight Mexicali’s commitment to its vision of national advancement while also demonstrating that the city required minimal federal intervention. In one particular case, PRONAF’s aesthetics were mocked as being U.S.-focused. Along López Mateos Boulevard, one of Mexicali’s main thoroughfares that connected the port of entry to state and federal offices, PRONAF planted a selection of flowers, trees, and white rocks to create what it considered a visually pleasing scene. Prominent Mexicali columnist, Eduardo Rubio, saw the thoroughfare’s landscape design as an extension of U.S. tastes. He commented that the plants in the manicured landscape “were common and ordinary in all the parks across the border [*del otro lado*], in many buildings, and in almost all the hotels and motels.” Rubio preferred plants found locally and nationally, including several species of cacti, pines from central Mexico, and shrubs from Yucatán. These plants created a truly “Mexican” scene in Mexicali that simultaneously

⁷⁰ “Bermudez,” interview, 14-18.

distinguished the boulevard from U.S. landscapes while also contributing nationalist visuals in the border city. PRONAF's shrubs and foliage along the international boundary, *La Voz* added, was a superficial response that "provided Mexicali with the appearance of a modern city" and left infrastructural problems unanswered. Both critiques questioned PRONAF's appeal to/for U.S. eyes that appeared to link Mexicali in the precise ways that Bermúdez claimed to resist. That is, Bermúdez's plans in Mexicali failed to provide a sense of nationalism as border beautification was intended for a U.S. audience rather than *mexicalicenses*.⁷¹

The city of Mexicali also resisted PRONAF land use policies that excluded local businesspeople input. While border beautification's intended audience was U.S. business interests, real estate remained exclusively under state control. PRONAF was gradually phased out by 1972 and Baja California's government authorities continued to exercise the program's property and modernization mandate to the very end. Between June 1971 and August 1972, city authorities, PRONAF officials, and second-hand sellers struggled to define the meaning of order and control on federal land. In early June 1971, Mexicali's mayor, Eduardo Martinez Palomera, asked PRONAF's federal and local office to clean up property it held in central Mexicali on López Mateos Boulevard. The mayor requested PRONAF clean the accumulated trash, plant trees, and remove semi-permanent structures for an outdoor market. The latter was not in use by any vendors, according the mayor.⁷² When no effective action was taken by PRONAF in over one month, Martinez Palomera again wrote to PRONAF's local representative to remove the outdoor market's structures and provide gardening for aesthetic and practical reasons to limit the

⁷¹ Eduardo Rubio, "Muy bonitos, pero nada de 'Mexican...,'" *La Voz*, Dec. 4, 1964, 5A; "Servicios gráficos: Jardines," *La Voz*, Jan. 12, 1965, 8A.

⁷² Letter from Eduardo Martinez Palomera to Manuel Farias Contreras of PRONAF, June 2, 1971, box 2, record 6, AHMM.

amount of “unbearable” dust and dirt flares common on dry desert earth.⁷³ The mayor’s push to remove the market was met with resistance by local second-hand vendors, who staged a protest on the PRONAF lands on January 22, 1972. Joined by vendors from as far as Ensenada on the Pacific Coast, the group voiced their complaints that their commercial activities were interrupted for over five months.⁷⁴ PRONAF ultimately sided with Mexicali and eliminated the outdoor market and its vendors. At least one beverage seller attempted to stay on the lands, but he was forced to leave the area with his belongings by Mexicali’s police in a display of the city’s power to federal projects.⁷⁵

In addition to the removal of the semi-permanent outdoor market, Baja California’s state government planned to renovate the central port of entry by removing residents. There were allegations that Baja California’s secretary of public works sold lands to profit his associates and himself. These lands were near downtown and the main port of entry—where PRONAF was busy with construction—and hundreds of families that lived there were relocated via eminent domain to other areas of Mexicali. In the public sphere, local critics held conversations in cafes and labeled the land dealings as the “biggest steal of the century” for governor Milton Castellanos Everardo and his associates. The governor was implicated because secretary of public works was his son-in-law’s brother.⁷⁶ The veracity of the rumors was less important than the perception of the machinations of PRONAF and graft. The January 1972 protest by second-hand sellers and detractors of Castellanos’s government were modes of resistance to government plans that placed elite visions at odds with quotidian *mexicalicenses*.

⁷³ Letter from Eduardo Martinez Palomera to Guillermo Gutierrez of PRONAF, July 29, 1971, box 2, record 6, AHMM.

⁷⁴ “Los comerciantes ‘de segunda’ piden libertad para trabajar,” *El Mexicano*, Jan. 22, 1972, record 1112B-003, DGIPS.

⁷⁵ Letter from Roberto Mazon Noriega to Guillermo Gutierrez of PRONAF, August 28, 1972, box 2, record 6, AHMM.

⁷⁶ “Estado de Baja California, información de Mexicali,” June 24, 1972, 1-2, record 1622D-014, DGIPS.

One of the most visible projects undertaken by PRONAF was ports of entry and Mexicali pushed back against its perceived economic in favor of Imperial Valley retailers. As early as 1959, the chamber stated that the proposed port of entry favored Calexico and Imperial Valley retailers at the expense of Mexicali merchants who were already dealing with a series of crises.⁷⁷ With construction in full swing in 1971 and the temporary gate being planned east of downtown, the chamber of commerce again reiterated its complaint of favorable treatment for U.S. commerce. It added that the temporary gate was a potential disaster for the federal government as well since there was the real possibility that the temporary gate could become permanent, thus nullifying the government's PRONAF version of the port of entry. Nevertheless, the chamber of commerce was supportive of the PRONAF gate and agreed that people needed as quick a border crossing as possible, especially commuter workers.⁷⁸ Yet, the chamber felt that the federal government interdict on their behalf and reign in the Imperial Valley's ability to unfairly compete for borderlands consumers.

The Imperial Valley also took notice of PRONAF. In September of 1962, the Imperial Valley Development Agency (IVDA) received the report, "Imperial County Analysis of Economic Potential." The IVDA commissioned the report from the Los Angeles-based Real Estate Research Corporation. The reported suggested the valley to move away from agriculture because of water scarcity and legal battles over water rights with Mexico from the Colorado River. Instead, the IVDA was recommended to put its economic efforts on tourism, namely for northern winter vacationers who could escape harsh and cold weather in the temperate desert. Tellingly, trade between Mexicali and the Imperial Valley was also listed as a factor of economic potential. The valley's consumer sales to Mexicali residents was roughly \$11.5 million and U.S.

⁷⁷ Letter, Mexicali Chamber of Commerce to Secretariat of Foreign Relations, June 3, 1959, box 56, record 1, AHMM.

⁷⁸ Letter from Mexicali Chamber of Commerce to Mayor of Mexicali, Feb.16, 1971, box 56, record 1, AHMM.

exports to Mexico through Calxico were estimated to reach \$171.4 million by 1975. PRONAF was named as the principle reason, rather than the Bracero Program, for an increase in Mexicali's population and a rise in the valley's profits. The report thus suggested that the Imperial Valley look to establish deep commercial relations with Mexicali in order to benefit from PRONAF. The IVDA possessed an additional vision to the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands political economy that would tie the valleys in more ways than access to field labor, yet agriculture continued to dominate economic activity and elite identity.⁷⁹

Section 3: Genealogies of Industrial Capitalism

In both popular and academic discourse, the development of U.S. transnational industrialization in northern Mexico and its impact on infrastructure, fluidity of capital across borders, role in employment and labor relations, and the roots of neoliberalism in northern Mexico is often signed by one word: maquiladora. Simply put, the maquiladora (maquila, for short) strategy was a joint venture between the Mexican federal, state, and local governments and a transnational corporation, where Mexican workers performed the intricate tasks of product assembly for the corporation. The finished product was then shipped to a particular market, by and large defined as the United States, and exempt from U.S. tariff law under provisions 806 and 807. Maquilas were also exempt from Mexican tariff restrictions and factories were allowed to import U.S. machinery and raw materials with the understanding that any finished product would be exported to avoid competing with local manufacturing.⁸⁰ Some firms utilized the *prestanombre* strategy, which entailed "a Mexican citizen who fronted for the actual [U.S.]

⁷⁹ "Imperial County Analysis of Economic Potential, 1962," 1-5, Ben Yellen Papers, box 25, folder 7, Special Collections, UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

⁸⁰ Cowie, *Capital Moves*, 113.

owner.”⁸¹ The *prestanombre* tactic was utilized by some firms to circumvent Article 27 of Mexico’s Constitution, which prohibited non-Mexican ownership of property within 62 miles of Mexico’s borders and 31 miles inland from the coasts. However, a non-Mexican company could own 100 percent of the maquila’s equity.

Northern Mexico and the United States’ embrace of borderlands transnational industrialization via maquiladoras is the subject of extensive academic attention. Scholarly works on northern Mexico’s maquiladora industry center on three critical facets of maquiladoras. First, scholars connect the rise of maquiladoras with the end of the Bracero Program.⁸² In this framework, the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) was the main government program that spurred maquiladora facilities in the wake of fears of massive unemployment with returning braceros. Second, scholars center debates on the feminization of maquiladora labor.⁸³ For the first two decades of maquiladora development, the preponderance of the maquiladora labor force was composed of women, with employers focused more on the supposed meekness of women and their alleged physical predisposition to repetitively and efficiently perform intricate assembly tasks. Thirdly, and related to the female workforce, scholars have highlighted the relationship between patriarchy, urbanization, and unchecked industrialization to the feminicides in cities such as Ciudad Juárez.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Peter Baird and Ed McCaughan, “Hit and Run: U.S. Runaway Shops on the Mexican Border,” *North American Congress on Latin America’s Latin America and Empire Report* 9, no. 5 (July-August 1975): 8.

⁸² Sklair, *Assembling for Development*; Alicia Schmidt-Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).

⁸³ See *Women on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Responses to Change*, eds. Vicki Ruiz and Susan Tiano (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Norma Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana*, trans. Michael Stone and Gabrielle Winkler (Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies, UT Press, 1997); Devon Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: UT Press; CMAS Books, 1997).

⁸⁴ *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).

I argue that maquiladoras must be understood as part of a longer trajectory of U.S. capitalism on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Interpreting maquiladoras as *the* process of industrialization in northern Mexico elides a much more dynamic history of transnational capitalism and border control where elite families worked in tandem with U.S. interests to influence Mexicali's development and identity. The focus placed on the Bracero Program-to-BIP progression presents a linear narrative belied by concerns in places like the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands. It can also unintentionally reinforce the Mexican government's imagining of history and state duty, where the central government directed its resources to open up the northern border for U.S. capital in pursuit of modernization for the benefit of all residents, albeit with questionable environmental and social results. Moreover, the Bracero Program-to-BIP framework neglects concerns of unemployment since the 1940s and the arrival of migrants from central Mexico to Baja California and Mexicali. By analyzing the roots of the transnational firms Kenworth Mexicana and Mextel, I propose, scholars can understand the development of northern industrial exceptionalism that reproduced pejorative racial meanings of Mexican labor on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Indeed, seriously considering pre-maquila manufacturing centers the role of Mexicali business elites in promoting Mexicali as a site of U.S. investment during the Evolution period of post-Revolutionary Mexico. It is necessary for a reperiodization of U.S. capital influence and global production processes, revealing the layers of Mexican state policies and local actions in the development of northern Mexico.

The sheer growth of factories and exponential increase in the number of people employed demonstrate the enlarged presence of maquiladoras. The northern Mexican cities of Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua) and Tijuana and Mexicali (both in Baja California, Norte) were the prominent sites of maquiladora industrialization. Between 1967 and 1979, maquilas in Ciudad

Juárez went from 9 plants with 925 workers to 103 plants with 36,206 workers, respectively. Tijuana in 1970 was base for 16 maquilas with 2,000 workers; in 1979, there were 101 plants with 10,889 employees. During the same period of 1970-1979, maquilas in Mexicali grew from 22 plants with 5,000 employees to 77 plants with 7,965 workers, respectively.⁸⁵ Each city also created industrial parks to persuade firms to establish their operations in their city. Ciudad Juárez contained *Parque Industrial Antonio J. Bermúdez* (1968, promoted by the former PRONAF director growth), Tijuana was home to the *Centro Industrial Barranquita* (mid-1960s) and the *Ciudad Industrial Nueva Tijuana* (circa 1976), and Mexicali's largest park was the *Parque Industrial Mexicali, S.A.* (1966).⁸⁶

As in other places in northern Mexico, Mexicali's manufacturing sector grew significantly between 1970 and 1980. At one point in 1971, Mexicali employed the most maquila workers in Mexico.⁸⁷ However, unlike Chihuahua's municipality of Juárez (where Ciudad Juárez is located), manufacturing in Mexicali reveals an uneven process where manufacturing was not the dominant employment sector. In 1970 Juárez, 9,342 people were employed in agriculture and 19,215 people in manufacturing.⁸⁸ By 1980, 6,366 people worked in agriculture and in manufacturing there was over a 100 percent increase, with 44,586 employed in that sector.⁸⁹ For comparison, in 1970 Mexicali, 32,820 people worked in agriculture and another 15,193 in

⁸⁵ Leslie Sklair, *Assembling for Development*, 81, 93, 99.

⁸⁶ "About: Antonio Bermúdez Industrial Park," accessed June 7, 2017, <http://parqueindustrialbermudez.com/about.html>; Sklair, *Assembling for Development*, 80, 82; "About Us: Parque Industrial Mexicali," accessed June 7, 2017, <http://www.pimsa.com.mx/site/who-we-are.html>.

⁸⁷ Sklair, *Assembling for Development*, 92.

⁸⁸ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), IX Censo General de Población 1970, Chihuahua, Características Económicas Capítulo 3. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/1970/default.html#Tabulados>. The data for this census is incomplete in digital copies of the actual census. The data cited is available in a spreadsheet provided by INEGI.

⁸⁹ INEGI, X Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1980, Chihuahua, Tabulados Básicos, Características Económicas, Capítulo 2. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/1980/default.html#Tabulados>.

manufacturing.⁹⁰ In 1980 Mexicali, 19,283 people worked in manufacturing and 22,974 worked in agriculture.⁹¹ The increase in the number of employees in manufacturing between 1970 and 1980 shows the gradual expansion of maquila industrialization in both Juárez and Mexicali, with the latter at a much less frantic pace than the former. The primacy of maquilas to Mexicali manufacturing, according to Sergio Noriega-Verdugo, was most evident with peso devaluations since 1982 and the formalization of the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994). As Noriega-Verdugo puts it, “The maquiladora industry is responsible for practically the entire increase in manufacturing jobs since 1980.”⁹² By 2000, nearly 83 percent of Mexicali manufacturing jobs (60,063 workers) were in maquila industries. Mexicali’s embrace of maquilas was thus uneven even with large projects such as the *Parque Industrial Mexicali, S.A.*

The Vildósola and Guajardo families are emblematic of northern Mexico’s intimate economic relations with the United States during critical periods in the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands history. For the Vildósolas, the end of the Colorado River Land Company initiated Mexicali’s *zona libre*-ISI strategy and prompted the start of the Vildósolas’ business dealings with U.S. machinery firms. Both Gustavo Vildósola Almada and his son, Gustavo Vildósola Castro, were instrumental in forwarding the state’s interest in modernization-via-manufacturing with their own concerns of their financial livelihoods when they launched the company *El Aguila* and Kenworth Mexicana (KenMex). Indeed, the Vildósolas preempted the federal government’s PRONAF by three years and the BIP by six years. The Guajardos began their involvement with U.S. firms when Edmundo J. Guajardo served as an attorney for the CRLC and the *Jabonera/Anderson Clayton*. The pressured buyout of the CRLC’s lands between 1937 and 1946

⁹⁰ INEGI, IX Censo General de Población 1970, Baja California, Características Económicas, Capítulo 4. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/1970/default.html#Tabulados>.

⁹¹ INEGI, X Censo General de Población y Vivienda 1980, Baja California, Vol. 2, Tomo 2, Cuadro No. 13 Mexico, D.F.: Dirección General de Estadística, 1983), 45.

⁹² Noriega-Verdugo, “Economic Overview,” 123.

placed Edmundo's engagement with U.S. corporations on a twenty-one-year hiatus. Soon after the launch of the Border Industrialization Program, Edmundo, Edmundo Viderique, and Ignacio Guajardo entered in the state-sanctioned maquila industry. By tracing a familial genealogy of U.S. capitalism on the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands, the movement of capital is transfigured from the level of bureaucratic abstraction to personification and reveals the nationalist undercurrent of development of both families/business entities.

Since at least the Revolution of 1910, the Vildósolas formed part of elite northwestern Mexican politics. Like others during the Revolution, Gustavo Vildósola Almada fled from Sonora to the United States from fear of death. Vildósola Almada was not directly linked to the Revolution, but General Fausto Topete was a second cousin of the family and he fought against President Emilio Portes Gil in the *Escobarista* Rebellion of 1929. Portes Gil formed part of Plutarco Elias Calles's *maximato*—referring to the prolonged influence of Calles on Mexican presidents—and the rebellion was quickly suppressed. At the conclusion of hostilities of the Revolution, Vildósola Alamada was arrested and deported to Mexico for possible ties with his cousin. He then decided to send the family to Los Angeles, California, which was where future KenMex president, Gustavo Vildósola Castro (GVC), was born. Vildósola Castro arrived in Mexicali in 1936, where his family and the family of his future wife—Lorenza Ramos del Valle—were already politically prominent figures. GVC and Ramos del Valle both had uncles that previously served as mayors of Mexicali while two other family members were established agriculturalists and engineers. Moreover, Vildósola Almada served as Baja California's senator from 1958 through 1964.⁹³

⁹³ Gustavo Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila en el Desierto* (Mexicali: Editorial Algibe, 2004), 12-14; Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexican Political Biographies*, 4th edition (Austin: UT Press, 2011), 1990. Vildósola Castro's personal name and memoir will be shortened to GVC to distinguish him from his father. The initials follow Mexican use of initials to signify first name, paternal surname, and maternal surname.

The Vildósolas exploited their geographical location next to the United States and tied their businesses to U.S. investments. As early as 1947, Vildósola Almada operated a business dedicated to mechanized leveling and harvesting for cotton production. Gustavo Vildósola Castro soon joined his father and uncle in the business in 1947 upon returning from a short study period in Mexico City. Vildósola Almada branched off from cotton and formed a partnership with U.S. investor Herald Youngston to produce linseed oil. This was the first time that the Vildósolas developed a working relationship with U.S. investors and businesspeople and established a transnational precedence for the coming years. Youngston overestimated the profitability of linseed and linseed oil and GVC persuaded his father to enter into a partnership with him, letting GVC work and maintain the agricultural equipment left by Youngston. GVC and Vildósola Almada formed *Excavaciones y Terracerías* (Excavation and Roadworks). The focus of the business was again land preparation and harvesting of cotton along with road leveling projects. GVC bought more bulldozer-type machines, some of which were inoperable, yet fixed them and resold the machines.⁹⁴ In 1952, GVC expanded his operations and opened up his own machine shop, *Talleres Mecánicos Industriales El Águila S.A. de C.V.* (The Eagle Industrial Mechanical Workshop, variable stock corporation) in the neighborhood of Cuauhtémoc a few blocks from the Mexico-U.S. border fence.

In his memoir, *Un Águila en el Desierto* (*An Eagle in the Desert*), Vildósola Castro soon shifts his tone from a seemingly humble young man to a self-aggrandizing patriotic adult who led the charge of modern industrialization in Mexicali. GVC saw a direct connection between his business venture and the economic health of Mexicali and Mexico. In 1953 Baja California

⁹⁴ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 23-25. A quick note about the memoir is warranted. When GVC published this memoir in 2004, a very limited number of books were printed. Most of the book copies went to family members, friends, and one copy for the Mexicali's Municipal Historical Archive. GVC was one of the most well-respected businesspeople in Mexicali and KenMex remains a coveted place of employment. I treat the memoir as both a primary and secondary source, especially to unpack how GVC perceived his place in a changing borderlands.

gained statehood status and GVC connected the start of *El Águila* with Baja California statehood to signal his full entry as a businessman. As GVC put it, “We [*El Águila*] were born nearly with the state.”⁹⁵ Some workers lived far from *El Águila* and preferred to sleep in Mexicali rather than their homes in the more rural and distant parts of the municipality. Indeed, GVC comments, “On one chilly morning, I arrived to *El Águila* only to find three workers asleep wrapped in the only fabric they could find, a Mexican flag. I exclaimed to them, ‘Oh, look, now we have the *niños héroes* [child heroes] in the workshop!’”⁹⁶ The *niños héroes* were a group of young soldiers and cadets who died defending the fortress and military academy at Chapultepec in Mexico City against the United States invasion during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). According to contemporary accounts, one of the cadets wrapped himself in the Mexican flag and jumped over a fortified wall to his death rather than let U.S. soldiers lower the Mexican flag and raise the stars and stripes over Chapultepec. In this exchange, GVC pointed out that the sleeping workers and GVC were part of modernization in Mexicali, where rural peasants looked to the city for work and struggled to manage changes in Mexicali’s political economy. Hinting at his near cult of personality fully developed later, GVC showcased the type of loyalty he commanded from workers.

Though Mexicali’s cotton monoculture was part of GVC and his father’s business ventures, both Vildósolas focused on the mechanized aspect of cotton rather than manual labor. The cotton industry loomed its threads in Gustavo Vildósola Castro’s industrial projects. GVC’s first paid job was working for his father and uncle in a cotton related industry. GVC and his father went into business together for cotton land preparation and harvesting. The workshop, *El Águila*, offered service and repair for agricultural equipment and later built and sold specialized

⁹⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 36. This anecdote was related by Manuel Guardado Toscano.

transport trailers for cotton. GVC attempted to enter cotton planting and harvesting along with his father-in-law and from 1950 to 1956, he traveled forty-five miles to *Colonia Hindú* to supervise the work on his 100-hectare (247 acres) cotton fields. Profits made from his cotton fields were reinvested in *El Águila*, which increasingly took up GVC's mind and time. GVC did not have any particular training or deep knowledge of cotton, but he understood the massive profits to be made in Mexicali's monoculture. He referred to himself as a "nylon grower," the joke rested on nylon's synthetic origins and lack of required agricultural knowledge to spin into fiber. During 1953 and 1954, his fields lost revenue and he soon left cotton to focus solely on *El Águila*.

In his memoir, Vildósola Castro expresses triumph over dilemmas through his vision as an ideal nationalist in an attempt to define *lo mexicano* (Mexicanness) in the north. In one particular melodramatic scene, GVC paints the potential closing of *El Águila* due to a peso devaluation in 1954.⁹⁷ This troubled GVC because he owed roughly \$100,000 to U.S. investors. Expressing his frustration with the very same international capital that enabled the Vildósolas to become businessmen in the name of Mexicali, GVC mused that he change the name of *El Águila* to *Talleres Cuauhtémoc*. As he saw it, he and the workshop were the "eagle that has fallen" in the same vein as the last Mexica dynast who lost power to the Spanish and indigenous rivals in 1521 and execution in 1525.⁹⁸

GVC's parallel between himself and Cuauhtémoc indicates how he saw his workshop for his own fortune and the future of Mexicali. Like Cuauhtémoc's struggle to hold the remainder of the Mexica Empire, GVC saw his economic survival as a determining factor in Mexicali and Mexico's ability to withstand the weight of monetary fluctuations. He placed himself at the

⁹⁷ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 44. As he put it, the exchange rate went from 1:8.60 to 1:12.50.

⁹⁸ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 44.

center of the industrialization narrative, the eagle in the desert that could have its wings clipped before it could fully soar. Unlike Cuauhtémoc, however, creditors did not torture and kill *El Águila*. The company remained due to workers agreeing to take a pay cut, whom GVC called, “the engines of business.”⁹⁹ He also realized that workers were the group of people who could shore up his business venture when the market revealed its volatility, the people who would sacrifice themselves for the sake of the company. Unlike GVC, the workers weren’t given heroic titles like Cuauhtémoc, reserved instead for the belittling *niños heroes*.

GVC also credited himself with limiting subversive competition that went against Mexico’s goals of industrialization. GVC remarked that *El Águila* was a major beneficiary of the federal government’s import-substitution policy and the *zona libre*, a policy project unfathomable to PRONAF’s director, Antonio Bermúdez. The emerging industrialist pointed out that *El Águila*’s growth conformed to the government’s plan of developing local industry, yet this plan also came at the expense of the agricultural and mining sectors.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, industrial development was a key step conceptually and physically in Mexicali’s path towards modernization. Investments in this model were made prior to PRONAF and the BIP of the early 1960s. As early as 1954, *El Águila*’s products reached regional markets, including Sonora and Sinaloa. The growing workshop produced, marketed, and sold enough agricultural implements—especially discs, levelers, and water pumps—to have those products removed from *zona libre* exemptions. GVC beamed with pride in his use of the federal government’s policies, which intended to meet local demands and then expanding to the larger national market, thereby increasing Mexico’s overall economic productivity. GVC noted that several local retailers were upset by *El Águila*’s success, not necessarily because of economic envy; rather, GVC undercut

⁹⁹ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 43, 59.

their “abus[ive]” strategy of purchasing items in the United States and then selling them in the interior, with no shipping or import duties paid because of the *zona libre*.¹⁰¹ GVC positioned himself as the embodiment of law, respect, and nation and believed he provided a model for his competitors.

Gustavo Vildósola Castro’s paternalist guidance of Mexicali’s industrial progress and economic evolution were showcased with the opening of Kenworth Mexicana in 1959. GVC noticed that sales of *El Águila* trailers declined. Upon investigation in 1958, he learned that the federal government closed the border to imports of semi-trucks in a plan to launch the quasi-state venture, National Diesel (Diesel Nacional, DINÁ). Early on, DINÁ was unable to meet regional or national demand for trucks.¹⁰² GVC saw an opportunity to enter into this market, but *El Águila* lacked the necessary equipment, materials, and trained personnel to enter into heavy vehicle manufacturing. Again leveraging his contacts with U.S. investors such as John Bennett, president of Utility Manufacturing Company—whom GVC purchased the initial trailer machinery—Vildósola Castro was introduced to the Seattle-based Kenworth Truck Company. Kenworth was initially dismissive of GVC, especially after executives from Kenworth visited *El Águila* in January 1959 and saw it as a low-end workshop rather than an automotive plant. However, a June 1959 strike in Seattle by the unions Machinists Hope Lodge 79 and Automotive Machinists’ Union 289 convinced Kenworth executives to reopen negotiations with GVC and opened KenMex on Christmas Day, 1959.¹⁰³ GVC was no stranger to symbolism and he considered KenMex a gift to Mexicali from him, one made possible through the struggle of Seattle workers demanding a pay raise and Kenworth unwilling to accept labor’s demands. Underneath the bow

¹⁰¹ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 63.

¹⁰² Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 68.

¹⁰³ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 70. This name change was not entered into public knowledge until December 29. During the Seattle strike, KenMex produced ten trucks for sale in Peru and in 1960, KenMex manufactured 153 trucks for Mexico’s market; see GVC, *Un Águila*, 73.

and wrapping, however, was GVC's reliance on U.S. capital's vision of "cheap" Mexican labor that centered KenMex's profits on the deliverer rather than the laborer.

As GVC crafted his image of the ideal *mexicano* in the north, he showed his reliance on U.S. capital to forward his self-image. The establishment of KenMex was not solely the result of the seemingly fortunate happenstance events in 1958 and 1959, but also due to longer connections with transnational investment and political power that focused north rather than south. Since the late 1940s, Gustavo Vildósola Almada (GVC's father) went into partnership with U.S. investor, Herald Youngston, for linseed oil production. GVC then purchased heavy machinery from the Los Angeles-based Utility Manufacturing Company. Through these contacts, GVC parlayed investment from Kenworth and its parent company, Pacific Car and Foundry (PACCAR), to establish KenMex. Since 1958, Gustavo Vildósola Almada was Baja California's senator and his "intervention in favor of the nascent [trucking] industry with officials from Commerce, Industry, and Finance, was decisive for our [KenMex] growth."¹⁰⁴ From at least 1962, but likely since 1958, Gustavo Vildósola Almada was also the president of KenMex's board of directors.¹⁰⁵ GVC, meanwhile, was the vice president and general manager. The remainder of the board members demonstrated U.S. linkages. Robert Waggoner served as treasurer, George Lhamon as secretary, Robert O'Brien as commissioner (who first met GVC in 1958 in Seattle), Clarence Knudsen as licensee, and Gregory Lair as an alternate. Though 51 percent Mexican interests and 49 percent "foreign" shares controlled KenMex, five of seven possible executive leadership positions were reserved for members of the U.S. firms Kenworth and PACCAR.

¹⁰⁴ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ The reason for this discrepancy is lack of archival material. Exhaustive research has not revealed the 1958 tax break or 1959 incorporation of KenMex. In the 1963 decree by Ernesto Pérez Rul, Vildósola Almada was listed as the president of the board of directors. In this same decree, KenMex's first tax exemptions are listed since 1958.

Baja California granted tax breaks as incentive for industrial development, which both the Vildósolas and Guajardos exploited. In his study on post-World War II tax policy and politics in Mexico, historian Benjamin Smith argues that federal tax breaks for industrialists and merchants also served as a method “to ensure...political compliance” from these key interest groups.¹⁰⁶ Yet, highly favorable tax concessions to firms like KenMex and Mextel also meant that the federal and state coffers were underfunded for social projects like housing, healthcare, and education, areas particularly critical for peoples with lower incomes. Indeed, across Latin American countries, Mexico ranked last in terms of GDP derived from taxes in 1965. Moreover, industrial- and commercial-friendly tax exemptions generated social and financial inequality. As Smith argues, “Exemptions and evasions favored the wealthy and regressive taxes stripped the poor of their cash at a higher rate than their richer compatriots.”¹⁰⁷ That is, Baja California and the federal government prioritized modernization via low industrial and commercial taxes without extending this privilege to the vast majority of Baja California residents. Both governments wrote the formulas that engineered the subsidization of a borderlands bourgeoisie and underwrote social stratification.

The language of Baja California’s tax breaks reveals the degree to which the state was in an ambivalent negotiation with the transnational KenMex. In his capacity as president, Gustavo Vildósola Almada represented KenMex in state legal matters. Between 1958 and 1979, Vildósola Almada was able to get 75 percent tax breaks on industrial, commercial, city, state, property, and land improvements.¹⁰⁸ *El Águila* was also granted 100 percent tax abatement from 1958 through

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin T. Smith, “Building a State on the Cheap: Taxation, Social Movements, and Politics,” in *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968*, eds. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 258.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, “Building a State,” 259-260.

¹⁰⁸ Tax Exemption, Kenworth Mexicana, May 13, 1963, 1; Tax Exemption, Kenworth Mexicana, June 16, 1969, 3, box 145, record 32, State Archive of Baja California (SABC), Mexicali, Baja California Norte, Mexico.

1963, but that rate was reworked when the company was rebranded as KenMex in 1959. In 1963, Ernesto Pérez Rul, director of Economic and Industrial Development for Baja California's noted the state's "level of cooperation...was to create the necessary conditions to guarantee the growth of [KenMex] in benefit of the company and the general interests of [Baja California]." Pérez Rul determined that KenMex was beholden to the whims of shareholders and it was the state's responsibility to create a protective environment for the company because of its role in creating industrial jobs."¹⁰⁹ KenMex applied for another tax exemption in 1969 and Governor Raúl Sánchez Díaz mentioned that KenMex not only generated foreign (U.S.) currency in the area, but it also created jobs. Moreover, the governor stressed the efficacy of the tax break, stating that KenMex decided to stay in Mexicali "despite the advantages and benefits available in the interior of the Republic owing to [KenMex's] economic capacity and international prestige."¹¹⁰ The governor in effect claimed geographical control of KenMex along with Vildósola's regional pride and U.S. links.

Indeed, these were symbiotic terms in the state's imagining of transnational capitalism. On the one hand, Baja California showed it was able to compete with central Mexico and fulfilled a tenet of the *zona libre*. On the other hand, the Baja California also showed its reliance on U.S. capital to reach that level of industrial development. Early on, KenMex received 60 percent of its materials from U.S. sources and PACCAR/Kenworth owned 49 percent of KenMex stock, keeping in line with the ISI regulations.¹¹¹ The goal of the state was to reduce the amount of "foreign" resources in the company as a strategy of economic independence and micro-autarky. With no hard figures, the state mentioned that KenMex gradually thinned its use of U.S. raw materials and semi-finished products. The state was also supportive of granting

¹⁰⁹ Tax Exemption, Kenworth Mexican, May 13, 1963, 6, box 145, record 32, SABC.

¹¹⁰ Tax Exemption, Kenworth Mexicana, June 16, 1969, 1, box 145, record 32, SABC.

¹¹¹ Tax Exemption, Kenworth Mexicana, May 13, 1963, 5, box 145, record 32, SABC.

KenMex tax incentives to remain in Mexicali. *El Águila* and KenMex's capital greatly increased from \$367,000 pesos in 1952 to \$1,602,000 pesos in 1963. By 1969, the workshop's location near the Mexico-U.S. border fence impeded the company's expansion of activity and machinery. Gustavo Vildósola Almada sought tax protection for the new \$30 million peso plant, which was enthusiastically granted by Governor Raúl Sánchez Díaz.¹¹² Gustavo Vildósola Castro remarked that in 1970 he seriously considered relocating KenMex to the central state of Aguascalientes, but decided to stay in Mexicali after "various topographical and economic studies" convinced him of the city's advantages.¹¹³ Baja California's tax breaks no doubt factored in to his decision as well as GVC's political connections through his father and his own sense of place in Mexicali that stretched back to his adolescence.

While the Vildósolas and Kenworth formed their partnership, the Guajardo family seized on their familiarity with U.S. investors and the Mexican federal government's promotion of transnational assembly trends to launch a maquiladora with the Mattel toy corporation. The federal government's *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (1961) was provided limited funds, but aimed at cultivating an aesthetic to attract mainly U.S. investments. In 1965, the federal government launched another program, the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). This program was focused more on creating an inviting environment for non-Mexican firms to set up shop along a 12.5-mile strip of land adjacent to the Mexico-U.S. border. The BIP provided the loose legal structure (not codified until 1971), which gave rise to maquiladoras.¹¹⁴ Mexico's federal government required that assembled finished products be shipped out of Mexico and into the U.S. market to avoid competition with local industry. Unlike a firm like KenMex, factories

¹¹² Letter from Gustavo Vildósola Almada to Governor Raul Sanchez Diaz, April 29, 1969, box 145, record 32, SABC; Tax Exemption, Kenworth Mexicana, June 16, 1969, 3, box 145, record 32, SABC; Baird and McCaughan, "Hit and Run," 8.

¹¹³ Vildósola Castro, *Un Águila*, 83.

¹¹⁴ Sklair, *Assembling for Development*, 45.

set up under the BIP could be 100 percent non-Mexican owned so long as the finished product did not remain in Mexico. This stipulation was known as “in-bond” industry in the United States since the product was slated for export. The incentives to establish a maquila distilled to U.S. tariff loopholes (provisions 806 and 807), where the product was only taxed the value-added, in this case, the “value” (cost of labor) added during assembly in Mexico. By far, the electronics industry was the dominant sector of maquilas followed by clothing and footwear.¹¹⁵

Mattel, the largest U.S. toy company, was not initially envisioned as a toy company. Mattel began in 1938 as Elliot Handler Plastics, a company established by Elliot Handler, Ruth Handler, and Harold “Matt” Matson. The company made and sold lamps, picture frames, jewelry, and even a Plexiglass clock for Douglas Aircraft. It was the jewelry line that caught the attention of prominent Los Angeles jeweler, Zachary Zemby. A pin Elliot fashioned impressed Zemby and he soon invested in the company. In 1941, Elliot Handler Plastics became Elzac (Elliot and Zachary) and was dedicated to multiple pieces of jewelry, especially costume. By 1943, Elzac employed 300 workers and Elliot remained a jewelry designer while Matt Matson was on the supervisor side of manufacturing. In 1944, Zemby brought in other investors and Matson wanted out of Elzac. Handler soon followed Matson and, along with Ruth Handler as salesperson, they formed Mattel (Matt and Elliot) in October of 1944. Mattel originally started with wooden picture frames, similar to Elliot Handler Plastics. By early 1945, Matson sold his portion of Mattel to Elliot and the latter shifted his attention from picture frames to doll house furniture he made from the scraps of wood left over from the frames. The Handlers and Mattel’s transformation from a miscellaneous plastic company to a toy manufacture was complete.

Key advertising and the popularity of its toys greatly contributed to Mattel’s early growth and later dominance of the U.S. market. The company began marketing its products directly to

¹¹⁵ Cowie, *Capital Moves*, 112-114; Baird and McCaughan, “Hit and Run,” 7-12.

the child consumer by placing advertisements during the *Mickey Mouse Club* show in 1955. As Lizbeth Cohen argues, direct marketing to children emerged in the 1950s with children's shows, including the *Mickey Mouse Club* and *Howdy Doody* that "sought to lay the groundwork for a lifetime of consumption."¹¹⁶ Mattel used its advertising spots to sell popular toys such as the "burp" gun, a submachine gun-fashioned cap gun. Undoubtedly, Mattel made its largest and most successful splash with Ruth Handler's idea for a "three-dimensional doll through which little girls could play out their dreams." In 1959, Mattel launched the "Barbie" line of dolls, named after Ruth and Elliot's first child, while the "Hot Wheels" line of die-cast toy cars was developed in 1968. By this same year, the company shifted its assembly and production processes to Taiwan and Mexico. Some of the very toys defined U.S. consumerist identity relied on low wage areas that brought the company's transnational model into the hands of the children it targeted for marketing. Frances Negrón-Muntaner argues that the cultural and racial politics of the "Puerto Rican" Barbie in 1996 and 1997 revealed the complexities of arguments of Puerto Rican identity between mainland and Island Puerto Ricans manufactured by a U.S. multinational corporation.¹¹⁷ Thirty years before those debates, Mattel forwarded a consumerist racial logic of American consumption and racialized production that manufactured white American identity.

Unceremoniously, Mextel was formally incorporated by the state of Baja California on April 13, 1967 and the Guajardo family took a prominent role in the maquila. The relationship between the Guajardos and Mattel revived U.S. capitalist relationships that traced back to one of the earliest U.S. firms in Baja California and Mexicali, the Colorado River Land Company. There had been a swelling of populist nationalism in Mexicali against the CRLC in the early

¹¹⁶ Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 320.

¹¹⁷ Frances Negrón-Muntaner, "Barbie's Hair: Selling Out Puerto Rican Identity in the Global Market," in *Latino/a Popular Culture*, edited by Habell-Pallán, Michelle and Mary Romero (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 79-81.

1920s that followed the ratification of the Constitution in 1917. There were two main camps of Mexicali elites regarding the CRLC. The anti-CRLC group was led by “combative” journalist Ricardo Covarrubias and also included “numerous lawyers whose careers were not advancing” because they lacked official government posts and were kept out of CRLC’s lucrative business.¹¹⁸ The other camp was a pro-CRLC group of lawyers who argued in favor of the CRLC even as the tide of nationalism of the Álvaro Obregón federal government pushed against the U.S. company. One of the lead lawyers for the CRLC in Mexicali was Arturo Guajardo. He was also the Mexican consul in Calexico in 1915 and his brother, José, served as a judge in Mexicali. Arturo’s nephew, Edmundo Guajardo, later represented the CRLC in 1920 and at times served as liaison between the CRLC and the federal government.¹¹⁹ Edmundo was also related through marriage to Baja California governor and the last president under the *maximato*, Abelardo L. Rodríguez. Edmundo possessed five percent of the CRLC’s shares in 1936 while 85 percent of the shares remained with U.S. investor and land baron, Henry Chandler.¹²⁰ When the federal government bought out the CRLC in 1946, another lawyer replaced Edmundo, but his business interest with the United States was far from over.¹²¹

The Guajardos’ dealings with Mattel signaled an increase of U.S. power and influence in Mexicali and its political economy. Twenty-one years after the federal takeover of the Colorado River Land Company, Edmundo J. Guajardo entered into another U.S.-led business venture, but now with Mattel. With 3,000 shares and \$300,000 pesos invested, he was the majority stockowner and president-treasurer of Mextel. Except for three alternates on the board of

¹¹⁸ Dorothy Pierson Kerig, *El Valle de Mexicali y la Colorado River Land Company*, trans. Tomás Segovia (Mexicali: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 2001), 179.

¹¹⁹ Kerig, *El Valle de Mexicali*, 264

¹²⁰ Kerig, *El Valle de Mexicali*, 245.

¹²¹ Kerig, *El Valle de Mexicali*, 333.

directors, the company was entirely composed by members of the Guajardo family.¹²² Unlike the predominant image of a 100 percent foreign-owned maquila, Mextel was a Guajardo family investment.¹²³ Indeed, the remainder of the shareholders included Homero A. Guajardo (vice president, 1,000 shares), Edmundo J. Guajardo Viderique (secretary, 500 shares), Leonel Guajardo (300 shares), and Moises Guajardo (200 shares).¹²⁴ The Guajardos' dealings with Mextel marked a point of departure from Edmundo's legal scheme to maintain the CRLC's latifundia in Mexicali. Edmundo was initially invested in maintaining U.S. land control in Mexicali as the principle option of transforming the desert into a sprawling agriculturally productive environment. By 1967, the types of relationships possible between U.S. capital and northern Mexico changed significantly. Groups like the Vildósolas and the state and federal governments demonstrated the profitability of developing personal and financial relationships with U.S. industrial firms rather than have them impose direct land control of the area. Interestingly, in the U.S. multinational's and Mexican businesspeople arguments, the driving rationale for U.S. capitalist involvement was Mexicali's "underdevelopment" that could transform the area into an industrial manufacturing zone.

Guajardo family interests with U.S. firms exceeded Mextel and delved into northern Mexico's most represented maquila industry: electronics. Edmundo Guajardo Viderique was the son of Edmundo Guajardo, former lawyer of the CRLC. Nearly one year before Guajardo Viderique was Mextel's secretary, he was the director of Ratel, a maquiladora in Mexicali that produced parts and accessories for televisions and radios. Ratel was constituted in May 1966 and

¹²² This claim is made based on the surnames listed in the articles of incorporation. It is possible that the alternates on the board of directors were also members of the Guajardo family by some other relationship, but that is speculation at this point.

¹²³ Baird and McCaughan, "Hit and Run," 8. The authors point out that maquilas could be 100 percent foreign owned, so long as the finished product was exported. Such companies epitomized the fly-by-night (*golondrina*—the swallow bird) factories.

¹²⁴ Mextel Registration, April 13, 1967, 289, Registro Público de la Propiedad y de Comercio [Public Registry of Property and Business], Mexicali, Baja California Norte, Mexico.

began production in June of the same year. Guajardo Viderique extended his maquila electronics ventures when he also served as director of Goleta Coil in August 1967. Like Ratel, Goleta Coil was a Mexicali company that specialized in “parts, pieces, components and accessories for all types of television appliances, for radio receivers and transmitters, and electronic computer appliances.”¹²⁵ Moreover, Ignacio Guajardo, son of Arturo Guajardo, the first Guajardo lawyer for the CRLC, established Electro-Mex in June 1966. Ignacio decided to locate the maquiladora in Tijuana rather than Mexicali and showed the extent of both family and business relations. Each of these maquilas received nearly identical seven-year tax breaks of 75 percent from manufacturing, commercial, city, and state, and property taxes. Indeed, tax breaks were a ubiquitous component of Baja California’s commitment to investors from both the United States and Mexico.

As Mexicali transformed from its cotton past to its industrial present, it altered the name of a neighborhood (*colonia*) to reflect its changing city and identity. *Colonia Esperanza* (Hope) was located two miles south of the international boundary. When Edmundo Guajardo Viderique applied for Goleta Coil’s tax exemption in December 1967, *Esperanza* was listed as *Colonia Guajardo*. The subtle mention of urban rebranding belies its significance. During the Porfiriato, *científicos* (positivist technocrats) reclassified streets from *Sangre de Cristo* [Blood of Christ] to *Orden y Progreso* [Order and Progress], from *San Felipe* [Saint Philip] to *Independencia* [Independence]. Mark Overmyer-Velasquez argues that this new nomenclature signaled a change from the ecclesiastical past to the modern and Liberal present, where residents were instructed to identify urban space with secular politics and not religious figures.¹²⁶ After the Revolution, Mexicali’s *Avenida Porfirio Díaz* was renamed *Avenida Francisco Madero* as the

¹²⁵ *Periodico Oficial*, Organo del Gobierno del Estado de Baja California, Dec. 10, 1967, 20.

¹²⁶ Mark Overmyer-Velasquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 59-62.

country moved from a dictatorial past into a hopeful post-Revolutionary present. Much like the Porfiriato, urban planners in post-Revolutionary Mexicali continued to signal that hope lied with U.S. economic relations and individuals that worked within a transnational capital framework to advance state and elite visions of a modern city.

Mattel's exponential growth in its finances and workforce were directly linked to its transnational dealings and acquisitions. Mattel became a publicly owned company in 1960 and soon after the opening of Mextel in 1967, the *LA Times* ranked Mattel as the thirty-seventh California headquartered company in terms of sales, moving up five spots from the previous year and outperforming the likes of Max Factor cosmetics and Walt Disney Productions.¹²⁷ Mattel president, Elliot Handler, announced an increase in first quarter profits in 1967 and also noted the company's Taiwan and Mexicali factories, no doubt a call to potential investors.¹²⁸ The immediate pre- and post-Mextel years also show a growth of assets and employees. In September 1966, Mattel's listed assets were \$33,876,146 and 1,800 employees.¹²⁹ One year after Mextel's incorporation in 1967, the *LA Times* listed Mattel's assets at \$47,493,539 and 4,000 employees.¹³⁰ By early March of 1970, Mextel was firmly established in the Mexicali, the Hot Wheels line of toys was in full operation, and Mattel acquired U.S. toy car company Monogram and Metaframe, a company that specialized in pet products.¹³¹ In that month, Mattel's assets were listed at \$155,687,915 and 15,000 employees.¹³² Importantly, Mexicali fit into Mattel's larger plans of global expansion with other export processing zones, namely Taiwan. As the *LA*

¹²⁷ "The *Times*' Roster of California's 100 Top Industrials," *LA Times*, January 3, 1967, E4; "The *Times*' Roster of California's 100 Top Industrials," *LA Times*, May 12, 1968, N4.

¹²⁸ "Mattel Predicts Higher Earnings," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1967, D10.

¹²⁹ "The *Times*' Roster of California's 100 Top Industrials," *LA Times*, January 3, 1967, E4.

¹³⁰ "The *Times*' Roster of California's 100 Top Industrials," *LA Times*, May 12, 1968, N4.

¹³¹ "1968-Mattel Embarks on its 'World of the Young' Acquisition Strategy," 7, accessed July 12, 2017; https://corporate.mattel.com/about-us/history/mattel_history.pdf; "Mattel Completes Purchase of Metaframe for Stock," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 17, 1969, 6.

¹³² "The *Times*' Roster of California's 100 Top Industrials," *LA Times*, May 10, 1970, M4.

Times put it, Mattel’s “largest line—dolls and doll clothing—is produced mainly by majority-owned firms in the Orient.”¹³³ Mattel preferred to exercise global production flexibility rather than base non-U.S. assembly solely in one country.

Conclusion

The relationship between executives at Mattel and Mextel was part of a larger concerted effort by U.S. companies to exploit U.S. tariff law and northern Mexican groups eager to form economically and socially profitable relationships within the fold of U.S. capitalism. Mattel and Mextel operated under the oft refrain from promoters that the maquila provided jobs in an otherwise city overwhelmed by unemployed peoples. By February 1975, Mextel was Mexicali’s single largest non-government employer with nearly 3,000 workers and appeared to validate such claims.¹³⁴ Carlos Torres Manzo, head of the Secretariat of Industry and Commerce, was less of an apologist, but still saw maquilas as a “necessary evil.”¹³⁵

Maquiladoras and the practice of *prestanombre* lent itself to popular discourse about unrestrained capitalism on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Yet the *zona libre*, PRONAF, BIP, and powerbrokers like the Vildósolas and Guajardos created the legal and social framework that reordered economic relationships between U.S. companies and northern Mexican parties. Moreover, the BIP was not a strictly formalized policy. It was more of a set of plastic guidelines that interested parties worked within and, at times, beyond to achieve their goal of establishing an assembly plant on Mexico’s northern border. The “necessary evil” of transnational companies in northern Mexico should thus be understood as northern Mexican businesspeople reading a global capitalist context and inserting themselves and their interests into a fluctuating

¹³³ “The *Times*’ Roster of California’s 100 Top Industrials,” *LA Times*, May 10, 1970, M4.

¹³⁴ Baird and McCaughan, “Hit and Run,” 16.

¹³⁵ Sklair, *Assembling for Development*, 47.

borderlands. Yet, for workers at KenMex and Mextel, they waged a series of legal battles through the labor arbitration board in attempts to receive pay for alleged unjust firings. The legal and labor struggles of workers at KenMex and Mextel is the subject of chapter 4, where workers in Mexicali were left navigating through national institutions that ill reflected transitional realities.

Chapter 3: Moving Tensions: U.S. Organized Labor and Mexican Commuting Peoples, 1951-1974

Introduction

Between 1961 and 1971, Raúl Avila developed a familiar labor and migration routine. Encompassing a labor circuit over 1,400 miles, Avila and his relatives traveled from Mexicali, Baja California Norte, to peach and plum orchards around Anaheim and Red Bluff, California. Avila was well acquainted with U.S. border and labor practices. He easily crossed the border from Mexicali to Calexico with his local passport and then moved north without a U.S. work permit. Traveling to the distant areas of California was a strategic move since he wanted to stay away from the border and avoid any possible contact with the U.S. Border Patrol. For ten years this system worked because immigration authorities rarely patrolled the highways outside of major agricultural areas. By 1971, immigration policing was expanded and Avila quickly felt the increased presence of the Border Patrol. He was detained and removed to Mexico three times in the same month in 1971. The first two times resulted in removal, but the third time he was taken to El Centro's immigration detention facility. He received a court hearing with an immigration judge and was faced with an ultimatum: pay a \$1,000 fine and be removed without a crime or be deported and marked as committing a crime. Lacking financial resources, Avila opted for deportation. As he put it, "I calmed down," and he decided to find work in Mexicali rather than embarking on the thousand-mile work commute and risk arrest and being charged with a migration crime again. He obtained a position at the U.S. transnational Kenworth Mexicana in 1971.¹

¹ Raúl Avila, interview by Michael D. Aguirre, January 26, 2016, Calexico, CA. Interview in author's possession.

Raúl Avila's story illustrates an aspect of the shifting labor and immigration regimes from the end of the Bracero Program (1942-1964) to the advent of U.S. industrial transnational corporations on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. Like many other borderlands peoples, Avila navigated the border to fit his needs through mobility on both sides of the border. Only upon the threat of detention did Avila work exclusively in Mexicali. But even after 1971, Avila's life reflected the transnationalism of the border when he took a job with Kenworth Mexicana for the next seventeen years before working and living in Calexico.

The Imperial-Mexicali borderlands was defined by movement. This movement and mobility produced different feelings in people depending on their investments. Businesspeople in Calexico and the Imperial Valley greatly benefited from Mexicali; indeed, the county relied on the Mexican city. As early as 1971, the pioneering sociologist, Julian Samora, noted both the population and economic dynamics of the borderlands. He wrote, "A rather large population exists in the Mexican twin city and the U.S. border city is generally dependent on the Mexican twin city for its economic existence, based on retail sales to Mexican nationals."² As noted in chapter 2, proximity to the United States and the twenty-two year Bracero Program were largely responsible for major population growth in Mexicali. In 1940, Mexicali *municipio* (county) contained 44,399 people and, by 1970, that figure jumped to 396,324. The population of Imperial County grew at a much slower pace. In 1940, the county's population was 59,740 and it slightly increased to 74,492 in 1970.³

The peoples of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands carved the textures of movement through their daily lives. In addition to businesspeople and financial investments, many other

² Julian Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1971), 24.

³ Norma Fimbres Durazo, "Capitalist Development and Population Growth in the County of Imperial, California, and Mexicali, Baja California," in *Imperial-Mexicali Valleys: Development and Environment of the U.S.-Mexican Border Region*, eds. Kimberly Collins, Paul Ganster, et al. (San Diego: SDSU Press, 2004), 47-48.

peoples created a transborder reality. Mexicali continued to be a place of settlement for peoples from central and southern Mexico as well as Central American migrants. Fieldworkers who lived in Mexicali often crossed the border before dawn and waited for busses or carpools to shuttle them to and from the fields across the Imperial Valley. Some *mexicalicenses* (Mexicali residents) also crossed the border to work in the numerous retail and service sector jobs, including grocery and department stores, while thousands more lived and worked exclusively in Mexicali and Mexico. Other *mexicalicenses* made food purchases in the Imperial Valley, especially Calexico, to consume in Mexicali or enjoy with friends and family in either country. Imperial Valley residents often crossed into Mexicali for dining, gambling, nightlife, visiting friends and family, or to attend Catholic services, including christenings and funerals. Still, others elected to live in Mexicali rather than the Imperial Valley because of the cost of housing and low wages in the valley. Adding a further layer to the transborder environment, children from both the Imperial Valley and Mexicali crossed the border to attend school, birthday celebrations, participate in sporting events, and perform in parades in both countries. Valley teenagers also skipped class or celebrated in Mexicali to the point that police were often on high alert. To be sure, this movement was primarily dependent on a person's legal status, authorization, and arbitrary discretion of U.S. and Mexican immigration officials. There were still many others who overstayed visas or crossed into the U.S.—and to a lesser extent, Mexico—without federal sanction, yet were an integral component of work, social, and political life in the valley. The dimensions of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands were creatively shaped by the myriad day-to-day activities of a highly mobile and intertwined peoples.

This chapter works in two interrelated ways to paint a mural of movement on the borderlands and the peoples who make this transborder world from various social positions.

First, it maps the construction of commuter labor through immigration policy, labor input, and Congressional hearings. These sources also glean the interests of local Imperial Valley residents on mobility of Mexicans in the county. Second, the chapter shows how agricultural unions from the 1950s through the 1970s contended with border movement through the stiff logic of exclusionary citizenship. It is a critical examination and history of farm worker unions led by Ernesto Galarza (National Farm Labor Union) and Cesar Chavez (United Farm Workers). Both unions struggled with the presence of undocumented and commuter workers in the fields and elected to adopt exclusionary citizenship as the entry point to full inclusion for labor rights and in the U.S. body politic. Indeed, Ernesto Galarza and Cesar Chavez exercised the language of “domestic” workers, “wets,” and, for Chavez, pejoratively termed “green carders,” as a linguistic, political, and social method to distance their union members from unsanctioned and unwanted workers from Mexico.⁴ Both labor leaders invested in interdiction, detention, and deportation regimes as a collective bargaining strategy that differentiated their union members from deportation and deportability, between U.S. citizen and “Mexican Brown.”⁵ For U.S. service and trade unions, however, their focus was inclusive labor organizing regardless of a worker’s residence. By studying movement and unions on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands, the trajectory of the racially coded language of citizenship and labor can be understood as shifting markers for belonging and ordering.

⁴ Throughout the chapter I use “domestic” worker in much the same way that U.S. labor unions and state officials used it as a category of differentiation. Generally, the term referred to workers who were from a local area, who were authorized to work in the United States through citizenship or a green card, and who lived primarily in the U.S. rather than both sides of the border. That is, the state and labor saw “domestic” workers as legitimate workers. I also use “commuter” as it was understood on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands: a person who lived in Mexico, possessed state documentation to live and/or work in the U.S., and travelled from Mexicali or Mexico to work in the U.S. at least once per week. Pejorative nouns such as “wets” and “green carders” are only used within quotation marks.

⁵ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2010), 13. For deportability, see Nicholas De Genova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 8, 247-248.

Section 1: U.S. Immigration Policy, “Commuters,” and Questions of Movement

Debates about labor rights, wages, labor, and immigration were a part of a national dialogue on these issues. Between 1964 and 1965, the Bracero Program ended and President Lyndon Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965. Among many of its provisions, the act placed quotas on the Western Hemisphere for the first time, stressed family reunification, allowed more refugees, and gave preferential treatment to immigrants with advanced skills and training. The INA was a major piece of liberal legislation that intended to treat global populations equally under quotas while moving away from immigration restrictions based on country of origin. As Mae Ngai argues, the INA neglected larger economic and social conditions when it granted Mexico 20,000 slots. In contrast, during the last year of the Bracero Program (1964), there were 177,736 participants, with at least 62,000 braceros in California alone.⁶ The new INA quota effectively “recast Mexican migration as ‘illegal’” mainly due to the open door policy of agribusiness and over a half-a-century of accelerated Mexican migration to the United States that conflicted with reduced immigration slots.⁷

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 restriction on Mexican permanent resident cards (“green cards”) allocation to 20,000 was indeed a major departure from previous immigration legislation. Yet, the role of commuter workers from Mexico remained unchanged. As explained by the executive assistant to the commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, “The Mexican commuter immigrant is a Mexican national who, unlike the 8.5 million other immigrants in this country, maintains his home in Mexico and enters the

⁶ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 201), 232, n.4; “Bracero Answer Not Easy,” *Imperial Valley Press*, September 8, 1964, 9. This newspaper will hereafter be abbreviated as *IVP*.

⁷ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 261.

United States for employment on an almost daily basis.”⁸ Commuter workers, however, were not a new topic of debates on immigration or labor. The first legal challenge to commuter workers occurred on the Canadian-U.S. border in response to the U.S. Department of Labor’s 1927 issuance of Order 86, itself a response to the Asian exclusion and Southern and Eastern European restrictive 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act. Order 86 classified quota immigrants who frequently crossed the border to work in the U.S. as permanent U.S. residents. Crossing the border was interpreted as “returning from a temporary visit abroad.” This definition was used to count transborder workers against the national quotas established in Johnson-Reed, and, it was argued, protected U.S. labor from competition from European immigrants. Commuter workers were thus classified as permanent residents and the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Order 86 in 1929 with *Karnuth v. United States ex rel. Albro*.⁹

Efforts to exclude Asian immigration and restrict immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe through Johnson-Reed and Order 86 did not target non-quota immigrants, such as those from Canada and Mexico, but organized labor battled to apply restriction to Mexicans. This change in labor’s challenges to restricting immigration and commuter work from Mexico was first evidenced in the 1960 *Amalgamated Meat Cutters* case, where the presiding judge classified the commuter dynamic as an “amiable fiction” of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) rather than Congressional policy.¹⁰ Though the initial case judge agreed with the American

⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Border Commuter Labor Problem: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, 91st Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., Part 5-A, May 21, 1969 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O, 1970), 1977.

⁹ Roger A. LaBrucherie, “Aliens in the Fields: The ‘Green-Card Commuter’ Under the Immigration and Naturalization Laws,” *Stanford Law Review* 21, no. 6 (June 1969): 1752-1754.

¹⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt. 5-A, 2274; Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., “The Mexico-United States Border: An Assessment of the Policies of the United States Upon the Economic Welfare of the Chicano Population,” Conference Paper, Economic Relations Between Mexico and the United States, Austin, Texas, April 1973, 4, in Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations Digital Commons, accessed February 2, 2018, <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=briggsI>.

The AFL-CIO based its case on the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act.

Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) that commuters be barred from the struck meat packing plant, the judge tasked with the final judgment refused to issue a mandatory order to the U.S. attorney general since only four commuter strikebreakers still worked at the plant. The case was therefore moot.¹¹ The AFL-CIO again filed a case against commuter workers in 1961, though this case was dismissed on the grounds that the union did not have a right to sue the federal government.¹² In 1968, the California Rural Legal Assistance followed in the AFL-CIO's path and sued Ramsey Clark (U.S. attorney general), Harlon B. Carter (INS, Southwest Region), and C.W. Fullilove (INS, San Francisco). The *Gooch v. Clark* case was based on complaints from the Imperial Valley, where "a group of residents of the Imperial Valley...lost work because of the competition Green Card commuters."¹³ Specifically, "They had lost jobs because of the preference employers had for commuters."¹⁴ The CRLA based its case on a close reading of the 1965 INA, which dropped the use of "alien lawfully for permanent residence" and instead used, "Returning resident immigrants." The CRLA contended that Congress implied an end to the commuter dynamic because of the change of language, though the presiding judge did not agree and dismissed the suit in 1970.¹⁵

In many ways, labeling the commuter dynamic a program—bona fide versus fictive immigrants, legitimate and adverse labor—was an attempt to order the border against a sense of labor and nationalist insecurity produced by capitalism on the borderlands. Like the Bracero Program (1942-1964), the commuter "program" was "encouraging poor Mexicans to make poor Chicanos even poorer" by competing in an overcrowded, low-skill, borderlands labor market.¹⁶

¹¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt. 5-A, 2274.

¹² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt. 5-A, 2275.

¹³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt.5-A, 2275.

¹⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt. 5-A, 2359.

¹⁵ Briggs, Jr., "The Mexico-United States Border," 16.

¹⁶ Briggs, Jr., "The Mexico-United States Border," 16-17.

Labeling this borderlands work dynamic the “commuter program” was a clear reminder that this program—and the preceding Bracero Program—was an instrument for labor and commercial exploitation that dovetailed with the Good Neighbor policy. While commuting continued under the INA of 1965, so did the distinction between “bona fide” immigrant and commuter. The permanent resident (“green card”) alien was imagined as the proper immigrant, one who ceased to keep close ties and connections to the person’s home country. The commuter was conceived as the offspring of bureaucratic maneuvers and a person who undermined U.S. nationalism by remaining close to Mexico rather than strictly the United States. Permanent resident aliens, however, could also be commuter workers. From the perspective of lawmakers and organized labor, the distinction between the two was place of residence. Permanent resident aliens were assumed to live in areas away from the U.S.-Mexico border or live the majority of the year in the U.S. Commuters, by contrast, lived mostly in Mexican border cities like Mexicali and made daily border crossings to work in the U.S. Commuters were realities of the U.S. borderlands with Mexico and Canada, with the focus on detrimental movement relegated to Mexico and Mexicans.

The concerns over “alien commuters” by federal legislators, organized labor, businesspeople, church groups, and other interested parties came to a head in early 1968. Between January 26 and March 8, the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration held a series of hearings in four U.S. border cities: El Paso, Texas; San Diego, California; Brownsville, Texas; Detroit, Michigan. Chaired by Richard Scammon—former head of the U.S. Census Bureau—the commission included five Senators, five Congressmen, and five non-governmental people. According to Scammon, the hearings were to assist federal lawmakers “in their work in building legislation in the whole field of immigration,” with the focus being on

“green card” commuter workers. Though Mexico, Canada, and the Pacific and Atlantic oceans bordered the United States, the hearings focused overwhelmingly on the U.S.-Mexico border. Indeed, over 700 pages of testimony and inquiry were dedicated to commuters from Mexico while 32 pages sought to illuminate the Canada-U.S. border.¹⁷ To be sure, movement on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands was numerically greater than it was on the Canadian borderlands. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) did not keep any hard figures of the number of commuters and estimates ranged from 40,000 to 400,000 permanent resident card holders.¹⁸ In January 1966, the INS did take a sample count of commuters who crossed the Mexican and Canadian borders. It counted 53,000 commuters with over 42,000 crossing from Mexico and 6,074 crossing the Windsor-Detroit border, where the majority of Canadian crossings took place.¹⁹

According to Scammon, the Commission and the hearings were not tied to any particular piece of legislation. However, New York Democratic Senator Edward (Ted) Kennedy introduced S. 2790 in December of 1967 one month before the hearings and several witnesses referenced it throughout the proceedings. The bill sought to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and apply its labor regulations to commuter workers. That is, the amendment sought to ensure that the entry of a commuter worker to the U.S. would not “adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States.”²⁰ Kennedy identified commuter workers as a new problem. He went so far as to present an evolution of immigration issues,

¹⁷ Hearings before the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens Along the Mexican and Canadian Borders*, Parts I-IV, January 26-March 8, 1968 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O, 1968-69).

¹⁸ Hearings, Select Commission, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens*, Part I, 211.

¹⁹ Hearings, Select Commission, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens*, Part IV, 161. There is no clarification of the remaining 5,000 commuters, pointing to the lack of an accurate census of commuters. The 5,000 numerical disparity can potentially be explained with other Canadian-U.S. ports of entry not counted in the sample, such as the Surrey port of entry in British Columbia and other western Canadian ports.

²⁰ Hearings, Select Commission, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens*, Part I, 210.

where the problem of “wetbacks” was resolved with the Bracero Program and the “explosive situation” of the commuter issue could be fixed with his bill.²¹ The bill also wanted enforcement of a proposed six-month labor certification from the Department of Labor prior to entry and revocation of a permanent resident card if a commuter intended to work at a struck plant.²² Kennedy and Senator Ralph Yarborough stressed that the bill did not seek to end the commuter system. Rather, in the liberal logic of regulation in the Immigration Act of 1965, S.2790 sought to regulate commuting peoples by creating numerical surveillance, prevent wage reductions via labor certifications, and limit the number of permanent resident cards.

A major point of contention for U.S. labor and politicians was the commuter policy itself. The Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration of 1968 and Congressional hearings before the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor in 1969 both sought clarification of the program, highlighted the difficulties of the program on U.S. unions, and proposed recommendations to limit the program and the movement of Mexican workers to U.S. cities. The 1969 Subcommittee on Migratory Labor dedicated an entire set of hearings on the “Border Commuter Labor Problem.” Senators and representatives revealed their unfamiliarity with the machinations of the commuter program, but were overwhelmingly convinced that the program was detrimental to U.S. workers. Senator Walter Mondale served as chairman of the subcommittee and quickly stated, “Our hearings will explore the extent to which commuter problems illustrate and explain the social and economic deprivation—and the powerlessness—faced by migrants [farmworkers].”²³ In nearly 600 pages of testimony, statistical data, and government reports, expert witnesses painted a profile of commuter workers as the root of farmworker “powerlessness,” meaning that borderlands working peoples were responsible for

²¹ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part I, 206.

²² Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part I, 205.

²³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt. 5-A, 1948.

the low wage and anti-union agricultural political economy. From Senator Ted Kennedy to Department of Labor contract researcher David S. North, the solution was for commuters to have their documents periodically renewed to verify that their working presence did not adversely affect U.S. workers.

The 1968 Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration hearings revealed the international relations aspect of the commuter system. Opposition to changing the commuter system on the U.S.-Mexico border emerged from diplomatic interests. Regardless of the origins of the commuter policies, Secretary of State Dean Rusk captured the evolution of the system from one of convenience and INS departmental discretion to a component of international relations. Rusk wrote, “I want to state that in my judgment the present commuter practice contributes to the friendly relations of the two countries [Mexico and the United States] and the maintenance of the Good Neighbor policy.” Rusk continued his statement and noted the Monroe Doctrine-to-Alliance for Progress hemispheric implications of the commuter system, “It is fair to state that any serious disruption in our relations with Mexico could have adverse effects on our relations with a number of other Latin American countries, and on the success of the Alliance for Progress.”²⁴ While the California Federation of the AFL-CIO protested, “We have this Good Neighbor policy thrown in our face all the time,” to justify the commuter system, Senator Ralph Yarborough (D-Texas) argued that cordial relations between the United States and Mexico reached a new peak with the recently negotiated Chamizal Treaty of 1964.²⁵ The treaty settled a 100-year old territorial dispute on the Rio Grande (*Río Bravo*) between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. Yarborough stated that this diplomatic victory should not be “upset with bitterness among the local people because their jobs are taken away by alien commuters who live in

²⁴ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part I, 92.

²⁵ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part II, 31.

Mexico.”²⁶ The commuter system thus included U.S. foreign policy as much as peoples and movement.

Labor’s ire for commuting peoples was based on their association with depressed wages and unemployment in U.S. border cities. Like arguments from Ernesto Galarza and organized labor, braceros once occupied this position until the end of the Bracero Program in 1964. Now, commuting workers were singled as wage depressants and unemployment multipliers. Indeed, unemployment in the Imperial Valley in 1966 was 10 percent, double the California rate. At the same time, seasonal farm wages on the California-Baja California borderlands increased by 35 percent to \$1.42 per hour.²⁷ Though the 35 percent wage gain was one-fourth greater than the rest of the state, wages remained less in the valley than California rates. Michael Peevey, Research Director of the California Federation of the AFL-CIO, stated that the “new” bracero problem was commuter workers and the wages they lowered in Imperial Valley agriculture. According to Peevey, commuters validated the “farther-higher” wage theory, which proposed that the farther a field was from the border, the higher the wage.²⁸ The California Department of Employment agreed, noting that wages for similar work in other parts of the state were 6 percent greater.²⁹ Peevey argued that over \$75,000 of wages were removed from the Imperial Valley and settled with workers in Mexicali.³⁰ Peevey sided with a local Imperial Valley business owner, when the latter said, “The Green Carder will work for less.”³¹ Imperial Valley county supervisor, Charles Kilgore, mentioned that work orders paying \$225 per month was not enough to live by in the valley, but enough if a worker lived in Mexicali.³² The argument from organized labor

²⁶ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part I, 209.

²⁷ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part I, 142; Part II, 24.

²⁸ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part II, 24.

²⁹ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part I, 139.

³⁰ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part II, 25.

³¹ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part II, 25.

³² Ibid.

interests was that employers paid on a wage scale determined by Mexicali cost of living rather than U.S.-based wages.

The Calexico Chamber of Commerce and the Calexico City Council both took issue to the possible passage of Ted Kennedy's S.2790. The chamber adamantly opposed the bill and the "dire economic reversals" of its passage. Calexico taxable retail sales totaled \$25 million and Mexicali accounted for 60 percent of these taxable dollars. Like their counterparts in El Paso, the chamber refused to underwrite federal policy at the expense of local economic concerns and relations with Mexicali.³³ One month after the hearings, the Calexico City Council passed a resolution that advocated a study of the commuter system. Closer to the local context than the AFL-CIO or federal lawmakers, the council treaded lightly and noted that wages were "possibly depressed by 'Green Card Workers'," and that commuter workers could also be responsible for high unemployment. The council pointed to the intimacy of the borderlands and asked that the commuter system not be abruptly altered and to avoid potential "chaos for farms and businesses throughout the Imperial Valley" with the disruption of a transborder labor force. Both the chamber of commerce and the council requested that commuters not be coerced to reside permanently in the valley due to potential overcrowding of schools, hospitals, and housing. Rather than calling for a ban or strict regulation of the system, the council suggested a comprehensive study, "Which would lead to a favorable solution, and the alleviation of much disaffection and controversy as currently exists."³⁴ The council took a similar approach when it protested Operation Intercept in late 1969 and suggested ease of movement.³⁵

One of the more revealing frustrations for labor and federal politicians was the seemingly

³³ Hearings, Select Commission, The Impact of Commuter Aliens, Part II, 252; Part I, 85-88.

³⁴ Resolution No. 2011, A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Calexico Regarding "Green Card Workers," April 18, 1967, Calexico City Hall, Calexico, CA.

³⁵ Resolution No. 2153, Resolution of the City Council of the City of Calexico Re: "Operation Intercept," September 23, 1969, Calexico City Hall, Calexico, CA.

lax border crossing regulations. There were two ways a person could enter the U.S. from Mexico via a land port of entry. The I-151 card, which was colloquially referred to as “green card” despite the contemporary card being blue, was an alien registration receipt card that classified the holder as an immigrant to the U.S. The card also served as a visa if the holder travelled outside the U.S. for less than one year. A direct carryover from concerns with the Bracero Program, the I-151 card was only given if an applicant obtained a labor certification that stated the worker’s presence would not adversely affect U.S. workers’ wages.³⁶ Importantly, under the INA of 1965, family members could receive their visas through the family preference system that bypassed a labor certification. Moreover, once a person received their permanent resident card they no longer required a labor certification, but could not be unemployed for more than six months and not reentering to work at a struck site.³⁷ In the U.S. consulate in Tijuana, 9,800 visas were processed in the 1967 fiscal year, with over three-quarters of these being family exemptions. Family reunification was still subject to ideas of economic dependency. Some family reunification claims for commuting peoples were denied because members were deemed “likely to become a public charge.”³⁸ In other words, the sponsoring member earned a low enough wage that the consulate worried their family member(s) would enroll on the dole.

The other border crossing card was the I-186, termed the “nonresident alien border crossing identification card.” The I-186 was a 72-hour visa limited to 150 miles from the border and valid for four years.³⁹ The I-186’s purpose was rooted in profit motive as much as international goodwill. Richard Scammon, chairman of the Select Committee, referred to the I-186 as the “72-hour shopping card,” a reflection of the commercial links between border cities

³⁶ Hearings, Select Commission, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens*, Part II, 6.

³⁷ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 152; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Border Commuter Labor Problem*, Part 5-A, 2002.

³⁸ Hearings, Select Commission, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens*, Part II, 18.

³⁹ Hearings, Select Commission, *The Impact of Commuter Aliens*, Part I, 9; Part II, 17-18.

and the limited welcoming of Mexicans as consumers. Moreover, the card did not permit the holder to work in the United States, though many workers and employers paid little notice. The importance of the I-186 and Mexicali consumers was crucial to the Imperial Valley economy. Some critics like labor leader Ernesto Galarza and Imperial Valley physician Ben Yellen both stressed how braceros and Mexican commuting peoples harmed local businesses and the larger U.S. economy through a drain on liquid capital.⁴⁰ However, chambers of commerce from El Paso to Calexico pointed out that local U.S. border economies were reliant on Mexican consumerism.

A conflict directly tied to access to Mexicali consumer/commuter revenue pitted the cities of Calexico and El Centro against one another. On October 8, 1964, people lined up as early as 8:30 a.m. in anticipation of the grand opening of El Centro's newest shopping center, the Valley Plaza Shopping Center. The mall offered chrome shopping carts, convenient parking, a variety of stores ranging from a Woolworth's to a jewelry store, and especially enticing in the valley heat, air conditioned shopping.⁴¹ The mall was part of a larger trend of retail suburban planning that moved purchasing away from downtown districts into less concentrated areas to attract customers and promote mass consumerism.⁴² The local press went so far as to label the mall the valley's "progress story of the year."⁴³ Under the oft refrain, "to increase international trade and good will," the Valley Plaza Merchants Association soon launched a shuttle route to the Calexico port of entry in an effort to increase the mall's accessibility for Mexicali shoppers.⁴⁴ The Association also actively advertised its transportation service in Mexicali. Calexico retailers

⁴⁰ "To the Merchants and Business Men of Imperial Valley," National Farm Labor Union, March 22, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP; News Letter from Dr. Ben Yellen, Oct. 6, 1960, box 1, folder 3, Ben Yellen Papers, UC San Diego Special Collections, La Jolla, CA.

⁴¹ "Crowds Throng New Plaza Mall," *IVP*, Oct. 8, 1964, 1.

⁴² Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Press, 2003), 265-269.

⁴³ "Valley Plaza Shopping Center Provides Huge New Facilities," *Imperial Valley Press-Progress Edition*, July 17, 1964, 5.

⁴⁴ "Free Shuttle Service: Valley Plaza Shopping Center Launching Bus Run to Mexicali," *IVP*, Dec. 11, 1964, 5. The ride was validated after a \$2 purchase at the mall.

quickly opposed the Valley Plaza's shuttle service. For them, the bus service was an affront to a Mexicali clientele they perceived belonged to Calexico by virtue of geography. Calexico business owners applied pressure on the city council and the council took procedural action. The Valley Plaza Merchants Association believed they obtained the necessary permits from Calexico for the shuttle, but the city council barred the service due to safety traffic from concerns by residents at the load/unload zone. Calexico also pointed out that this regulation was leveled against all commercial bus services in the city, including those operated by farm labor contractors.⁴⁵ By early February, the Calexico City Council ended its three-month retail fight and agreed to allow the shuttles to pick up shoppers at the port of entry. A superior court judge went further and issued a temporary injunction against the city from stopping the shuttles. The attorney for the Valley Plaza Merchants Association was critical of the moves by the Calexico City Council, saying, "You can't build a wall around your city to stifle competition."⁴⁶

From the perspective of the valley's landed and commercial bourgeoisie, the juxtaposition of the Valley Plaza Center debate with the ending of the Bracero Program and desire to control movement of Mexican bodies illustrates the differential inclusion of Mexicans in the valley and the U.S. In both cases, U.S. lenses filtered Mexicans as either workers and/or consumers. As the 1968 hearings show, their presence was tolerated so long as Mexican bodies continued to move. Their presence was also one that required a form of control and monopolized access. Growers in the Imperial Valley and policymakers exercised Public Law 414 and the permanent resident ("green card") system to ensure the maintenance of an ethnic Mexican dominated labor pool while retailers sought to secure Mexicali shoppers and dollars. The

⁴⁵ Calexico City Council Minutes, Dec. 15, 1964; Calexico City Council Minutes, Jan. 12, 1965, City Hall, Calexico, CA; "Valley Shopping Center Sues City of Calexico," *IVP*, Jan. 1, 1965, 5.

⁴⁶ "Calexico Giving Okay To Valley Plaza Buses," *IVP*, Feb. 3, 1965, 1; "Court Grants Bus Line Injunction," *IVP*, Feb. 11, 1965, 12.

understanding of Mexican peoples as limited participants of the Imperial Valley remained unquestioned. Indeed, the movement of Mexicans across the border was a crucial component of international relations and the borderlands political economy. Yet, Mexicans were carved into facets of the borderlands landscape that stymied a copious sense of belonging beyond migrant workers and consumers. Ironically, it was the very investment in temporality that created a long lasting conceptualization of ethnic Mexican peoples.

The status of commuter workers was not settled until *Saxbe v. Bustos* (1974). The United Farmer Workers Organizing Committee sued U.S. Attorney General William Saxbe and challenged the 1927 definition of commuter workers as permanent residents returning from a trip abroad. On November 25 and in a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that commuters were immigrants, including seasonal workers. Both groups could not be barred from entry and work in the United States due to their residence being in both the U.S. and Canada or Mexico. Because Congress was well aware of the commuter dynamic and did not alter it via legislation since the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, the Court left it up to Congress to change this practice. The Supreme Court affirmed INS precedent, including not distinguishing between bona fide and fictive immigrants.

Section 2: “Local Workers Need Job”: Organized Labor on the Borderlands, 1951-1961⁴⁷

The relationship between organized labor and the transborder realities on the Mexicali-Imperial borderlands was uneven. Like the formation of border identities and policies, dialogues between organizations ranged from indifference, cooperation, and hostility. In the post-World War II period, labor leader Ernesto Galarza and the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) pursued labor activism around the dichotomy of legitimate and illegitimate workers. The NFLU struggled

⁴⁷ “IVFA Chief Hung in Effigy By Valley Packing House Pickets,” *The Brawley News*, March 8, 1960, 1.

to advance its goals of serving its members within a transborder space ordered by capitalism, racialized labor, and grower access to Mexican labor. In its effort to secure employment for “local” and “domestic” workers, the union reproduced race and labor hierarchies centered on citizenship. This debate included the union’s inclusion of the state for its particular strain of labor rights. Even as the NFLU fought the state, it borrowed the language of the state. Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue the “trajectory” of racial politics in the United States as “the processes by which the state shapes and is shaped in turn by the racial contours of society and the political demands emanating from them.”⁴⁸ When the guest worker Bracero Program and the NFLU are conceptualized as dialectics of state power, they must also be interpreted as processes of racial formations. Indeed, the Bracero Program imagined and socially codified Mexican workers as itinerant, exploitable, pliable, deportable, a stoop laboring racial other; in a word, racialized. The NFLU borrowed this construction in an effort to differentiate its members from braceros, to categorize the former as deserving workers and the latter as scabs. The United Farm Worker leadership adopted a similar strategy even as the union and its members were placed within the near identical construction of racialized farm labor.⁴⁹

During the Bracero Program (1942-1964), agricultural labor unions in the United States confronted a labor regime that was thoroughly anti-union and a sweetheart deal for growers. The program accomplished three central goals, among others. First, the program ensured Imperial Valley and U.S. growers access to Mexican workers. Second, it created a binationally sanctioned labor agreement that provided an air of legitimacy and fairness to workers, growers, and

⁴⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 4-5.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, Phillip Vera Cruz, a leading figure in the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and the United Farm Workers, was a member and former local president of the NFLU in Delano. See, Craig Scharlin and Lilia V. Villanueva, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement*, 3rd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 33.

governments. Third, the program cemented the racialization of Mexicans as deportable fieldworkers. Labor, race, and legitimacy formed a triangulation of power relations in the Imperial Valley that also informed U.S. organized labor strategies to tackle braceros, growers, and their production of a seemingly endless stream of strikebreakers. Into this transborder milieu stepped in Ernesto Galarza, an immigrant labor organizer from Jalcoctán, Nayarit, Mexico, who earned a PhD in economics from Columbia University in 1947.

Galarza served as president of the National Farm Labor Union and quickly outlined its opposition to the Bracero Program. Historians Mireya Loza and Deborah Cohen both show how braceros refused to observe the obedience demanded and expected by growers as they tried to manipulate screening exams or sought non-sanctioned avenues of entertainment and mobility.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the structure of the Bracero Program was a constant presence. The American Federation of Labor chartered the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) in 1946 and placed Galarza as president.⁵¹ The union's areas included the Central Valley and the Imperial Valley. The NFLU made its way to the Imperial Valley as early as 1950 and attempted to remove braceros and undocumented workers in order "to create vacancies for our people."⁵² Importantly, "our people" was confined to NFLU members and domestic/resident farmworkers—those the NFLU saw as potential union members. The three-pronged tactic involved applying local and federal pressure on growers to not hire braceros and undocumented workers, removing these same workers, and collecting evidence against grower employment practices. To gather data, Galarza insisted, "That the locals pin-point their reports on a few ranches at a time and then

⁵⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011); Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2016).

⁵¹ Marco G. Prouty, *Cesar Chavez, the Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers' Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: Arizona UP, 2008), 11.

⁵² Letter from Galarza to Hank Hasiwar, May 20, 1950, box 44, folder 4, Ernesto Galarza Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated EGP.

move in with a demand that locals be hired.”⁵³ The NFLU compiled evidence to present to federal authorities that implicated the Imperial Valley Farmers Association (IVFA) in unjust dismissals of domestic workers in favor of hiring braceros. Indeed, such proof could potentially reduce the power of the IVFA and hold the federal governments of Mexico and the United States accountable to valley and Mexicali farmworkers against wage theft and labor exploitation.

Evidence mattered less than departmental discretion. The NFLU designed an affidavit questionnaire for dismissed workers. The affidavit included how many years the person lived in the valley, what farm company they worked for, weekly wages, date of firing, the reason for the dismissal, and how many braceros were employed on that particular farm. The latter was arguably one of the most valuable pieces of information for Galarza and the NFLU. Fired laborers mostly stated that they were released “because there was no work” or because the company “already had too many nationals [braceros],” sometimes over 100 braceros at the time of their dismissal.⁵⁴ Galarza amassed such evidence and presented it to Secretary of Labor Maurice Tobin. Despite the proof that longtime valley residents were turned away because of grower worker preference, neither the Department of Labor nor the Mexican government did much to address the NFLU’s concerns.⁵⁵ Tobin simply informed the NFLU that “all unemployed qualified agricultural workers make known their availability to [United States Employment Service] local officers serving agricultural areas.”⁵⁶

Developments in 1950 and 1951 demonstrated the tenuous relationship between the NFLU and federal agencies. In May 1950, Galarza was dismayed that budget cuts to the Border

⁵³ Letter from Galarza to Hank Hasiwar, May 20, 1950, box 44, folder 4, EGP.

⁵⁴ Statement by Jose M. Rosales, circa February 1952; Statement by Cosme Agundez, circa March 1952; both affidavits in box 44, folder 1, EGP. The affidavit format existed by 1950; See “Report of Employment of Mexican Nationals,” box 44, folder 4, EGP.

⁵⁵ Letter from Galarza to Maurice Tobin, May 4, 1950; “To All California Locals,” August 30, 1950, both in box 44, folder 4, EGP.

⁵⁶ Letter from Tobin to Hank Hasiwar, May 26, 1950, box 44, folder 4, EGP.

Patrol were not restored in Congress and the Department of Labor's refusal to promote "legislation to outlaw employment of wets in this session of Congress."⁵⁷ One year later, he expressed approval for the U.S. Employment Service (USES), the U.S. Border Patrol, and the Department of Labor. Galarza's endorsement of the agencies depended on their willingness to remove braceros and undocumented workers from Imperial Valley fields. Galarza wrote to the Secretary of the California Federation of Labor Neil Haggerty, "The USES has been most cooperative in wiping out all mixed crews of illegals and contractees [braceros], and the Border Patrol has reduced the number of illegals satisfactorily—for this date." Rather than present the agencies as intrinsically responsive, Galarza quickly explained to Haggerty, "These helpful developments, of course, have not been gratuitous. We have sweated for them."⁵⁸ Galarza was also pleased that the Department of Labor "got tough" against valley growers who used mixed crews.⁵⁹ Even better for the union, the DOL agreed to remove braceros from struck or picketed fields with an increased presence of the Border Patrol. The DOL and Border Patrol actions translated positively for the union, "I think they [melon and tomato growers] will be crazy not to deal." As Galarza related to the NFLU executive board, "The stage has been set for success in the Imperial Valley."⁶⁰ Galarza and the NFLU actively pursued both agencies to intervene on the union's behalf through interdiction.

A few months prior to Galarza's approval of the USES and Border Patrol, he expressed a measured concern for undocumented workers and a steadfast determination to organize. The NFLU asked for federal sanction against growers who willingly and knowingly hired strikebreakers, workers with or without work documents. While undocumented workers were

⁵⁷ Letter from Galarza, May 4, 1950, box 44, folder 4, EGP.

⁵⁸ Letter from Galarza to Neil Haggerty, May 12, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁵⁹ Galarza to H.L. Mitchell, May 17, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

targeted and removed, Galarza was displeased that the workers were deported. Galarza wrote, “It is clear that our demand was directed specifically against the growers guilty of the violation and not at the illegals.”⁶¹ The NFLU attempted to use the state’s deportation arm to limit and outright halt the flow of Mexican undocumented workers from the valley’s fields, but was taken aback when deportation resulted. Galarza and the NFLU dismissal affidavits contained the surveillance necessary for the Border Patrol to enter a field, arrest, and deport undocumented workers. Galarza’s immediate target was the IVFA and its members and the sociopolitical protection they enjoyed rather than undocumented workers. Nevertheless, these workers served as collateral to mobilize the Border Patrol and advance NFLU goals.

On May 24, 1951, Galarza and the NFLU launched a bitter strike in the Imperial Valley. Labor negotiations were attempted on April 26, but the IVFA refused to meet. Emboldened by the assurances of the Department of Labor and the Border Patrol, the 6,000-member NFLU protested the firing of twenty domestic workers in light of the employment of 4,800 braceros. Moreover, the grower fired workers who he previously employed for five and ten years and showed the concern for profit margin rather than employer loyalty.⁶² The union sought “preferential employment for farm workers who are American citizens,” a wage increase, and an end to the “employment of illegal aliens from Mexico.”⁶³ With the *legal* and *illegal* dichotomy, the NFLU policed the border and attempted to close it to commuter workers “with the help of a baseball bat brigade.”⁶⁴ Moreover, citizen arrests of undocumented workers were carried out and turned over to the Border Patrol. This campaign was so successful that the Border Patrol called

⁶¹ Galarza to Glenn E. Brockway, March 17, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁶² Telegram from H.L. Mitchell to Hank Hasiwar, May 26, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Strategy, and the Organization in the California Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 51.

H.L. Mitchell, co-founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (the precursor of the NFLU), to Washington, D.C. to instruct the agency on the union's tactics.⁶⁵

The delivery of undocumented workers to the Border Patrol was not counter to the NFLU's previous measured concern for undocumented workers and deportation. Undocumented workers were part of citizen-union worker currency in labor disputes and the NFLU exercised the U.S. deportation regime when it suited its organization drives. The NFLU and the Imperial Valley Central Labor Council were forthright in their role as border sentinels and job protectors, "In the forefront of the fight to halt the migration of thousands of wetbacks is the National Farm Union." The Labor Council went further, "The Council feels that with the support of labor immediate barriers can be set up to stop the wetback tide."⁶⁶ The barriers were both physical and legislative since the union patrolled the border, arrested undocumented workers, and sought disqualification of growers who used braceros and undocumented workers as strikebreakers. Rather than leave capture and deportation solely to the Border Patrol, the NFLU showed spectators and workers the stakes in containing Mexico and Mexicali for U.S. citizen-workers, undeserving and deserving laborers, respectively.

Soon after of the beginning of the strike, the NFLU encountered local resistance. An editorial appeared in the *Brawley News* that dismissed NFLU concerns. The editorial claimed that the Imperial Valley Farmers Association was established solely for "the negotiation of contracts with the Mexican government for the seasonal employment of Mexican nationals," not to act as a labor mediator or conciliator between IVFA members and workers.⁶⁷ The author suggested channeling labor concerns to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), an affront

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Letter from Loleta Grande (secretary of the Imperial Valley Central Labor Council) to All, n.d. circa May 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁶⁷ "Better Way to Adjust Differences," *Brawley News*, June 5, 1951, 2, in box 44, folder 5, EGP.

to farmworker organized labor since agricultural labor was exempt from NLRB collective bargaining protection. Moreover, the author expressed how the strike threatened the valley's racial and gender hierarchy. The author stated, "The use of 'Pachuca' type girls and Indio Mexican-Americans in the picket lines to a large extent, neither makes the strike look representative nor does it make for peaceful picketing."⁶⁸ The "Indio" and pachuca (young gang member) picketers were imagined as inherently violent subjects and their presence served as the author's evidence that the NFLU needed to be stopped.

The pachucas and "Indio" Mexican Americans, however, revealed more about the author and the Imperial Valley than they did about the NFLU. Historian Catherine Ramírez astutely argues that pachucas were constructed as *malinches* (female traitors), symbols of anti-patriotism during World War II and threats to all peoples of Mexican descent in the U.S. for their perceived betrayal of "middle-class definitions of feminine beauty and decorum."⁶⁹ Malinche, translator for Hernán Cortés, was repurposed for people of Mexican descent living in the United States to show their commitment to U.S. nationalism and gender conformity. The reference to "Indio" signified darker complexion and lower class that presumed illegal presence and illegitimacy of labor issues. Kelly Lytle Hernández theorizes this racial and class characterization as *Mexican Brown*, "because regardless of immigration or citizenship status, it was *Mexican Browns* rather than abstract Mexicans who lived within the Border Patrol's sphere of suspicion."⁷⁰ Organized labor on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands reified and practiced the illegality framework of U.S. deportation agencies as an organizing strategy. The letter to the editor centered its dismissal of the strike on the racial and gender make up of the NFLU picketers rather than engage the merits

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Catherine S. Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 38-39.

⁷⁰ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2010), 13.

of the union's protest. The decision to not engage the merits of the NFLU was the very mark of racial and gender privilege in the valley.

The National Farm Labor Union contended with uneven positions of the federal government and other unions. The 1951 NFLU strike against the Imperial Valley Farmers Association and their supporters was over in one month. It took the NFLU nearly a year to gain a semblance of support from federal agencies, support that eroded between May and June 1951. The U.S. Employment Service pulled back on removing mixed crews by conducting ranch-to-ranch inspections. For the NFLU, ranch-to-ranch inspection was tantamount to approval of mixed crews and failure of the USES to fulfill its duties.⁷¹ While the American Federation of Labor recognized the strike, the Teamsters saw it as a wildcat and did not support it.⁷² Moreover, the Department of Labor also refused to recognize the strike as legitimate.⁷³ The Border Patrol later joined the citizen's arrests by the NFLU, though the delayed action no doubt frustrated Galarza. By the time the Border Patrol agreed to remove braceros and other workers, the melon harvest was over. The NFLU decided to suspend strike activity until the late 1951 or early 1952 harvests.⁷⁴ Dealing a further blow to farmworker organizing, the so-called Texas Proviso of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 did not make hiring an undocumented worker a criminal offense. As historian Lori Flores argues, the proviso was aimed at protecting growers and employers as they "accused the INS of violating their right to use Mexican labor."⁷⁵ Both the NFLU and growers debated the containment of Mexican bodies.

⁷¹ Hank Hasiwar to H.L. Mitchell, June 8, 1951; Hasiwar and Galarza to Maurice Tobin, June 18, 1951, both in box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁷² Galarza and Hasiwar to George Meany (AFL Secretary-Treasurer), May 25, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁷³ Telegram from Hank Hasiwar to Tobin, n.d., circa early June 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP. The telegram has no explicit author, but the preceding telegrams in the folder were written by Hasiwar.

⁷⁴ Mitchell to Michael J. Galvin (acting Secretary of Labor), n.d. circa early June 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁷⁵ Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016), 80.

The highly complicated and fraught situation in the Imperial Valley made Galarza and the NFLU more resolute in their goal of organizing domestic workers. In a letter to H.L. Mitchell, Galarza expressed, “I am for being thrown out of Imperial so long as we make it clear that it wasn't the NFLU that threw in the sponge.”⁷⁶ Even clearer for Mitchell, Galarza wrote, “I am not retreating. We will not in a long while be as prepared with a record and a case as we are today in Imperial.”⁷⁷ Galarza considered that possession of “the goods” (inculpatory evidence) on growers and labor strikes against them was as strong as ever to weaken grower power and increase the union’s might.⁷⁸ His confidence was tempered by growers’ ability to “throw the wets and Nationals at our potential membership by wage cutting and displacement” and “face the possibility that neither the AFL or the mass of domestic workers will stand up to an open fight.”⁷⁹ For the three main labor groups in the valley—the AFL, NFLU, and local workers—successful labor organizing was a borderlands enigma. One of the few dynamics that remained constant for Galarza and U.S. organized labor was the power of growers to deflect accountability and labor’s use of the stigmatizing language of deportability, including “illegals” and “wets.”

The National Farm Labor Union was soon renamed the National Agricultural Workers Union and limited its activity in the Imperial Valley. Ernesto Galarza changed his labor strategies and focused his attention on the Bracero Program itself. Five years after the 1951 Imperial Valley strike, Galarza published *Strangers in Our Fields* (1956) and later *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (1964), both dedicated to exposing the Bracero Program’s abuses and grower-government profit accords. The humanizing goal of the books centered on braceros themselves, highlighted grower exploitation, and revealed the U.S. and Mexican

⁷⁶ Galarza to H.L. Mitchell, April 10, 1951, box 44, folder 5, EGP.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

governments' sanctioning of the program. Yet, the line between legitimate and illegitimate workers continued in these texts, as undocumented workers were peoples that "bootleg their labor at cut-rate prices."⁸⁰

Galarza's efforts formed part of a longer trajectory of farm labor activism that continued into the early 1960s. On March 7, 1960, during the lettuce season, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), Local 78, launched a strike against the farm labor office in El Centro. Interestingly, it pulled its support from the 1951 National Farm Labor Union strike.⁸¹ A recent switch from piece rate wages to hourly wages in lettuce convinced union workers to drop their tools and carry a picket.⁸² The day after the strike was launched, union members gathered more members on the picket line and enhanced their demonstration with an effigy of the Imperial Valley Farmers Association's (IVFA) newly elected secretary-manager, Edward Hayes. At least forty men protested through downtown El Centro, made their way to the labor camp on the east side of the city, and beat the effigy into bits of straw.⁸³ Among the pickets was the message, "Local Workers Need Job [sic]."⁸⁴ In four words, the UPWA claimed local privilege to farm work while pointing out agriculture's dominance in the regional political economy. The UPWA did not need to explicitly advocate for removal or deportation of strikebreakers—whether bracero, commuter, or undocumented worker—to broadcast their antipathy toward what the union perceived as non-local threats to organizing. Like the NFLU, the UPWA reinforced

⁸⁰ Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Section, Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, 1956), 2.

⁸¹ Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*, 51.

⁸² "Valley Packinghouse Union Goes on Strike," *The Brawley News*, March 7, 1960, 1.

⁸³ "IVFA Chief Hung in Effigy By Valley Packing House Pickets," *The Brawley News*, March 8, 1960, 1. Other messages included, "We Want Piece Rate," "Abajo [Down with] Hayes," and "Veterans without Jobs." The latter echoed concerns of Georgia Representative Stephen Pace from the 1947 House hearings on the extension of the Bracero Program.

⁸⁴ "IVFA Chief Hung in Effigy By Valley Packing House Pickets," *The Brawley News*, March 8, 1960, 1.

organized labor's coupling of U.S. workers' rights and possessive citizenship as determinants for employment and labor organization.

The pressure generated by the 1960 strike continued into the 1961 lettuce season. The UPWA and the recently chartered Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), AFL-CIO, launched another strike with similar demands of higher wages (\$1.25 per hour), union recognition, piece rates for skilled workers, and removal of braceros from struck fields. With the addition of AWOC, the strike obtained more resources in the fields and attained more attention from the press and growers. The UPWA-AWOC coalition began its public drive by protesting the farm labor offices, but it also expanded its focus to include the border. On January 5, 1961, workers voted to hold a one-day strike. This vote was held in *el hollo* (the hole), a riparian depression in Calexico from the New River bifurcating the border fence. The location of this vote was significant. Geographer Don Mitchell notes that *el hollo* was a "shapeup for undocumented workers."⁸⁵ Holding the vote here demonstrated to the borderlands public that the Imperial Valley was U.S. worker territory. Moreover, the vote at *el hollo* symbolized the coalition's reliance on U.S. nationalism by reclaiming a space that was used by "illegal" workers to deprive U.S. workers of their right to jobs in local fields.

Section 3: "The Commuter is This Generation's Bracero": Cross-Border Visions in Trade and Service Unions⁸⁶

Writing for the Department of Labor, researcher David S. North attempted to clarify for Congress and the department the work situation on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. North connected the end of the Bracero Program with immigration debates surrounding the

⁸⁵ Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops*, 355.

⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Part 5-A, 2280.

Immigration and Nationalization Act of 1965 and made a pointed argument, “In a sense, the commuter is this generation’s bracero.”⁸⁷ North was not alone in this assessment. As previously discussed, Ted Kennedy, Ralph Yarborough, and the AFL-CIO pushed for regulation of movement and permanent resident card issuance, arguing that commuter workers competed in a glutted, low-skill market on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Like braceros, commuter workers were a labor menace because of the latter’s assumed penchant for strikebreaking and wage depressing for U.S. workers on the borderlands. As the court cases between 1929 through 1970 demonstrate, commuter workers were imagined as perennial scabs while immigration law was seen as the defense barrier to protect U.S. labor rights. However, the winds were not nearly as unidirectional and constant as legal challenges and Congressional hearings might suggest.

As this section shows, organized labor struggled to negotiate its own emphasis on U.S. citizenship and nationalism within a transborder framework, where freely moving commuter workers and undocumented laborers were an integral component of social, labor, political, and economic life on the borderlands. Organized labor and local politicians wrestled with opposing strategies of adherence to citizen-exclusionary precedence and novel transborder strategies for commuter workers from Mexico. Unlike braceros, commuters were not classified as foreign workers with a fixed time period stamped on their work identification cards. From a policy standpoint, commuters were immigrants, permanent resident aliens, who could live and work on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, with some restrictions. However, policies and social realities exist in tension. The constant immigration and labor debates at multiple levels made commuter workers wary of their position, but ground commuters traversed as they maintained transborder lives. Undocumented workers were also careful of avoiding suspicion, whether from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the U.S. Border Patrol, or organized labor.

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Part 5-A, 2280.

The Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee took an early interest in limiting the levels of exploitation of Mexican workers in the United States. It was composed largely of members from the CTM, the AFL-CIO, the United Mine Workers of America, and the Railway Brotherhoods.⁸⁸ The committee commissioned and published Ernesto Galarza's 1956 book, *Strangers in Our Fields*, and Galarza also served as its field representative in California. Not coincidentally, Cesar Chavez was appointed to serve on the committee in 1967 as the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee faced similar issues with Mexican labor in the post-Bracero Program borderlands.⁸⁹ Toward the end of the Bracero Program, Leon Schacter, vice-chairman of the U.S. section, briefly noted the role of the U.S. organized labor in the elimination of the Bracero Program. He quickly added, "While the AFL-CIO was not opposed to immigration, it was opposed to the use of cheap labor to lower the standards of living of the American worker."⁹⁰ The official position of the AFL-CIO was even clearer, "the U.S. Section does not seek to close U.S. borders to alien workers—but would wish to achieve and safeguard wages and other working standards for both native and alien labor."⁹¹

In a January 1965 memo for U.S. members of the committee, Secretary Milton Plumb included the section "The Border 'Commuter' Problem." Plumb's assessment of commuter workers closely resembled dominant perceptions of braceros during the program. Like braceros, commuters were also from "one of the most poverty-stricken areas in the Western Hemisphere [Mexico]" that provided employers with a "virtually unlimited pool of workers." Commuters

⁸⁸ Ernesto Galarza, *Strangers in Our Fields* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Section, Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, 1956), front matter.

⁸⁹ F.C. Pieper (AFL-CIO) to Cesar Chavez, July 24, 1967, box 26, folder 45, UFW Cesar Chavez Papers, Office of the President, Part 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated as CCP, Pt.2.

⁹⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint US-Mexico Trade Union, September 24, 1964, El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, box 26, folder 45, CCP, Pt.2.

⁹¹ "The Border 'Commuter' Problem," in memo from Milton Plumb, January 5, 1965, 5, box 26, folder 45, CCP, Pt. 2.

were not only “anonymous pawns in an economic chess game,” they were also “hungry workers...[that] can do work at wages and conditions intolerable to U.S. citizens.” The net effect of commuter workers for cities on the U.S. side of the border was migration of domestic labor to other parts of the United States and U.S. border areas left as “chronically depressed areas, which must carry a heavy burden of unemployment and a great welfare load.”⁹² The Texas AFL-CIO made these connections as early as 1961, yet the AFL-CIO focused on the individual worker over structural analysis of agricultural political economy in the United States and Mexico. For U.S. organized labor, commuters were the principle, yet faceless, architects of the borderlands landscape who destabilized labor’s girders.

U.S. unions were confronted by a transborder labor issue and straddled a borderlands approach to labor questions. In Plumb’s January 1965 memo of the U.S. section of the Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, the recommendations proposed foreshadowed suggestions offered in Congress two years later. The AFL-CIO requested the Department of Labor have the power to limit commuter “traffic” (mobility) through an “adverse effect” stipulation similar to what existed under the Bracero Program. The labor federation also demanded that the U.S. and Mexico determine an international minimum wage and fair labor standards. It offered no specifics as to how the international minimum wage or fair labor standards would be determined. Indeed, this was one of the most difficult facets of labor policy that the ALF-CIO contended with, especially when the organization already pointed out that northern Mexico was “undeveloped” and currency exchange rates strongly favored the peso, if a person lived in Mexico.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., 4.

⁹³ Ibid., 3.

Moving toward the direction of transborder labor agreements, the AFL-CIO and CTM presented a labor plan that demonstrated the power of solidarity. When construction of the Amistad Dam on the Texas-Coahuila border of the Rio Grande was set to begin, both union federations already agreed on a solidarity pact in 1965. The Rio Bravo Pact/Rio Grande Agreement was proposed so that workers in the U.S. and Mexico mutually agreed on equal pay for equal work, the establishment of an international commission of labor grievances, and not enter a contract that undermined another union. The Amistad Dam on the Texas-Coahuila border “gives the representatives of the workers of the Mexican and North American trade union organizations an opportunity to put into practice that which until now has only been an idea.” The CTM continued, “Let it [the border] not divide our intentions and our call for economic improvement for the workers,” and it called for use of both the U.S. and Mexico legal systems and a “firmly based solidarity” to achieve the goals of the pact. The pact’s introduction ended with a positive and instructive note. It called for more solidarity and labor actions “in order to achieve social justice which is the goal of the free trade union movement of the world.”⁹⁴

The Rio Bravo Pact/Rio Grande Agreement of 1965 was imaginative in the ways it conceived of labor organizing on the borderlands. For the unions and rank-and-file members involved, there was a possibility that wages and borders would be removed of their dividing power and be supplanted by a transborder labor solidarity. With the appointment of Cesar Chavez to the Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee in 1967, the United Farm Workers was nominally aware of the Rio Bravo Pact/Rio Grande Agreement. Indeed, the Retail Clerks in the Imperial Valley also showed the power of cross-border organizing and pacts in 1965. Yet, there were many differences between trade and agricultural work that complicated

⁹⁴ “Rio Bravo Pact/Rio Grande Agreement,” in memo from Milton Plumb, January 5, 1965, 3, box 26, folder 45, CCP, Pt. 2.

such agreements for the UFW. The Rio Bravo Pact did not make any mention of workers crossing the border. The agreement was more concerned about undercut wages and benefits for workers on their respective sides of the border rather than the fluid borderlands. Moreover, trades could access the National Labor Relations Board or the *Junta General de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Labor Arbitration Court) legal system in ways that agricultural workers—domestic, commuter, and undocumented alike—could not. The Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee recognized this, “And there is apparently no protection for either the commuter or U.S. citizen worker in the laws of Mexico or the U.S., and no international agreements between the two nations concern themselves with the workers’ plight.”⁹⁵ The Amistad Dam was a four-year project from 1965 through 1969; U.S. farm work was seasonal, migratory, and constant. Despite the UFW’s affiliation with the AFL-CIO and its minimal interactions with the CTM, agricultural labor in the borderlands political economy was not suited to conventional labor strategies and tactics that relied on border separation as a form of cross-border labor solidarity.

Trying to organize commuter workers in the service industry could pose problems for union members unthreatened by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. In September 1964, the Hotel, Restaurant, and Bar Tenders’ Union in El Paso, Texas, faced a potential union decertification if they could not get enough workers to vote. According to the union representative, the main problem the union faced was, “Mexicans who live in Mexico and work on the other side of the border.” The union representative wanted the CTM to pressure these workers to join the Hotel, Restaurant, and Bar Tenders’ Union, but U.S. immigration officials presented a larger thread of borderlands labor. Twice during the September 1964 meeting of the Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee, CTM officials were critical of the U.S.

⁹⁵ “The Border ‘Commuter’ Problem,” in memo from Milton Plumb, January 5, 1965, 4, box 26, folder 45, CCP, Pt. 2.

Immigration and Naturalization Service. The CTM directly responded to U.S. labor concerns of an increase of undocumented immigration after the Bracero Program and that commuters were difficult to organize. In both instances, the CTM stated that the INS was the thorn, not Mexican workers. As the Mexican federation put it, “Mexican commuters fear loss of jobs should they join unions...if American immigration authorities would have a different attitude it would be much easier to organize them.” The CTM pointed out that the “U.S. unions had a job to do...in changing the attitude of the immigration authorities, so that Mexicans living on the other side of the border would not be afraid to join the unions.”⁹⁶

The connection depiction of commuters as anti-union scabs was a portrait painted with a broad brush. In July 1965, the Retail Clerks International Association, No. 1167, AFL-CIO, filed unfair labor charges with the National Labor Relations Board against Cook’s Market in the Imperial Valley.⁹⁷ Employees alleged Cook’s asked for more hours without recompense and did not have welfare and healthcare coverage. By August 1965, the Retail Clerks expanded labor actions to T.C. Worthy stores in Calexico and El Centro and later to Fed-Mart in Calexico.⁹⁸ Once more, the union sought better pay and hours with the store. Workers exercised the picket and asked people to observe a consumer boycott of the stores to push managers into negotiations. Beneath the well-known labor relation practices of pickets, boycotts, and contract negotiations was a controversy over the international symbolism and interpretation of flags. At Cook’s and T.C. Worthy, strikers used the red-and-black strike flag. In Mexico, the use of this flag indicated that a business was officially shut down until labor and management arrived at an accord.

The larger concern for both stores was the loss of Mexicali consumers, who may turn

⁹⁶ Report to the Officers of the Joint U.S.-Mexico Trade Union Committee Meeting, September 23-24, 1964, 4-5, El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, box 26, folder 45, CCP, Pt. 2.

⁹⁷ “Union Files Charges Against Cook’s Here,” *IVP*, July 21, 1965, 6.

⁹⁸ “Union Steps Up Action Against IV Markets,” *IVP*, August 16, 1965, 1; “Mexican Consul Protests Flag Use By Strikers,” *IVP*, September 22, 1965, 1.

away after seeing the flag. The owner of Cook's attempted to red-bait the strikers and the flag, but labor officials with the *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos* provided a quick lesson about the flag's purpose and its pro-labor, non-communist, stance.⁹⁹ Compounding the strike flag issues was a question about the use of the Mexican flag at Fed-Mart. The Mexican consul in Calexico adamantly protested the flag's use "in this unauthorized manner."¹⁰⁰ The consul went so far as to express his desire to report the Mexican flag's use to the U.S. State Department to push the Calexico city council to take action against the picketers at Fed-Mart.¹⁰¹ Although no laws were breached, the city council adopted a resolution "censuring the improper use of the Mexican national flag" and requested that the Retail Clerks cease its use.¹⁰² An agreement was reached where the Mexican national flag would no longer be used, but the red-and-black flag could still be flown.

Mexican workers significantly influenced the labor actions by the Retail Clerks. Lee Glazer, head of the local organizing committee, noted that the prolonged strike brought together Mexicali and Imperial Valley unions for the first time, establishing the Mexicali-Imperial International Affairs Committee.¹⁰³ During the initial organizing meeting, representatives from myriad unions supported the committee, including the Retail Clerks, Butchers Union Local 229 (from San Diego), Teamsters Local 898 (El Centro), AWOC, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México*, the *Conferderación Regional Obrera Mexicana*, and the *Conferderación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos*.¹⁰⁴ These groups would not meet again under such mutually beneficial circumstances. This transborder dialogue directly translated

⁹⁹ "Mexicali Official Protests 'Red' Charges In Strike," *IVP*, August 6, 1965, 1.

¹⁰⁰ "Calexico Pickets Halt Display of Mexican Flag," *IVP*, September 23, 1965, 1.

¹⁰¹ "Mexican Consul Protests Flag Use By Strikers," *IVP*, September 22, 1965, 1.

¹⁰² Resolution No. 1891, "A Resolution Censuring the Improper Use of the Mexican National Flag Within the City Limits of Calexico," Minutes, Calexico City Council, September 21, 1965; "Mexican Consul Protests Flag Use By Strikers," *IVP*, September 22, 1965, 1.

¹⁰³ "Clerks Plan Fight With IV Markets," *IVP*, August 27, 1965, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

into bilingual pickets and use of the red-and-black strike and Mexican national flags. Indeed, Glazer stated that the main proponents for utilizing both flags were “the Mexican union men” from Mexicali.¹⁰⁵

The residency or citizenship makeup of the labor force was not revealed, yet Calexico resident Victor Legaspi—cousin of Calexico mayor Luis Legaspi—provided some critical insight. Legaspi chastised Cook’s owners, especially their attempt to red-bait the strike. Legaspi’s solution to the labor imbroglio was for Cook’s—and, by extension, other local markets—to pay union wages and preclude the need for a union. More importantly for Legaspi, the increase in wages would also eliminate “the need to hire the huge labor supply from Mexicali.”¹⁰⁶ Legaspi further argued that Calexico residents were “the ones guilty of using unfair labor practices against our youth simply by looking the other way.”¹⁰⁷ Legaspi referred to commuter workers as the main culprit against young workers and the local economy. That is, the labor situation at Cook’s was not solely about wages, but also about commuter workers who formed an integral part of the labor force. Removing commuter workers from the ranks of Cook’s and the Retail Clerks union would mitigate the need for any labor dispute since, Legaspi reasoned, only Calexico residents remained which created a scarcity of workers.

Section 4: The United Farm Workers and Commuter Labor in the Imperial Valley

As the National Farm Labor Union, United Packinghouse Workers of America, and Ben Yellen struggled against Mexican workers—the imagined pilferers of Imperial Valley jobs and wages—another significant labor movement stirred. Cesar Chavez was director of the Community Service Organization (CSO) during the 1960-1961 valley lettuce strike. Not only

¹⁰⁵ “Calexico Pickets Halt Display of Mexican Flag,” *IVP*, September 23, 1965, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Victor Legaspi, “Voice of the People,” *IVP*, July 30, 1965, 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

was he present on the picket line and at rallies, he also organized the Committee to Advance the Valley Economy and distributed leaflets that detailed money lost to braceros and Mexico. He also picketed the growers' scab wives and children as they tried to pack lettuce without the UPWA. Moreover, the 1960-1961 strike convinced Chavez that a different organization was necessary to address farmworker labor concerns. Chavez attempted to get CSO support for a farmworker union effort, but when the leadership refused, he resigned and soon established the Farm Workers Association in Fresno, California, in September of 1962 (later National Farm Workers Association). Ironically, the very area that was known as the "graveyard of farm worker unions" was also the valley that catalyzed Chavez's break from the CSO and the beginnings of the United Farm Workers.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, the 1960-1961 Imperial Valley strike demonstrated Chavez's predilection to see Mexican laborers as wage-stealing foes. What is less clear is how Chavez's visions translated into a labor strategy, especially on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands between the grape strike of 1965 up to the early 1970s. This section shows the United Farm Workers as a labor union that adopted strategies stretching back to the AFL of the 1920s, borrowed heavily from Ernesto Galarza's Imperial Valley organizing in the National Farm Workers Union, and the UPWA strike of 1960-1961. Chavez and the UFW also faced a strong grower bloc in the Imperial Valley that effectively utilized commuter workers for labor in the valley's fields with minimal federal intervention and recourse. To be sure, the Bracero Program ostensibly offered grievance procedures, but was rarely enforced. The UFW, like previous labor movements in the United States and the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, practiced exclusive citizenship against a racialized

¹⁰⁸ Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011), 107, 111, 660. I follow Matt Garcia's note and use the better-known United Farm Workers (UFW) throughout this chapter to also refer to the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (UFWOC), which was created in 1966. See Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 299, n.1.

Other in an effort to attain job security, wages, and livelihoods for its members. Commuter workers presented a different issue for the union, yet the logic to control worker mobility remained relatively unchanged. The UFW did not passively inherit its labor strategies. Rather, it negotiated a spectrum of labor practices ranging from deportation, surveillance, and measured inclusion of Mexican workers.

The precise year of the arrival of the National Farm Workers Association, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (AFL-CIO), or the United Farm Workers to the Imperial Valley is unclear. Chavez established the FWA in Fresno and largely remained in the Central Valley to develop his base of support and operations, especially from Bakersfield in the south valley to Delano and Fresno in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley. The earliest appearance of the Imperial Valley in *El Malcriado*—the NFWA/UFW newspaper—was in its second issue in December 1964. It warned migrant farmworkers in the Central Valley of contracting with the California Department of Employment for the first post-Bracero harvest in early 1965 (see chapter 1).¹⁰⁹ This message was for Central Valley migrant farmworkers, perhaps including some Imperial Valley workers who were in the area as well. The Imperial Valley was already portrayed as a place of conflict to be selectively avoided as the NFWA built itself in the San Joaquin Valley. The next reference *El Malcriado* made to the Imperial Valley was circa March 1965. The NFWA black eagle dotted a map of California to demonstrate the areas of the union's expansion. The eagle marked Brawley, Calexico, and the Republic of Mexico as part of its sphere of influence, moving with the farmworkers across the labor circuit and homes in

¹⁰⁹ “Reenganche de Trabajadores,” *El Malcriado*, Don Coyote, circa December 1964, 10-11, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/Miller/1965%20Don%20Coyote.pdf>, accessed January 11, 2018. Bill Esher, editor of *El Malcriado* (1965-1967) explains that the paper had an early circulation of 2000, stretching from Bakersfield to Madera, roughly 150 miles north, and some mail orders. See, “El Malcriado, 1965-66, Bill Esher, Editor,” <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/elmalcriado2.pdf>, accessed January 11, 2018.

Mexico.¹¹⁰ However, the strength of that influence remained unclear. If *El Malcriado* was central to establishing an imagined political community via print culture, it was also showing the borders of that community with desires to push beyond the San Joaquin Valley.¹¹¹

The NFWA black eagle marked the Imperial Valley and Mexico as a site of its growing power in early 1965. Yet, in May and June of 1965, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, ALF-CIO, was preparing to stage a new set of protests and negotiations for tomato and cantaloupe workers in the Imperial Valley and grape thinners in Coachella 90 miles north of the Mexico-U.S. border. The issue for AWOC in Imperial and Coachella was commuter workers, those workers mostly from Mexicali with I-151 or I-186 border crossing cards. Interestingly, during this same mid-year harvest period, the first contracted braceros in the post-Bracero Program era were processed in El Centro and sent to work in the San Joaquin Valley.¹¹² The labor shortage argument of growers there was credible enough to convince the Department of Labor to implement Public Law 414. The Imperial Valley, however, did not have a labor shortage and the AWOC sought to restrict worker movement as leverage against growers. Sam Miramontes, director of the AWOC's Calexico office, stated that the union successfully stopped approximately 150 commuter workers from boarding buses in Calexico to the valley's fields. Just as important for the union, Miramontes also pointed out that AWOC signed commuter workers to the union.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ "Viva la Causa Crece!," *El Malcriado*, No. 6, circa March 1965, 4, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/Miller/1965%20No%206.pdf>, accessed January 12, 2018.

¹¹¹ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: UT Press, 2011), 109. See also, Colin Gunckel, "Building a Movement and Constructing Community: Photography, the United Farm Workers, and El Malcriado," in *Social Justice*, Vol. 42, Nos. 3-4 (2015), Special Issue: Mexican and Chicana Social Movements (2015): 32-35.

¹¹² "600 Braceros Being Processed Here," *IVP*, May 18, 1965, 1.

¹¹³ "Union Pressure Planned With Start of Harvests," *IVP*, May 12, 1965, 1.

During the May-June 1965 strike, AWOC continued its wage negotiation drive through commuter workers. Unlike the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union in 1960, AWOC was not challenging the legality of commuter workers in Imperial Valley fields. Instead, Miramontes saw commuter workers as potential members, possible scabs, and probable evidence against growers. For the latter, Miramontes noted that though AWOC did attempt to stop commuters from boarding labor contractor busses, he changed tactics and allowed commuters to fill the busses and go work the fields. Importantly, AWOC's main focus during the May-June 1965 strike was labor contractors. Once in the fields, AWOC could declare growers as part of the grievance to legitimate the labor dispute with the Department of Labor.¹¹⁴ Miramontes and AWOC called off the strike on June 10, 1965 for two reasons. First, growers from San Joaquin to cantaloupe growers in the Imperial Valley began to pay the \$1.40 wage AWOC originally sought. As Miramontes put it, "As soon as farm workers learn that \$1.40 is being paid on an increasingly wide basis, they won't be willing to work for less."¹¹⁵ That is, Miramontes declared a limited victory. The second reason the strike was called off was because of a large labor reserve. According to Miramontes and the *Imperial Valley Press*, there were approximately 4,500 commuters going from Mexicali to work Imperial Valley's fields while only 1,500 workers were needed. Miramontes mentioned that commuters were willing to work for \$1.25 rather than wait on growers for \$1.40.¹¹⁶ This wage differential was key, yet one AWOC publicly struggled with as it cast farmworkers as a single bloc of wage solidarity rather than a faceted labor class. When AWOC was informed the strike was legal less than one week later, only four pickets protested in Calexico.

¹¹⁴ "State Probing Tomato Strike," *IVP*, June 3, 1965, 1.

¹¹⁵ "AWOC Calls Off Strike," *IVP*, June 10, 1965, 1.

¹¹⁶ "AWOC Resumes Picketing After IV Strike Ruled Legal," *IVP*, June 14, 1965, 1.

The spring and fall of 1965 rumbled with labor organizing activity from the Imperial to the San Joaquin Valley. While AWOC organized in the Imperial Valley, it also pushed for \$1.40 wage in Stockton and Coachella grapes. Between May and August, the NFWA organized rose flower grafters in McFarland and launched a successful rent strike in Tulare County.¹¹⁷ The two organizations were invested in bettering the lives and wages of their members. AWOC and the NFWA worked independently, but their shared goals, mutual types of labor, and commitment of rank-and-file members, individuals like Larry Itliong (AWOC), Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Gilbert Padilla (NFWA) brought the two organizations together during the week of September 8-16, 1965 against table grape growers around Delano. The history of the Delano grape strike of 1965 has become both the core and the lore of farmworker organizing in California and the United States. It is the history of a group of multiracial and multiethnic farmworkers and their allies against powerful agribusiness firms across western states with close political links in state and federal lawmaking bodies. It serves as a testament to the power of collective bargaining, shrewd political negotiation, determination, vision, and effective use of boycotts to force grape growers to recognize the farmworker union as legitimate and a new reality in the industry. The coalition union confirmed this new world with the March 17-April 10 1966 *Peregrinación* (pilgrimage) from Delano to Sacramento that generated a public relations boom and NFWA recognition, wage raise, hiring hall, and credit union with Schenley Industries on April 5, 1966.¹¹⁸ With the official merger of the AWOC with the NFWA into the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO by August 19, 1966, labor relations in the fields teetered on revolution.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*, 112-113.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 151-159.

¹¹⁹ Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2012), 41-43.

The use of boycotts, the negotiation for union autonomy, the hybrid social-labor movement forwarded by Chavez, and the strikes and pickets around the money fields of the San Joaquin Valley are amply and robustly discussed by numerous scholars and participants. What remains to be unpacked and theorized is the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (and later UFW) engagement with commuter workers from Mexico, including sanctioned and non-sanctioned workers, on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. As previously shown, the UFW was part of a longer history of labor organizing in the fields. Chavez tried to distance himself from this history by building and moving away from the *mutualista* and the business union model, but its dual imprint was lasting enough to remain a legacy.¹²⁰

The NFWA, AWOC, and UFW were in a protracted battle against agricultural bourgeoisie and their state and federal supporters. The stakes were enormous in this battle. Not only were wages and union recognition in the balance, but also the lives of union members and supporters, as shown from beatings and deaths on picket lines. Critical to the union's survival and success was determining which individuals and organizations forwarded and defended the farmworkers' union. The NFWA-UFW accomplished this goal through binaries: farmworkers and growers. Chavez and the union leadership were concerned with building a movement and a union and it mattered less what the person or group's class, race, gender, or religion was as long as they supported *la causa*. Indeed, journalist Miriam Pawel shows that the UFW relied heavily on white students during the boycotts and pickets. Marshall Ganz and other skilled organizers were neither Mexican, Filipino, or Catholic. Growers, on the other hand, were also much less concerned about a person or group's background and identities as long as agribusiness was

¹²⁰ Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*, 87, 113. Matt Garcia notes that Chavez initially borrowed the *mutualista* structure that was familiar to many Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers. See Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*, 31. See also, "What is a Union," *El Malcriado*, No. 23, circa July 1965, 13, accessed January 15, 2018, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/adair/No23.pdf>.

paramount. They not only counted on the press and policymakers, but also on labor contractors to provide them workers during strikes and peak harvest. At the center for both groups was the triangulation of worker movement in control, funneling, and removal.

The United Farm Workers sought to control Mexican labor through the image and construction of the scab and commuter worker. The first mentioning of scabs in *El Malcriado* occurred during the August 1965 strike against J.D. Martin, near Visalia. The NFWA stated, “There is nothing more shameful and openly wrong than that man who offers to work for a lower wage,” and, “Each of these dogs should get exactly what they deserve.” Rather than leave an opening for misinterpretation, the article closed with proper union treatment of a scab worker, “He should...be hated and avoided by all men.”¹²¹ The paper only mentioned strikebreakers in the abstract while a letter to the editor noted, “What a shame I felt when I found out they were Mexicans—and even more, when I learned that they were from here in my own town of Visalia!” For this worker, scabs broached lines of ethnic, labor, and hometown solidarity.¹²² The issues for the union were scabs, farmer associations, and the labor contractors that supplied groups of workers. Indeed, a local Mexican American labor contractor was labeled a biblical Judas, a “stooge of the ranchers” who betrayed farmworkers fighting for a living wage.¹²³ Importantly, the paper made no mention of Mexico, undocumented, or commuter workers. The letter to the editor expressed disappointment of loyalty rather than target inflammatory remarks on undocumented or commuter Mexican workers as scabs.

By 1967, the UFW and its allies invested its borderlands labor organizing strategy on

¹²¹ “The Strike Breaker,” *El Malcriado*, No.18, circa August 1965, 15, accessed January 16, 2018, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/adair/No18.pdf>.

¹²² Pedro Flores Guia, “What the People Are Thinking,” *El Malcriado*, No.18, circa August 1965, 11, accessed January 16, 2018, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/adair/No18.pdf>.

¹²³ “Judas is Among Us,” *El Malcriado*, No.18, circa August 1965, p.14, accessed January 16, 2018, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/adair/No18.pdf>.

regulation and removal. This pivot marked a change from viewing strikebreakers as common scabs to viewing Mexican workers and the borderlands as inherent strikebreakers. Initially, the goal of the regulation-removal strategy was to prevent commuters and undocumented workers from crossing the border and scabbing in the San Joaquin fields and vineyards. In a letter to Cesar Chavez, a farmworker from San Ysidro, California (adjacent to Tijuana), related to Chavez of a meeting held in that city in August 1967. The worker expressed the group's desire to unionize and asked for guidance on which local UFW representative to follow. Along with this common type of organizational question, the worker warned Chavez to be on the lookout for "possible strikebreakers" coming from Mexico with fraudulent documents on their way to the Giumarra fields.¹²⁴ The worker, however, made no mention of commuters as a labor issue in San Diego, California. Even on the San Diego-Tijuana borderlands, the early focus was in San Joaquin, while the border was a line of defense against mobile workers.

The UFW was on familiar ground when it came to strikebreakers and Mexican workers from Ernesto Galarza's National Farm Labor Union to the United Packinghouse Workers of American and Ben Yellen's protestations. The distinction between a worker with border crossing documents and those without was nearly irrelevant. The UFW and its allies saw Mexican workers as scabs both in the present and in the future. Mexican workers were already suspected of scabbing the moment they crossed the border to work. The trajectory of the Bracero Program continued to racialize Mexican workers as deportable and perennial scabs against U.S. labor. Pete Velasco, director of the UFW in Coachella, testified in the 1969 Subcommittee on Migratory Labor hearings how the union struggled with commuters. Plainly, commuters were synonymous with scabs and illegality. Velasco testified that Coachella growers and labor

¹²⁴ Ramon Torres Gonzalez to Cesar Chavez, August 27, 1967, box 23, folder 13, UFW Cesar Chavez Papers, Office of the President, Part 1, Series III, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated as CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

contractors were capable of replacing striking grape workers on a 1:1 ratio. This created a strike situation where, “Domestic workers are afraid to walk out, because they know that if they walk out, they are replaced by permanent resident card cardholders.”¹²⁵ Velasco mentioned that the UFW communicated with commuters via loudspeakers and bullhorns about the union’s cause. He pointed out that the fight in the fields was also in their interest.¹²⁶ Velasco provided evidence for the latter through wage increases for grape workers—regardless of status—after UFW strike pressure in the summer of 1968.¹²⁷ Moreover, Velasco revealed that all commuters, regardless of documentation, were illegal because they were breaking the strike lines. This act was prohibited by the Department of Labor.¹²⁸ For the union, commuters were thus illegal strikebreakers and free riders of the UFW efforts.

The UFW’s increased presence to other parts of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands continued to wrestle commuter workers. At a ranch in Arizona, the concern was that commuters not only broke local strike lines, but that they would eventually migrate to the San Joaquin Valley and undermine efforts there. When the union conducted an intelligence run on strikebreakers in Arizona, the reporter stated that the workers there were “mostly Green Carders who have been working at Kovacevich and Guimarra [sic],” both companies involved in grape products.¹²⁹ The reporter also mentioned the local networks and mobility of commuter-migrant workers, as the majority of the workers they surveyed were from San Vicente, Nuevo Leon, and allegedly spent half the year working in the United States. The reporter also listed the names and union status of the workers, including Mexican and Filipino strikebreakers. The reporter, however, failed to make a critical connection. If the workers listed were indeed “mostly Green Carders,” then

¹²⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt.5-A, 1955.

¹²⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt.5-A, 1962.

¹²⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt.5-A, 1961.

¹²⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt.5-A, 1959.

¹²⁹ “Workers at Macchiaroli Ranch in Arizona,” circa 1967, 1-4, box 23, folder 1, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

nearly half of the named workers were union members.¹³⁰ While time and resources were spent trying to convince lawmakers to alter immigration rules, at least on some Arizona ranches, commuter workers were open to the union. Furthermore, there was no follow-up from UFW leadership regarding the unionized commuters or of the strategies that brought them into the union fold. Like the Retail Clerks efforts in 1965, commuter workers from Mexico broke the overgeneralized brush used to paint them as perennial scabs.

The UFW's latent attention on the Imperial Valley was broken in a robust demonstration of the union's public power. On May 10, 1969, the UFW staged a 100-mile march from Coachella to Calexico in support of the grape boycott and the looming grape strike. Most importantly to the union, the march was an effort to convince commuters to not break the strike in Coachella. The march was a test of endurance for union members and their supporters. The NFWA march three years earlier from Delano to Sacramento was three times as long, but marchers in the Coachella-Calexico demonstration withstood scorching 100-degree weather everyday, much like the fieldworkers themselves who endured such temperatures every season. The march was a cause célèbre for politicians and civil rights groups. The march concluded on May 18 at the Calexico port of entry, followed by a gathering of 5,000 supporters at Rockwood Park five blocks away. Among those in attendance were Senators Walter Mondale, Ted Kennedy, and Ralph Yarborough, Representative John Tunney, Ralph Abernathy (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), and Calexico mayor Luis Legaspi.¹³¹ Noticeably absent was local farmer and California assemblyman Victor Veysey.

¹³⁰ According to the list, 60 were non-union and 54 were with the union. "Workers at Macchiaroli Ranch in Arizona," circa 1967, 1-4, box 23, folder 1, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹³¹ "UFWOC 'Grape Worker' March Ends With Rally in Calexico," *Calexico Chronicle*, May 22, 1969, pp.1-2; Lauren Araiza, *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2014), 123-124.

The purpose of the march was novel for two reasons. It marked the first major action by the UFW in the Imperial Valley. Up to then, the union was focused on organizing grape workers in the Central Valley and spreading the grape boycott. Though the UFW would expand its focus to Imperial Valley's cash crops of lettuce and watermelons until the following year, it nevertheless signaled to valley growers that the union was present and expanding. Second, the UFW made a public appeal to commuters, both permanent resident card holders and undocumented, to join *la causa* and not break strike lines.¹³² *El Malcriado* reported that the union's purpose of the march was, "To demonstrate its commitment to improving wages and working conditions for all farm workers, regardless of race or nationality."¹³³ Cesar Chavez continued with the appeal when he critiqued growers' divide-and-conquer technique, "The growers have traditionally pitted bracero and green-carder against resident worker, Mexican against Filipino, white against black."¹³⁴ Manuel Chavez, Cesar's cousin, and the UFW went further and met with members of one of Mexico's largest national unions, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (CTM, Confederation of Mexican Workers). The Mexican government threatened arrests of demonstrators in Mexicali, yet this failed to prevent the UFW and the CTM from meeting briefly. The two groups met at the pedestrian pass at the border, where the CTM

¹³² Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 766-767, n.39.

¹³³ "March to Mexico Builds International Solidarity," *El Malcriado*, No.5, May 1969, 2, accessed January 16, 2018, accessed January 19, 2018, https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/1969/May%201-31,%201969%20No%205_PDF.pdf.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

pledged its support for the UFW organizing drive.¹³⁵ Growers in Coachella overcame the strike, but the UFW demonstrated its organizational and public relations dexterity.

The 1969 “March to Mexico” revealed the UFW’s complex engagement with labor politics on the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Cesar Chavez asked commuters to refrain from scabbing and show solidarity with union grape workers in Coachella. *El Malcriado* and newspaper accounts made no mention of the UFW trying to recruit commuters to the union. This followed what Pete Velasco revealed was UFW precedent. During the 1968 Coachella strike, Velasco revealed the union’s approach to commuter workers relied on place of residence. He stated that workers with permanent resident cards were part of the union, but not commuters. That is, only Mexican workers who lived exclusively in the United States were members of the UFW and commuters were not. The March to Mexico was a message to commuters that the UFW’s struggle was also theirs and that “they [commuters] can be a member of our union and reside in the United States.”¹³⁶ The UFW welcomed workers who cut residential and, relatedly, community ties with Mexico. Moreover, the national AFL-CIO and Ted Kennedy also supported this residency requirement. Both pushed legislation to have permanent resident cards certified every six months to prevent wage depression and job scarcity. Place of residence was seen as a marker of union loyalty that ensured farmworker discipline in battles for union recognition and living wages on the U.S. side of the border.

The March to Mexico also demonstrated the bifurcating power of the Mexico-U.S. border and the limits of cross-border organizing. Labor groups on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3; “UFWOC ‘Grape Worker’ March Ends With Rally in Calexico,” *Calexico Chronicle*, May 22, 1969, 1; Ruben Salazar, “Kennedy Greets Grape Strike March at Calexico Finish Line: Kennedy Greets Grape March at Finish Line,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1969, 3, 21. Bardacke asserts that the CTM was unwilling to agree on a no-scabbing deal, yet the *LA Times* article he cites as well as my own research does not support that claim. At the very least, the CTM and the UFWOC agreed on the merits of their respective labor movements. See, Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 766-767, n.39.

¹³⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, Border Commuter Labor Problem, Pt.5-A, 1964.

invested in the regulating powers of the juridical border on worker movement. This was a strategy to order the borderlands. From the NFLU to the UFW, agricultural labor groups in the United States wrestled with the anxieties of movement on the borderlands. The border fence and border policies represented a porous saw-toothed barrier in need of whetting. Strengthening the border and the position of organized labor was a mutual project that could be accomplished via increased commuter regulations, including preventing commuters from entering struck fields. The CTM's endorsement of the UFW demonstrated the mainstream Mexican labor union's accordance with limiting Mexican workers' border crossings as an anti-scabbing measure. The first instance of the CTM attempts to stop commuters occurred in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. In May 1967, the CTM of Tamaulipas attempted to stop workers from entering Rancho La Casita, a struck melon field. The governor of Tamaulipas broke the CTM pickets and Victor Reuther (United Auto Workers, International Affairs Department) requested the CTM continue to picket on the Mexican side of the border.¹³⁷ In the 1969 March on Mexico, over 400 CTM members gathered to support the UFW. Although the agreement between the two unions is unclear beyond a pledge of support, the presence of the CTM pickets in Mexicali was a transborder message to commuters to observe the strike and the UFW by ceasing their very movement and livelihoods.

By 1970, Cesar and Manuel Chavez looked to commuter workers with more interest beyond the grape boycott. Anticipating the lettuce boycott and strikes of 1970, Manuel Chavez spoke at a large gathering in San Luis, Río Colorado, Sonora, on the border with Arizona, Baja California Norte, and 25 miles south of California. Held in the city's bullring on March 1, 1970, the gathering was specifically for permanent resident card workers (*trabajadores emigrados*,

¹³⁷ Fidel Velasquez to Victor Reuther, May 23, 1967; Victor Reuther to Fidel Velasquez, circa May 20, 1967; both in box 56, folder 9, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

immigrated workers) to communicate issues “related to the defense of our agricultural rights” in the U.S. The meeting was promoted as non-political, with discussion also touching on the “necessity to support the developing campaign” of Cesar Chavez in U.S. fields. Manuel relayed to Cesar that over 200 men and women attended the gathering and another one was soon to be held across the border in San Luis, Arizona. The meeting served the dual purpose of bringing commuter workers together in a show of community building and anti-scabbing. As historian Marc Rodriguez has shown, migrant farm labor required the development of interpersonal networks to mitigate the constant movement and harassment by employers, government, and union officials.¹³⁸ By creating an event specifically for commuter workers, Manuel and the UFW were able to bring together commuter workers—who no doubt shared stories of work as they sat in the bullring’s stands—under a message of commuters’ labor rights and labor solidarity to observe the UFW’s strikes and boycott.

The fear went deeper than job loss for commuter workers. The Border Patrol’s documentation requests on Giumarra picketers in August 1967 expanded to revocation of permanent resident cards. Cesar Chavez was compiling evidence of unfair treatment and harassment by the INS against UFOWC members who were commuters. In late April 1970, Cesar wrote to Manuel, “I’m ready to start moving on the border crossing problems and harassment I talked to you about when I was in Calexico. I need a letter in Spanish detailing all the specifics of the harassment including the taking of [union] membership cards, taking the micas [permanent resident cards], the whole TB runaround, and other things.” He asked Manuel

¹³⁸ Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011), 2, 10, 87-95. Though Rodriguez focuses on migrant workers from Texas, his analysis nevertheless points to the ways that migrant farmworkers sustained and maintained lives in multiple states while negotiating with politicians and United Farm Worker efforts in Wisconsin. See also Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2012), 82-83.

to collect the names, permanent resident card numbers (“border crossing card”), age, address in Mexico, and any other identification information. Importantly, Cesar told Manuel, “The people involved have to be union members [emphasis in original].” The line of legitimate worker now encompassed commuter workers, with the caveat that they be members of UFW.

This was a critical move by Chavez and the UFW. The union was more concerned with a worker’s union affiliation than their place of residence. Internally, union leadership understood that relying on deportation and a limit to commuter worker movement was an untenable strategy. The sharing of information with the Border Patrol in the San Joaquin Valley, testimony in Congressional hearings, and support from Ted Kennedy appeared to take a secondary position to protecting workers with permanent resident cards and exposing intimidation by the INS. Cesar confidentially expressed the urgency of the situation to his cousin, “It’s very important that I get the information right away” and “please rush this to me so I can get started on it.” Much like the CTM hinted at the Joint United States-Mexico Trade Union Committee in 1964, commuter workers lived and worked under the threat of job loss and revocation of their permanent resident cards. As previously noted, permanent resident card/visa allocation changed with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which placed a 20,000 cap on countries from the Western Hemisphere, including Mexico. Though family reunification and employer sponsorships continued, the loss of a permanent resident card meant gambling on receiving a new card and bureaucratic hassle, at best. Time lost attempting to obtain a new permanent resident card meant lost working hours and wages in the United States. Moreover, invalidation of a person’s permanent resident card meant that commuters were no longer able to live and work in the United States; if they desired to, then they could wait for another visa or cross as an undocumented worker with less labor and legal protections than before.

Alongside the changing strategies of the UFW and the AFL-CIO with commuter workers existed a tense relationship with the U.S. immigration agencies. Marshall Ganz stated that working with the INS was not a matter of principle, but one of convenience for the union as it fought against growers in the San Joaquin Valley. Ganz revealed that the union's relationship with the INS, commuter, and undocumented workers "was different at different times" and the union had to "leverage whatever power there was around."¹³⁹ A central component to the UFW anti-sabbing strategy was surveillance. The UFW gathered scab information by being in the fields and watching which workers crossed pickets, writing their names and vehicle license plate numbers. This information could be shared with the union, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Border Patrol. For the union's purposes, workers who refused to join the union, scab, and speak ill of the union, they were labeled "super scabs." UFW members could be fined for crossing a picket while attempts to recruit non-union members continued.¹⁴⁰ The delivery of personal details, especially the fields where scabs showed up, was an attempt to remove commuter workers and aid the INS and Border Patrol in their duties. This tactic was risky for both its uneven efficiency and public relations. On some occasions, the Border Patrol turned its detention lens on the union. In 1967, Margarito Muñoz, UFW member and picketer, at Giumarra reported that when fellow picketer Donna Watson informed the Border Patrol of undocumented workers at two fields in Delano, agents asked for documentation from the picketers. David Michael Fishlow, a picketer with Muñoz and Watson, seconded Muñoz's statement. Fishlow

¹³⁹ Marshall Ganz, interview by Frank Bardacke, cassette 1, side b, Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University.

¹⁴⁰ "Workers at Macchiaroli Ranch in Arizona," circa 1967, 1-4, box 23, folder 1, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

recalled an agent tell him that organizing farmworkers was “inadvisable and that he did not feel we should be attempting to do so.”¹⁴¹

Other times, the Border Patrol refused to act on inspection requests by the union. In March 1968, Jerry Cohen, the UFW’s main lawyer, informed Robert Kennedy that neither the DOL nor DOJ were clear on jurisdiction or possible actions against commuter workers at struck fields.¹⁴² The California AFL-CIO supported a proposed rule that did not allow workers with permanent resident cards to enter the U.S. to work at a struck site. The federation pushed further and wanted to bar commuter workers from working at a struck site, regardless if the workers were there prior to the strike or coming from a different place of employment.¹⁴³ That is, the federation focused on limiting the mobility of workers it deemed vulnerable and a menace to the union’s efforts. When the rule passed the INS, it did not permit commuters “from taking jobs at strike-bound firms,” but the Department of Labor “has a fact-finding role only,” with the INS tasked with enforcement.¹⁴⁴

In this bureaucratic context, the UFW, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice—which oversaw the INS and Border Patrol—came to an accord on April 25, 1968. The DOJ noted, “There will be an immediate sweep of the Giumarra fields to check for the presence of illegal green carders and pull them from these fields.”¹⁴⁵ On the same day as the accord, Cesar Chavez complained to Attorney General Ramsey Clark that no raids were conducted, but the Border Patrol once again harassed UFW picketers.¹⁴⁶ A few days later and after much

¹⁴¹ Statements by David Michael Fishlow, August 25, 1967; Statement by Margarito Muñoz, August 28, 1967; box 35, folder 4, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹⁴² Letter from Jerry Cohen to Robert F. Kennedy, March 20, 1968, box 35, folder 3, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹⁴³ Thomas Pitts (CA AFL-CIO) to Raymond Farrell (INS Commissioner), May 22, 1967, 2, box 35, folder 2, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Goodwin to Frank Drozak, September 7, 1967, box 35, folder 2, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum of Agreement between DOL, DOJ, and UFWOC, circa April 1968, box 35, folder 3, CCP, Pt.1, S.3. The precise date of the agreement is derived from a memo by Leroy Chatfield in the same location.

¹⁴⁶ Telegram from Cesar Chavez to Ramsey Clark, April 26, 1968, box 35, folder 3, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

bureaucratic wrangling and pressure from the UFW and AFL-CIO, the Border Patrol finally conducted a much-desired raid in Delano fields only to emerge with no one apprehended. It is possible that DOL Secretary Willard Wirtz unwittingly notified the growers, contractors, and workers when he told reporters when the upgrade to raids would commence.¹⁴⁷ Such actions by the UFW convinced at least one former member from the Mexican state of Veracruz that Chavez betrayed the confidence and inspiration he initially instilled. The former member critiqued Chavez's relationship with the INS as one where Chavez was "the hunting dog and Immigration [INS-Border Patrol] were the hunters" and chastised Chavez's use of Revolutionary heroes Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa for the UFW's purposes.¹⁴⁸

In the same year that *Saxbe v. Bustos* (1974) was deliberated, the now-United Farm Workers mounted an extensive campaign against Mexican workers, namely undocumented fieldworkers. In March 1974, Cesar Chavez launched "Project Mexico" by sending three UFW members to Mexico in an attempt to dissuade potential migrants from working in some of California's fields between April and August. Possible migrants were encouraged to avoid struck fields "to avoid any inconveniences," the meaning of which was not clarified in the letter.¹⁴⁹ Soon after, Chavez tried to entice the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, SRE) to take a firm position against commuter and undocumented workers from breaking UFW strikes and joining the Teamsters. Attempting to appeal to Mexican nationalism and diasporic history, Chavez wrote, "Our problem is that our own brothers break our strikes...our own brothers [raza] are being exploited with low pay and worked until

¹⁴⁷ Telephone Report from Leroy Chatfield in Los Angeles, CA, taken by Ginny Hirsch, April 26, 1968, box 35, Folder 3, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from "A Union Member," to Cesar Chavez, Poza Rica, Veracruz, Mexico, March 2, 1968, box 35, folder 3, CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

¹⁴⁹ Letters for Adalberto Jiménez, Cornelio Salinas, and Guadalupe I. Sánchez by Cesar Chavez, March 9, 1974, Office of the President, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

exhaustion...we do not want that.” Chavez told the SRE, “There is a line that is dividing us [the U.S.-Mexico border], this line has not been respected.” Chavez also contradictorily noted, “For us there is no border [*frontera*] because in our blood we still carry [Mexico] in our veins.” He finished his appeal with a quotation from former Mexican president and hero Benito Juárez, “Respect for the rights of others is peace.”¹⁵⁰ Chavez argued that his interest was solely the protection of farmworkers in the U.S. against exploitation by growers. The multifaceted Project Mexico was a plan that embraced and exercised the transborder reality of farm labor in the United States with appeals to U.S. and Mexican citizenship and ethnic solidarity.

One of the most notorious developments in the UFW’s relationship with the Border Patrol and undocumented workers occurred in late 1974. On August 27, 1974, 200 union workers struck a lemon orchard in San Luis, Arizona, adjacent to the Mexico-U.S. border. The union understood that “the most serious problem the strikers faced was an increase in the number of illegal aliens coming across the border to work in the lemon orchards.”¹⁵¹ Members were aware of a hole in the border fence, roughly 5 feet tall and 1 foot wide. Since the strike, foot traffic through the hole was estimated by one account at 200 undocumented workers per day. UFW members reported the hole and the number of workers crossing through it to the Border Patrol. Members became frustrated with the lack of effort by the Border Patrol and their inability to stop strikebreakers. The solution for the UFW was to become the Border Patrol. In early September 1974, 350 lemon workers organized round-the-clock patrol of the San Luis border. As the UFW states rather innocuously, “By explaining the strike situation, the farmworkers were

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Comité de Trabajadores Campesinos [UFW] to Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores [Secretariat of Foreign Affairs], circa March, 1974, box 16, folder 16, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁵¹ “Special Strike Report: San Luis, Arizona,” in “Report on Illegal Farm Activity in California and Arizona,” circa October 1974, box 17, folder 17, CCP, Pt.2.

able to turn many of the illegals back.”¹⁵²

This action was a precursor to the much more sophisticated and numerically significant patrol in October 1974. On October 6, 1974, approximately 2,000 UFW members and allies gathered in the Arizona-Mexico borderlands. They were placed at 20-mile intervals across 125 miles of the border. The border sentinels-labor supporters were equipped with tents, communication equipment, and vehicles to patrol the “hole in the fence and many others like it.” The demonstration was intended to last the duration of the strike “or until such time as there is evidence that the United States Border Patrol is doing its job well.” The October patrol was infamously termed the “Wet Line.” The border took an added meaning, a racialized line of defense for the union and its strike. Even when crossing a chain link fence in the desert, undocumented workers were nevertheless the ballast necessary to differentiate between deserving union members and illegitimate workers.

From the March to Mexico in 1969 to the October patrol of 1974, the figure of Manuel Chavez looms large. Manuel was Cesar Chavez’s cousin. He served some time in prison for various offenses, most recently for check fraud. As Frank Bardacke notes, Manuel’s past placed strains on the legitimacy of the nascent NFWA.¹⁵³ Marshall Ganz described Manuel and Cesar as near polar opposites. Where Cesar “didn’t like the border” because of the “constant wheeling and dealing out of just this struggle to survive,” Manuel was the “evil twin” who “thrived on the border.”¹⁵⁴ Moreover, Cesar “hated dealing with Mexican politicians” and Manuel “loved it.” Tellingly, when the March on Mexico met with members of the CTM, it was Manuel, not Cesar, that met with the Mexican union. According to Mario Bustamante, a skilled lettuce worker and

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 126-127.

¹⁵⁴ Marshall Ganz, interview by Frank Bardacke, cassette 3, side b, Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University.

dedicated union member, the October patrol was an action planned by Manuel Chavez.¹⁵⁵ Bustamante understood the patrol as a rogue act by Manuel rather than a policy endemic to the union. Bustamante did not share Manuel's borderlands labor vision, but some 2,000 members and allies did.

Both Chavez's actions led to a deep rift with one Phoenix boycott leader Rita Lopez. Lopez vehemently protested the UFW and Cesar Chavez's "campaign against undocumented workers." She stressed to Chavez that working with and trusting the Border Patrol was a two-fold mistake. For one, the Border Patrol was no ally to the union and displayed a history of inaction when the union requested assistance. In a sense, the Border Patrol was a strikebreaking governmental body. Secondly, Lopez argued that UFW collusion with the Border Patrol was also license for "a massive dragnet violating the legal rights of every Mexicano in the country," where all peoples of Mexican descent were subject to suspicion of not belonging in the U.S. or even part of it.¹⁵⁶ Lopez and ten other boycott activists resigned from the union because of the UFW's "pitting fellow workers of La Raza against each other." Lopez continued by providing insight into a strategy the UFW experimented with and later dropped in 1970, "The Union should fight for the full legal rights of all agricultural workers in this country so that it will be possible to organize the unorganized." Ironically, this was the sentiment that launched organizing efforts of farmworkers since the 1930s, yet Lopez pushed beyond the confines of the nation-state to see all agricultural workers as part of the American working class.

UFW opposition capitalized on the union's positions on commuter and undocumented workers. In 1967, the California-Arizona Farm Labor Association warned workers with permanent resident cards, "Don't be fooled, you can work anywhere. If anyone stands in your

¹⁵⁵ Mario Bustamante, interview by Michael D. Aguirre, January 4, 2016, El Centro, CA. Interview in author's possession.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Rita Lopez to Cesar Chavez, August 2, 1974, box 16, folder 16, CCP, Pt.2.

way, contact your boss and he'll help you right away." The Fresno-based labor association placed itself as the benevolent supervisor while the UFW attempted to regulate commuter movement. The Teamsters capitalized on the 1974 actions in San Luis, urging Mexican workers to not vote for, "Cesar's punks [who] robbed, beat, abused and sent packing back across the border aliens who were trying to scratch out a living to support their families in Mexico." The Teamsters message was accompanied by a cartoon, where "illegal aliens" were left pummeled and concussed with UFW vigilantes standing over them. In their effort to gain support, the Teamsters showed how it understood undocumented workers as potential dues-paying union members to be siphoned away from the UFW. Illustrative of labor organizing on the borderlands, the cartoon placed UFW guards on both sides of a brick wall (the Mexico-U.S. border), with Mexican workers in the center. Organized labor was fighting for control over Mexican workers in U.S. fields with limited regard to the input, wants, and desires of Mexican workers themselves—commuter and undocumented alike.

Conclusion

From the Bracero Program up to 1974, U.S. organized vacillated in its approach to workers from Mexico. Labor moved from reproducing and reifying the language of deportability and exclusion to undermining the bifurcating power of the border between domestic and foreign workers. The actions of Cesar Chavez to send informants to Mexico and Manuel Chavez on the Arizona-Mexico borderlands, both in 1974, must be read within the context of strikes in California and Arizona as well as the pending *Saxbe v. Bustos* Supreme Court decision. Commuter workers *were* permanent residents, immigrants, and "green card" workers. Restrictive entry and mobility strategies required a different a different approach, one that mirrored the

copious legal definition of U.S. laborer, one that encompassed the existence of people like Raul Avila and his father. It was not until the UFW takes on migrant healthcare that Mexicali and Mexico appear as a union place (see chapter 5). As chapter 4 will discuss, even as the UFW walked on unsteady ground between 1967 and 1974, workers in Mexicali transnational companies looked increasingly toward Mexican labor courts and unions to solve workplace issues promulgated by U.S. capitalist understanding of Mexican labor as inexpensive and expendable.

Chapter 4: The Binds of Labor: Law, Labor Boards, and Worker Activism for Recognition in Transborder Spaces

Introduction

In 1975, the status of laborers in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands appeared to be on separate tracks. The largest non-government employer in Mexicali—Mextel—was in the throes of a major labor dispute. For several months, the rank-and-file workers of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico* (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) demanded a wage increase and job stability. To their surprise, workers arrived to find Mextel's doors closed in February 1975 despite the company's assurance that Mextel would remain open. The scene of worker frustration and job insecurity contrasted with excitement and anticipation with a new farm labor law in California. Later that year, farmworkers in California secured the first comprehensive agricultural labor legislation in the United States. Modeled after the National Labor Relations Act, California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act guaranteed the right to collective bargaining and established the Agricultural Labor Relations Board to resolve grievances and investigate unfair labor practices.

This chapter argues that vulnerable working peoples in Baja California Norte and California exposed the limits and possibilities of worker struggles through labor law and labor boards in California's Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) and Mexico's *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board, JLCA). Labor laws in both countries established the rules and procedures for workers to file formal grievances for various issues, including dismissal of employment and payment of lost wages. Labor boards, the 1931 Mexican Federal Labor Law, and the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) were a response

in both Mexico and California to demands from organized labor to offer a venue where labor decisions could be heard, debated, ruled, and enforced. They presented workers with a different labor activism to hold employers accountable for unfair labor practices and challenge the impunity that agricultural growers in California and transnational corporations in Baja California Norte enjoyed. As this chapter shows, labor law and state labor boards often benefitted employers through lengthy proceedings and limited financial compensation for individual workers. Yet, workers used labor boards as part of a broader set of labor actions, including unionization drives and strikes, that defied an economic regime that racialized Mexican workers as part of a formula to maximize returns and reduce workers' voice. Indeed, workers at Mextel and the California fields often questioned the applicability of law to their context and at times created new case law in the process, including the recognition of farmworker dilapidated housing to allow the UFW access to these previously hidden-in-plain-sight dwellings. The labor boards on the California-Baja California Norte borderlands created alternative meanings of labor and offered "counterscripts" to class, citizenship, labor, and gender.¹

At the center of this chapter are one of the primary—but understudied and undertheorized—sites where contests between workers and employers manifested: labor arbitration boards. The ALRB and JLCA document and preserve the language and actions of employers and workers, of rote procedure by board administrators and the energy of unions and lawyers focused on labor justice. Read critically, the cases enable excavation of the culture of workers and employers in both Baja California Norte's export industry and California's agricultural fields, revealing workers' individual and, at times, collective motives for arbitration. In her study on women laborers in northeastern Mexico, historian Sonia Hernández has shown

¹ Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2014), 7-9.

how Mexico's labor arbitration boards were forums where *mexicanas* demanded state authorities uphold rights guaranteed in the 1917 Constitution and the 1931 Federal Labor Law. The use of the labor boards by *mexicanas* also showed that while factory work was a major part of a workers' life, "factories did not control them."² Moreover, the JLCA cases analyzed in this chapter also expand the periodization of maquila worker activism, which tends to focus heavily on the post-1982 peso devaluation and boom in maquilas in Mexico.³ By recalibrating periodization, the struggles between workers and transnational capital are illuminated during the nascent development of massive U.S. transnational capitalism in northern Mexico and are shown to be part of a longer trajectory of worker activism that extends to the maquila boom in the mid-1980s and into the North American Free Trade Agreement debates in the 1990s.

Arbitration cases in the ALRB and JLCA also capture the uneven power of labor unions and their relationships with the rank and file. In Mexicali, the CTM represented workers at Mextel. However, the majority of the JLCA cases made little mention of the CTM or of union-paid lawyers. Instead, Mextel workers relied on state-funded lawyers or private attorneys in the JLCA while the CTM gradually took a more active role in labor demonstrations in late 1972. In California, the UFW overwhelmingly represented workers in the ALRB. The UFW was often

² Sonia Hernández, *Working Women into the Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2014), 130.

³ The peso devaluation began with President Luis Echeverría Álvarez and continued with José López Portillo. The latter bet significantly on oil futures, which did not materialize. For the post-1982 maquiladora spike, see Paul Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom: A Paradox of Development or the Logic of Neoliberalism?," *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 3, Special Issue (May, 2001): 55-83. This is not to say that previous studies were or are devoid of value. Rather, looking at pre-1980 labor disputes makes a larger case for understanding labor trajectories during the early phase of maquilization and liberalism in the mid-twentieth century. Some of the post-1980s literature include Devon Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: CMAS Books, 1997); Jorge Carrillo, editor, *Reestructuración industrial: Maquiladoras en la frontera México-Estados Unidos* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Publicaciones del Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1989). Carrillo has several other works on maquilas and the cited text provides a representative example of his scholarship. See also Norma Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana*, trans. Michael Stone and Gabrielle Winkler (Austin: UT Press, 1997). For literature highlighting feminicides of maquila workers in Ciudad Juárez and environmental impacts of maquiladoras in Tijuana, see Rosa-Linda Rosa-Linda and Cynthia Bejarano, editors, *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010); Funari, Vicky, De La Torre, Sergio, et. al., *Maquilapolis (City of Factories)*, Independent Television Service. United States, 2006.

listed as party in ALRB cases and union leadership also provided testimony. When placed in a comparative analysis of labor rights and activism, the CTM limited its engagement with the JLCA, electing instead for protests beginning in late 1972 up to the closure of the maquila in 1975. The UFW combined both tactics and at times adopted situationally beneficial strategies including collusion with U.S. immigration authorities and obtaining temporary visas for undocumented workers. Through the lens of the labor arbitration boards, the CTM was less responsive to union members and preferred to see the JLCA as a space outside of its purview while the UFW was heavily involved in labor cases and demonstrations. Through their activism in the arbitration boards and public protests, both unions influenced the spaces of work when employers shut down or shifted operations to open shop geographies. By doing so, both unions also showed their power to preserve labor rights and advocate for steady employment for members.

The exercise of labor laws pushed against a transnational capitalist class that used mobility and invested in ideas of racialized Mexican labor as a strategy of devaluation of human worth. Workers in both countries were able to access labor arbitration boards with rhetorically friendly laws, but were still part of a “broader and meaningfully autonomous institution” that included numerous actors, time-consuming hearings, and embedded within a larger capitalist political economy.⁴ Such factors could potentially undermine the spirit of the law. Workers and unions in the Imperial-Mexicali and greater California borderlands struggled to find spaces within California or Mexican labor law to fit their needs, whether indemnity payments, reinstatement, or rights for undocumented farmworkers. Despite the stately aura of labor law and

⁴ Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), 74. Ranko Shiraki Oliver, “Mexico’s Dilemma: Workers’ Rights or Workers’ Comparative Advantage in the Age of Globalization?” *McGeorge Global Business and Development Law Journal* 25, no. 1 (June 2012): 199.

labor boards, this chapter shows that workers in Mexicali and California used their hearings to ensure that the law was applied to employers while also creating new state-recognized definitions of workers through their legal challenges, including migrant and undocumented workers. The labor arbitration boards were thus critical sites where meanings of law, work, capital, and labor culture were debated, revealing the vacillating effectiveness of law as part of labor activism in both countries and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

On the surface, there seems to be little to no link between two distinct industries in two different countries. Yet, borderlands grassroots intellectuals articulated the urgency of understanding the U.S.-Mexico border as a space linked by peoples and political economy. One such intellectual was Fidel Valdéz. He was a lettuce cutter under a United Farm Worker contract in the Imperial Valley and his sisters worked in maquilas in Mexicali. Valdéz connected the borderlands working class and their fights for transborder labor rights, “We are like two hands on the same body here on the border...whatever affects one side affects the other too.” Valdéz continued, “If the maquiladora workers lose their fight, so do we [UFW], and if we should lose, it will also be their loss.”⁵ Valdéz was a borderlands thinker. Like philosophers Gloria Anzaldúa and Walter D. Mignolo’s theorization of knowledge and identities from interstitial spaces, Valdéz revealed the necessity to imagine a borderlands working class threaded by U.S. transnational capital, racialization of Mexican labor, and continuous challenges to bourgeois desire of worker subordination.⁶ This chapter heeds the call of border thinkers like Valdéz to illuminate the disruption of bourgeois fantasies of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a cultivated space ripe with passive workers.

⁵ Peter Baird and Ed McCaughan, “Hit and Run: U.S. Runaway Shops on the Mexican Border,” *North American Congress on Latin America’s Latin America and Empire Report* 9, no. 5 (July-August 1975), 28.

⁶ For *nepantla*, see Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999). For border gnosis, see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012).

Section 1: Labor, Mextel, and Mexicali's *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje*

In 1927, Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles formally issued the decree that established the labor arbitration boards across the country. Prior to the Mexican Revolution and the 1927 decree, various states established their own labor boards. These boards and state labor laws did not extend across Mexico, but they did later influence federal policy.⁷ The 1927 decree formed the *Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje* and the state-level *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (JLCA). These boards streamlined the execution of Article 123 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. Article 123 guaranteed indemnity for unjust firings, an eight-hour workday (seven for night shifts), a minimum wage, collective bargaining, the right to strike, and called for labor conciliation and arbitration boards.⁸ Article 123, along with Article 27 (which issued important legislation for peasant landholdings) and Articles 3, 5, 24, 27, 130 (which limited the power of the Roman Catholic Church), was part of the goals of the 1917 Constitution to promote a social revolution in Mexico. As scholar Kevin Middlebrook notes, land reform and worker rights “emphasized the *collective* character of new social and political rights for peasants and workers, not just opportunities for individual advancement,” (emphasis in original).⁹ That is, the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary governments attempted to create new subjectivities and relationships that focused on group welfare. Since 1915, organized labor—most notably the *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM)—

⁷ Sofia Verónica Ávalos Díaz, “Origen y evolución de las Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje,” *Instituto de Investigaciones Jurisprudenciales y de Promoción y Difusión de la Ética Judicial*, no. 4 (enero 2008), 6-10.

⁸ Kevin Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 47, 58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

supported and invested in the new Revolutionary state to influence the creation and execution of federal policy and new identities with the state, including labor legislation.¹⁰

While the JLCA and its federal counterpart were authorized via presidential decree, the major payoff for organized labor's support of the post-Revolutionary state was the 1931 Federal Labor Law. The new labor law of the land enumerated numerous regulations, including rules to create a union, stipulations of employment, terms of job dismissal with cause or unjustified, coverage of workplace accidents, JLCA hearing processes, and indemnity payment qualifications. For instance, to create a union, twenty workers needed to gather and agree to the governing rules of the union. The union then had to register with the JLCA to be considered official.¹¹ Unlike in the United States' National Labor Relations Act or California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act, a union in Mexico did not require state oversight in elections to guarantee a union's legitimacy. This system enabled monopolization of a union's power by corrupt and powerful labor leaders in Mexico's major unions. Under the 1931 Federal Labor Law, workers were entitled to guaranteed payment of three-months' salary if a worker was fired without cause, regardless if the worker belonged to a union. Apprenticeship periods and duties were left to employers to decide, and, as JLCA cases in this chapter show, managers at Mextel exploited this the company's benefit. The 1931 Federal Labor Law expanded the applicability of the law to more groups of workers such as federal employees and professional actors through subsequent decades, highlighted by the reforms in the 1970 Federal Labor Law.¹² Brought under the aegis of

¹⁰ J. Fernando Franco G.S., "Labor Law and the Labor Movement in Mexico," trans. Kevin J. Middlebrook, in *Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico*, edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook (La Jolla, CA.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1991), 105.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

¹² Pedro Cervantes Campos, "El Artículo 123 Constitucional en 1979," *Antecedentes y Evolución del Artículo 123 Constitucional y de la Ley Federal del Trabajo*, Foro Laboral, Serie Conferencias no. 5 (Ciudad de México: Editorial Popular de los Trabajadores, 1981), 40-43. The 1970 law kept much of the same language and spirit of the 1931 law.

the federal and state governments, Mexican workers across the country and in numerous industries were included in a robust set of labor regulations.

The 1931 Federal Labor Law also specified the composition of the labor boards, including Mexicali's *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* (JLCA). The JLCA was composed of a board president, one pro-labor member, and one pro-business member. Each of these members were required to not be involved with any disputing parties in the JLCA. The board contained a straightforward process to hear and rule on cases. A worker filed a claim, followed by investigation of the claim and witnesses for the worker and the employer, a decision, and enforcement.¹³ Cases could be resolved quickly, but they could also take years. In extreme instances, four cases remained under review for over forty years in Mexico City.¹⁴ However, the JLCA in Mexicali rarely took longer than two years.¹⁵ The length of time of the cases, the possibility of an employer successfully disproving a claim, possible blacklisting, and the varying rates of financial compensation if a worker did win could serve as deterrents to file a claim.¹⁶ Yet, Mextel workers and their lawyers submitted their claims to the JLCA and showed that they were vocal defenders of their rights. Workers, then, were the peoples holding federal officials accountable to the promises of the post-Revolutionary period amidst accelerated investment by U.S. capital in Mexicali and Mexico.

Indeed, U.S. investments and expansion of its economic sphere influenced Mexican work life and migration. As discussed in chapter 2, Mexico blended import-substitution with liberalization policies in the form of U.S. transnational companies like Kenmex and Mextel. The

¹³ Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution*, 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁵ This is based on labor cases filed against Mextel and Kenworth Mexicana in the Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California, Mexicali (State Archive of Baja California). The state archive will hereafter be abbreviated as AHBC.

¹⁶ Hernández, *Working Women*, 139.

companies' presence in Mexicali was largely the goal of the federal economic programs that supported foreign investment like the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (National Border Program, 1961), the Alliance for Progress (1961), and the Border Industrialization Program (1965).¹⁷ Liberalization complemented import-substitution and U.S. agriculture labor demands before and after the Bracero Program. Liberalization also contributed to the marginalization of rural peasant farmers and agricultural day laborers in Mexico and was a major contributor to urban and northern migration. Researcher Adriana López Monjardín incisively articulates the working conditions, disparate impact of land reform, and creation of migrant workers across the Mexican countryside as agricultural production shifted to mechanization and new export crops.¹⁸ Many peasant landholders and day laborers confronted the changing rural economic landscape by migrating to cities, including those on the northern border. In her seminal study on female maquiladora workers in Tijuana, researcher Norma Iglesias Prieto points out that “sixty-eight percent of the workers interviewed were migrants.”¹⁹ The movement of peoples to northern cities created a large reserve labor pool, which anthropologist Devon Peña argues shored up gender and management-worker hierarchy via threat of quick dismissal from the job.²⁰

Maquiladoras and other transnational firms were the newcomers to a male top-down vision of education and capitalist subjectivity. As in other periods of expanded state control, the aims of the state were not totally realized or wholeheartedly accepted. Even when the border was seen as a place of decadence, officials in the state of Tamaulipas argued to build maquilas in

¹⁷ The Alliance for Progress was a Kennedy administration Latin American-focused economic and imperial program that sought to create structural conditions across Latin America conducive to increased foreign (read: U.S.) investment, including foreign direct investment. See, “Carta de Punta del Este, *El Trimestre Económico*, Vol. 28, No. 112(4) (Octubre-Diciembre de 1961), 737-738.

¹⁸ Adriana López Monjardín, “Organization and Struggle among Agricultural Workers in Mexico,” in *Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico*, 185-191.

¹⁹ Norma Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana*, trans. Michael Stone and Gabrielle Winkler (Austin: UT Press, 1997), 46.

²⁰ Devon Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: CMAS Books, 1997).

rural areas as a way to stop the “unworthy exodus of young women from humble backgrounds to the vice nightclubs of the border.” Maquilas were also desired as training facilities for rural residents in preparation for future employment in the industry.²¹ Since the Porfiriato’s use and reliance on technocrats (*científicos*) up to establishment of the Secretariat of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) in the early post-Revolutionary period, the state planned to include rural and indigenous peoples in a national identity.²²

The establishment of Mextel and Kenmex in Mexicali were iterations of Mexico’s liberalization policies that coexisted with the labor adjudication arm of the JLCA. A particularly revealing glimpse of the machinations of liberalization and Mextel was the unfamiliarity between workers and management. Seven months after the Guajardo family and Mattel incorporated Mextel in April 1967, a male warehouse worker, Adislado Rubio Castañeda, served Mextel with its first suit. In three weeks, the former warehouse worker received the indemnity and lost wages benefits he claimed. Rubio claimed manager Jesse Hill fired him, but he was unsure of Hill’s name, “I think his name is [Jesse Hill].”²³ As in other maquilas, Hill was sent from the United States to manage Mattel’s large investment in Mexicali, including peoples. The disconnect between Rubio and Hill was part of the project to maintain lines of personal separation between workers and management as well as workers and transnational capital. Hill was the unnamed U.S. overseer of a plant spearheaded by Mattel and the Guajardos. Through his suit, Rubio made himself known to Hill, to Mextel, and the potential for workers to use the JLCA to claim their

²¹ Edmundo Sigler, “Cable de la Frontera,” *La Prensa*, March 25, 1969, 4, record 1775B-005, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DGIPS), Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico. Hereafter this archive will be referred to as DGIPS.

²² See Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: U of Arizona Press, 1997); Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001).

²³ Adislado Rubio Castañeda v. Mextel, at 1-4 (Mexicali 1967), in box 147, record 33, AHBC.

labor rights under Mexican law and create a sense of place regardless of the plans for anonymous management.

The procedural and legal strictures of the JLCA required empathetic labor lawyers to assist workers with navigation of the forum. Some lawyers were provided by the federal *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social* (Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare) while others were private attorneys.²⁴ Between 1967 and 1970, Manuel Luque Bórquez argued eleven cases for Mextel workers with the JLCA, including Adislado Rubio Castañeda.²⁵ He obtained indemnity awards in nine of those cases. Luque argued the most cases of any lawyer or firm against Mextel and KenMex. The strategies and language he employed showed how Luque and his clients contended the power of the Guajardos and U.S. capital. The majority of the cases he presented were indemnity for unjust firings, usually three-months' salary and any lost wages. The cases followed procedure, or, legal and bureaucratic formulae that provided a sense of predictability for the parties involved.

The use of the JLCA by women was part of a larger project to challenge the high turnover rates that management wanted from what it imagined as passive women.²⁶ The women in the Mextel cases, who made up nearly 67 percent of the cases filed during Mextel's existence, used the JLCA to protest a bourgeois culture focused on a revolving door of labor and low wages. Several workers were initially hired as apprentices in different departments, which included lower wages than non-apprentice workers and a six-month probationary period before moving up the wage hierarchy. *Mexicanas* at Mextel utilized the JLCA as an iteration of

²⁴ Only one person filed a labor case against Mextel without a lawyer. That person lost the case.

²⁵ Along with future Baja California governor Milton Castellanos Everardo, Ramón Luque Bórquez and Ignacio Guajardo founded the College of Lawyers of Mexicali in 1956. See "College of Lawyers," Public Deed 1,635, Vol.35, February 15, 1956, General Notary Archive of the State of Baja California, Mexicali.

²⁶ Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 119.

“feminism-in-nationalism.” As Chicana philosopher and historian Emma Pérez argues, “Women as agents have always constructed their own spaces interstitially, within nationalisms, nationalisms that often miss women’s subtle interventions.”²⁷ The cases brought forth by *mexicanas* was both a move against the assumed docility of women and a check against the company’s power while using the procedures and language of the state.

Mexicanas’ partnerships with Luque and the other labor lawyers were much more than a recovery of wages as they couched their positions under the procedures and language of the state. Nearly one year after the first case against Mextel, Manuel Luque Bórquez presented Mextel with the unjust firing cases of Carolina Romero Miranda and Rosa Delia Alegría Valenzuela in October 1968. The separate cases were similar in their demands and outcome. Romero was initially hired as an apprentice for six months and was fired prior to the conclusion of the apprenticeship. Romero wanted compensation for lost wages and her job back. No doubt she preferred steady employment to three months’ pay and the loss of her job. Luque was already negotiating with Mextel away from the JLCA at the time of the suit, but he shrewdly filed Romero’s claim with the JLCA in a dual strategy to pressure Mextel and ensure that her request remained within the statute of limitations—lest Mextel drag negotiations beyond the allotted timeframe.²⁸ Five weeks after the case was filed, Romero settled with Mextel for an amount “that satisfies the claimed benefits against [Mextel].”²⁹ It is not entirely clear if Romero obtained her job back in the settlement, but at the very least she did obtain some financial compensation from Mextel. Rosa Delia Alegría was hired as quality control for toy telephones and stated she was also fired without cause. Unlike Romero, Alegría sought indemnity and also settled with Mextel

²⁷ Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999), 33.

²⁸ Carolina Romero Miranda v. Mextel, at 1 (Mexicali 1968), box 162, record 18, AHBC.

²⁹ *Romero Miranda*, at 6.

with nearly identical language from Romero settlement.³⁰ Interestingly, in both cases Mextel provided no evidence or counterargument to the workers' claims, either as a nod to their unjustified firing or the company's desire to settle quickly with the least expenses for both parties.

Differences between what a worker perceived as their employment duties and the discipline Mextel desired could run afoul. In January 1969, Mextel fired toy telephone assembly worker Yolanda Lucero López. She worked for the company for nearly one year, which was one of the longer tenures of any of the workers who brought suit against Mextel. Manuel Luque Bórquez presented the case, but this time he faced stiff opposition from Mextel's vice president and main lawyer, Homero Guajardo.³¹ Lucero stated that Jesse Hill fired her because she refused to sweep the area around her workstation. According to her, sweeping was not part of her job description. Guajardo fired back and denied the basis of her suit by arguing that Lucero was fired with cause. The vice president and company lawyer argued that Lucero was not asked to sweep the area around her station. Rather, Lucero would "throw her work materials on the floor, and when asked to pick them up, she improperly refused to do so."³² She also appeared to show insubordination by refusing to take orders from her line supervisor, who claimed Lucero despised him.³³ Three months of court proceedings resulted in an undisclosed settlement for Lucero.

Yolanda Lucero López's case against Mextel was a of combination actions and reactions that led to her receiving financial compensation, but also an end to her employment. If Homero Guajardo's retorts are taken as fact—that Lucero threw material on the floor and was

³⁰ Rosa Delia Alegría Valenzuela v Mextel, at 6 (Mexicali 1968), box 162, record 27, AHBC.

³¹ This was the first JLCA case Homero Guajardo argued. He was also the last person to defend Mextel in the JLCA in 1973.

³² Yolanda Lucero López v Mextel, at 9 (Mexicali 1969), box 166, record 35, AHBC.

³³ *Lucero López*, at 10.

insubordinate to her supervisor—then she can be seen as an advocate for workers on the assembly line who denied the employer hierarchies necessary for fungible labor to be profitable and docile. She wanted to only perform the duties she was contractually obliged to execute. Dropping the plastic parts that made up Mattel’s toy telephones on the shop floor caused enough of a distraction for management that they pursued her dismissal. There was no suggestion that Lucero implemented guerrilla *tortugismo*—intentionally slowing down work.³⁴ Rather, she refused the discipline that the Guajardos tried to cultivate at Mextel and instead wanted to work with people she respected.

Lucero may have also influenced assembly line worker Bertha Lizarraga Leyva, whose times at Mextel overlapped and was also fired for insubordination. Lizarraga was dismissed in June 1969 after a coworker and her line supervisor got into a verbal argument regarding a lack of dye on the line. The supervisor threatened Lizarraga’s coworker with dismissal if she continued to “yell” at him. Lizarraga intervened and told her coworker to remain on the line and that the supervisor did not have the authority to fire her. After a brief disciplinary visit to the personnel office, Lizarraga “laughed” at the company’s actions, which further frustrated the supervisor. According to Guajardo, Lizarraga told her supervisor, “You’re a [person] just like me and you saw what they did to me in the [personnel] office, they don’t do anything to me.”³⁵ Lizarraga ultimately dropped the suit after six months of arbitration, but, like Lucero a few months before her, Mextel was notified that workplace hierarchies and obedience were not foregone conclusions because of the presence of a U.S. transnational company in Mexicali. These actions created a labor culture that challenged management and capital even upon pain of loss of employment.

³⁴ Peña, *The Terror of the Machine*, 112-116. *Tortugismo*, from the Spanish word for turtle.

³⁵ Bertha Lizarraga Leyva v Mextel, at 6 (Mexicali 1969), box 171, record 17, AHBC. The original record notes this page as number 6, but when counting serially, page 6 is actually page 10. I follow the pagination in the original.

Mextel retained the power to fire workers to suit its needs, including the early implementation of post-Fordist strategies. Jorge Carrillo and Kevin Middlebrook both identify this hire-and-fire plan as employers' desire for a flexible labor market and a post-Fordist strategy.³⁶ Yet, worker resistance in the *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* was a partially effective method to challenge Mextel's power. In September 1969, five workers sued Mextel after a large layoff at the plant. At no other point in the JLCA cases was there a single month or day that received as many registered complaints against the company. Felipe Mossa Valdéz, lawyer for two of these workers, plainly stated that the firings served little else but "to suit the interests of the company."³⁷ The maquilization of Mexicali was forwarded as a scheme to place northern Mexico as a node of industrial production on par with central Mexico and as a way to exercise its proximity to the U.S. for assembly production of transnational corporations.³⁸ As Mossa showed, maquilization also included a labor-management relationship that instructed workers on the primacy of the firm over the individual worker, or, those who were the backbone of industrialization in northern Mexico. The fired workers' positions ranged from supervisors to seamstress, reaffirming the apex rank of the company.

Mextel settled the suit of the five workers in less than eight days. The company did not protest the claims and its quick settlements also obscured the reasons for the firings. Mossa Valdéz was creative in the presentation of his clients' suit by grouping two male workers

³⁶ Jorge Carrillo Viveros, "Flexible Production in the Auto Sector: Industrial Reorganization at Ford-Mexico," *World Development* 23, no. 1 (1995): 87-101; Kevin J. Middlebrook, "The Politics of Industrial Restructuring: Transnational Firms' Search for Flexible Production in the Mexican Automobile Industry," *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 3 (Apr., 1991): 275-297. For an interesting interpretation against the Fordism/Post-Fordism dichotomy, see, Bruce Pietrykowski, "Beyond the Fordist/Post-Fordist Dichotomy: Working Through 'The Second Industrial Divide,'" *Review of Social Economy*, 57, no. 2 (June 1999): 177-198.

³⁷ Raymundo Gonzalez Zepeda and José Luis Vivar Rojas v Mextel, at 2 (Mexicali 1969), Box 174, record 18, AHBC.

³⁸ For integration, see chapter 2; "Concanaco, Concamin y SIC Iniciarán una Acción Conjuna e Inmediata en esa Zona," *Excelsior*, March 25, 1969, record 1775B-005, DGIPS. This article is concerned with the state of Chihuahua, pointing to an integration plan stretching the length of the U.S.-Mexico border.

together. As he put it, “It’s an intent we made to group the workers and obtain the best benefits from the company.”³⁹ Manuel Luque Bórquez also joined two female and one male worker in the same suit. Both lawyers’ strategies yielded full indemnity payment, demonstrating the possibility of a favorable conclusion by joining multiple workers in one suit. Yet, presenting a labor case as a group was not a guarantee of indemnity, as a suit by three male workers in September 1970 shows. Indeed, this September 1970 case spent three years in the JLCA court, longer than any other case against Mextel. The company exercised its rights under the labor law and placed the burden of proof on the workers, who each sought payment for overtime. When the last worker desisted his claim, Mextel effectively defended itself via attrition.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, workers at Mextel and their lawyers at times utilized a strategy that put Mextel on a quick settlement plan.

Unforeseen illness could result in a worker’s termination from Mextel, which followed the letter of the 1931 federal labor law. Doll assembly worker Evangelina Sánchez Escobar worked on the doll assembly line for nine months before she was fired in October 1969. By this time, Manuel Acosta replaced Jesse Hill as head of personnel. To be sure, replacement of a U.S. manager with a Mexican manager served to lend a local face to Mextel, but the power structure Acosta upheld reified class distinctions and muddled the dichotomy between U.S. and Mexican interests. Sánchez missed two weeks of work because she was interned at the national hospital, Mexican Social Security Institute (*Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*, IMSS), with an undisclosed illness. She supplied Acosta with the hospital’s paperwork as proof. Acosta dismissed the IMSS documentation and reiterated to Sánchez that she was fired. Homero Guajardo later stated that she was terminated because she missed four days of work in a thirty-day period; he made no mention of IMSS. Under Article 121 of the 1931 Mexican labor law, a

³⁹ *Gonzalez Zepeda and Vivar Rojas*, at 2.

⁴⁰ *Juan Cabrera Zavala, Juan Guzman Aguayo, and Ernesto Medina Romero v Mextel*, at 1, 24, 29 (Mexicali 1973), box 187, record 20, AHBC.

worker could be in breach of contract and lawfully terminated if they incurred three unexcused absences in a month.⁴¹ Guajardo made no mention of IMSS in his rebuttal, but did reaffirm Acosta's position that Sánchez missed work.

Evangelina Sánchez Escobar maneuvered the paternalism of maquilization to undermine Mextel's ability to fire with impunity. She originally sought indemnity and Guajardo's use of Article 121 of the Federal Labor Law appeared to end her suit. Six months after she filed her suit (and three months shy of her entire tenure at Mextel), the two sides reached an agreement in an otherwise closed case. Sánchez admitted to missing four days in October. But, she issued a final "appeal to the kindness of [Mextel's] representatives" and asked for "at least one month payment for the services she performed during her time with Mextel."⁴² Homero Guajardo responded that Mextel was going to pay her one-month salary as part of the agreement for Sánchez to admit that she missed four days.⁴³ In her study on patriarchy, Deniz Kandiyoti notes, "Even though these individual power tactics do little to alter the structurally unfavorable terms of the overall patriarchal script, women become experts in maximizing their own life chances."⁴⁴ Sánchez was versed in the paternalism of Mextel and appeased its patriarchal righteousness through the JLCA to obtain financial compensation to prepare for life beyond Mextel.

Perhaps no other set of labor cases or lawyer rhetoric encapsulates critique of the transnational dynamic of Mextel than those argued by lawyer Octavio Conde Quiroga. Conde was a person with variegated interests. He ran for the office of congressional representative (*diputado*) for Mexicali in 1961 and 1970 as a member of the Authentic Party of the Mexican

⁴¹ Federal Labor Law of 1931, *Diario Oficial*, vol. LXVII, no. 51. In particular, see Article 121, Subsection 10, 30.

⁴² Evangelina Sánchez Escobar v. Mextel, at 8 (Mexicali 1970), box 176, record 13, AHBC. The agreement was reached on May 19, 1970.

⁴³ Sánchez Escobar, at 8.

⁴⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society*, vol. 2, no. 3, Special Issue to Honor Jessie Bernard, (Sept. 1988), 280.

Revolution (*Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana*, PARM). The PARM was one of the many post-Revolutionary political parties that were generally subsumed under the aegis of the dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI). Prior to his political and legal career, Conde was an amateur actor in Mexicali's tent stages, where he developed the original character of *Sarapito*.⁴⁵ These venues helped launch the career of famed Mexican actors such as Mario Fortino Alfonso Moreno Reyes, who was better known as *Cantinflas*. Conde later became secretary of Mexicali's Vicente Guerrero branch of the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (*Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos*, CROC). It was in this capacity that he argued cases for Mextel workers in the JLCA. Between 1968 and 1970—the years Conde was active in the JLCA—Conde was the only known representative of any union to argue against Mextel in the JLCA.⁴⁶ Historian Jorge Carrillo Viveros notes that during the rebound of industry in the early 1980s, 15 percent of Mexicali's workforce was unionized while Tijuana saw an even lower rate of 5 percent.⁴⁷ Conde's labor arbitration efforts were indicative of his investment in worker rights, but also demonstrate worker wariness of unions in Baja California.

Octavio Conde Quiroga argued three cases in the JLCA, but the forceful and direct language of the cases outweighed their quantity. Maria Elena Torrecillas Ochoa was hired as an apprentice in August 1967 and fired a few days prior to the end of her contract. She claimed Jesse Hill unjustifiably fired her for missing three consecutive days without notification to Mextel management. Torrecillas produced paperwork from IMSS that instructed she be excused for three days to recover from an illness, which neither Hill nor Edmundo Guajardo Viderique

⁴⁵ Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, *La Gran Bonanza: Crónica Del Teatro En Baja California* (Mexicali: UABC Press, 2006), 101.

⁴⁶ Other lawyers included those in private practice and members of the STPS.

⁴⁷ Jorge Carrillo Viveros, "The Evolution of the Maquiladora Industry: Labor Relations in a New Context," in *Unions, Workers, and the State in Mexico*, edited by Kevin Middlebrook (1991), 229.

(son of Mextel president-treasurer Edmundo Guajardo) recognized as valid. Torrecillas's challenge to Mextel was not strictly based on indemnity. Torrecillas and Conde based the suit on Mextel undermining Mexican institutions and highlighted her necessity to work. When Hill and Guajardo refused the IMSS paperwork, Torrecillas and Conde took this as evidence of Mextel placing itself at the head of the post-Revolutionary state by neglecting the sanctity of the state's welfare system. As Torrecillas and Conde put it, they wanted a favorable ruling "for justice, humanity, and as an example to all the companies that violate the law and disparage the victories of the Mexican Revolution, such as IMSS, a majestic work of health and protection."⁴⁸ Along with Conde, Torrecillas positioned herself as the defender of the Revolution as even maquilization promised a new era of modernization.

Torrecillas also made it clear that she must work to live and contribute income to her family and was a qualified worker. She listed her father as the person "whom she depends on for all her daily necessities," signaling her labor as integral to the household income.⁴⁹ Moreover, Torrecillas informed the court that she learned all of the duties of her seamstress apprenticeship in two months and was prepared to take an skills test to prove her knowledge. The call to take a skills test served dual evidentiary strands to show that Torrecillas should be hired full-time (that is, beyond a finite apprenticeship) and a challenge to Mextel's lengthy apprentice system. Torrecillas and Conde clearly put forth her demand for job security and a higher wage, "[She] wants and needs this job."⁵⁰ Both worker and lawyer sought to get her job back; indeed, this is precisely what Torrecillas wanted rather than indemnity.⁵¹ The JLCA ruled in Mextel's favor and

⁴⁸ Maria Elena Torrecillas Ochoa v Mextel, at 3 (Mexicali 1968), box 155, record 29, AHBC.

⁴⁹ *Torrecillas Ochoa*, at 22.

⁵⁰ *Torrecillas Ochoa*, at 3.

⁵¹ *Torrecillas Ochoa*, at 1.

entitled Torrecillas to a month-and-a-half pay rather than three months, citing the original contract rather than the entire circumstances between worker and company.⁵²

The necessity for *mexicalicenses* to keep a job at Mextel was a dynamic that management utilized, but also one that workers contested. Torrecillas pointed out that she wanted to prove herself and make Jesse Hill reconsider his decision to terminate her. When Alicia Cuevas Magaña was fired in April 1970, she leveled an indictment against Mextel and other companies. Cuevas stated that there were so many people wanting to work and Mextel representatives merely walked to the fence of its property line and selected workers from a large pool. When a “humble [poor] person” like herself was selected, Mextel’s terms of employment overwhelmingly favored the company because Mextel possessed the “luxury” of hiring only those that signed exploitative contracts. With the necessity to obtain any form of employment they could, workers like Cuevas agreed to work at Mextel, which essentially “nulls” the contract because it was unfair from the outset. As she put it, workers “do not have the freedom to *not* sign...and they [Mextel and other companies] thus protect themselves with an apparent legality, which, ultimately, is prejudiced against the workers.”⁵³ Cuevas not only contested the sanctity of modernization via transnational companies, she also questioned the social and labor conditions *mexicalicenses* faced as a consequence of liberal economic policy across Mexico.

Rosalba Soto Lara was one of Conde’s last clients and she illuminated sexual harassment at Mextel. In early September 1970, Rosalba Soto Lara was fired from Mextel for the second time. Represented by Conde, the first firing was due Mextel’s claim of “lack of primary

⁵² Kevin Middlebrook points out that the labor and conciliation board system was intended to be procedurally flexible and mindful of separation of federal and local cases. Yet, the board did not take into consideration the larger political economy and histories of Mextel and Torrecillas, despite the favorable language of the 1917 Constitution and 193 labor law. See Middlebrook, *Paradox of Revolution*, 59-60, 188.

⁵³ Alicia Cuevas Magaña v Mextel, at 1 (Mexicali 1971), box 182, record 31, AHBC. It should be noted that Cuevas was signed as an apprentice first at a rate of 30 pesos per day, which was below minimum wage.

materials,” which was coded language for a management slowdown and layoffs. Such justifications were commonplace in the more ubiquitous electronics maquilas. Soto was hired back to perform numerous duties on the line, but soon contracted a stomach illness, which she blamed on the type of glue she handled at Mextel. Indeed, health risk concerns were commonplace for workers in assembly plants.⁵⁴ She was transferred to the doll assembly line where she installed pull strings on talking Barbies and was also under the eye of a new supervisor, Adán Ceja. He was already the subject of Bertha Lizarraga Leyva’s case in 1969, yet Soto added a different dimension to her suit. Soto claimed that her dismissal was due to her confrontation with Ceja over his pattern of sexual harassment on the line. Soto stated that she was treated unfairly, was “required to work more than her body and hands could manage and repeated transgressions on my person, an honest woman, by Supervisor Adán...who likes to touch women workers’ hands and other parts.”⁵⁵ Soto went on to describe Ceja as supervisor “who turned out to be predacious and disrespectful to women [*lépero*]...and naturally had his favorites and his victims.” That is, Ceja felt entitled to access to women’s bodies because of his position with Mextel. The final straw for Soto was when Ceja “provoked me when he grabbed my hands without my consent and I protested. He complained to the personnel manager [Manuel Acosta] to fire me and so it was.”⁵⁶ She added that no less than five other women were fired for the same reason.⁵⁷ Significantly, Soto’s allegations were entered into the record.

Soto sued Mextel for her profit share as well as indemnity. Profit share (*reparto de utilidades*) was a percentage of a firm’s profits over the course of a year that was redistributed to workers. Soto and Conde lambasted Mextel and Mattel for the way the company accumulated

⁵⁴ Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers*, 11-12.

⁵⁵ Rosalba Soto Lara v Mextel, at 1, (1970), box 187, record 10, AHBC.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

profits, “What a joke by Mextel and it’s *prestanmobres* that represent that company with capital clearly North American [U.S.] that needs over a thousand workers, that accumulates large profits, with minimum wage and boasts of its *reparto de utilidades* in that form.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, she and Conde sought the *reparto*, “Regardless if it’s the laughable amount of \$2.50” pesos or \$24.50 pesos senior workers receive, precisely because it was legally owed to her. The demand for the *reparto* was dually symbolic as Soto positioned herself as a supporter Mexican labor law and used the *reparto* as a way to critique the transnational dynamic of wages and outsourcing. Like her statements against Ceja’s harassment, Soto and Conde showed the power wielded by management and capital at Mextel, but also made themselves into bulwarks for women and Mexico against that very power. Conde used a similar strategy in a different September 1970 suit and pondered if the JLCA “will cease the mockery that is done to women and the laws of Mexico.”⁵⁹ Soto’s case was settled in one month for one-third indemnity of what she originally sought with no mention of Ceja’s alleged sexual harassment in the settlement.

While cases were deliberated in the JLCA, workers at Mextel were increasingly demonstrative in public of their frustrations with the company. Labor relations conflicts were already on an accelerated pace since late 1969. That year, workers filed nineteen JLCA cases against the company, the most cases against Mextel’s in its history. Workers continued the trend and filed seventeen cases against Mextel in 1970. Together, cases in 1969-1970 were 80 percent of JLCA suits against the company. Moreover, women overwhelmingly filed during this peak period, countering the imagined docility critical to investment in maquilas. In 1971, however, no new labor cases were filed with the JLCA against Mextel for the remainder of the company’s existence in Mexicali. In early September 1972, eight workers were accused by management of

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ Estela Valdez Ibarra v Mextel, at 1 (Mexicali 1973), box 187, record 22, AHBC. This suit was dropped by the female worker for unspecified reasons.

theft and were taken to jail. In a display of worker solidarity and incredulity of the company's word, over 300 Mextel workers gathered on September 11, 1972, and marched through the streets of the neighborhood of *Pueblo Nuevo*. The workers' arrest was the catalyst for the demonstration, but frustration with Mextel pressurized as quickly as six months since it opened. Protestors reflected this resentment in their call for fair treatment from Mextel and "condemned the passive attitude of [Mextel] administrators who do not know how come out in defense of workers' rights."⁶⁰ Mextel workers came under the purview of the CTM in 1970 and, after a rank-and-file campaign, Enrique de Jesús Ríos Rivas led the union as his supporters ousted unelected union representatives.⁶¹ Ríos Rivas maintained pressure to get the eight workers their jobs back while Homero Guajardo petitioned the JLCA to rescind their contracts for misconduct.

Between 1974 and 1975, workers at Mextel confronted the company and Baja California on minimum wage rates. Debates for a wage jump were underway by August 1974 and the regional commissioner for minimum wages stated that the general raise was necessary to put Baja California on par with other major developing regions in Mexico.⁶² Soon after the commissioner's statement, businesses argued that the wage increase was detrimental to Baja California since it eliminated the "competitive edge" with the United States.⁶³ The "edge" rested on Baja California wages being low enough to entice and keep transnational firms in the state. With a wage boost, the value of labor went up and so would the tariff on import to the U.S., potentially making maquilas not financially viable for transnational corporations seeking to maximize profits via low wages. Even worse for businesspeople, capital could fly to other

⁶⁰ "Manifestacion de Protesta de 300 Obreros Contra Mex-Tel," *La Voz*, September 11, 1972, record 1115-003, DGIPS.

⁶¹ "Border Crisis 1975: Workers Strike, Shops Move," vol. 9, no. 5, *Latin America and Empire Report* (July-August 1975), North American Congress on Latin America, 16.

⁶² "Salario Equilibrado con el Diferencial Proponen para Baja California," *La Voz*, August 8, 1974, 2, record 1118-001, DGIPS. The minimum wage commissioner, Ricardo Equia Balderrama, was also president of the JLCA when Mextel closed in early 1975.

⁶³ "Las Maquiladoras en Peligro si Suben los Sueldos," *La Voz*, August 9, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

regions and countries.⁶⁴ Mexicali's chamber of commerce mentioned that President Luis Echeverría's measures to combat inflation were already operating effectively and any parties who wanted changes to the president's formula were interested in "breaking the progress of the nation."⁶⁵

The chamber of commerce no doubt was mindful of organized labor's push for the higher minimum wage. In a demonstration of unions' power, the CROM and the CTM both sought a 35 percent increase for workers in unionized sites under their respective organizations. To drive the point, unions were prepared for a strike until a wage increase materialized. The CROC also favored a wage increase, but stated, "Special treatment [no strikes] will be provided for maquiladoras" and "only those firms that can pay the increase without disappearing" were the ones it would target for the strike.⁶⁶ Less than a week later, the CROC stated that it was to go on strike against the 107 firms under its collective bargaining contract, but still exempted the 38 maquiladoras it represented.⁶⁷ By August 20, 1974, the CROM and CTM both carried out their proposed strike on a total of 42 firms, including Mextel and its 2,100 workers.⁶⁸ The CTM and the CROM made such a show of unity and force that the president of the JLCA requested employees work overtime to receive and file all of organized labor's claims.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ "Información de Tijuana: Los Representates de la Asociación Nacional de Maquiladoras Expresan Hoy su Temor de un Aumento de Salarios, que Indudablemente Afectaria la Industria Local," August 14, 1974, 1-2, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁶⁵ "El Comercio Local Contra el Alza en los Salarios Minimos," *La Voz*, August 12, 1974, 1-2, record 1118-001, DGIPS. The original document dates the article as July 12, but this was an error by the compiler or typist.

⁶⁶ "Medida de la CROC en la Demanda Salarial," *El Mexicano*, August 14, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁶⁷ "Decidió la CROC dar Trato Especial a las Maquiladoras al Exigir Aumento de Sueldos," *La Voz*, August 19, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁶⁸ "Información de Mexicali: La C.R.O.M. Presentó 10 Emplazamientos a Huelga y la C.T.M. por su Parte, Presentó Otros 3," August 20, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS. As indicated, the CTM already placed other unions on strike, including the Oil Workers (non-petroleum) union. See "Información de Mexicali: El Titular de la JCCyA, Informó que la Sección 44 del Sindicato Nacional de la Industria Aceitera (CTM) Emplazó Hoy a Huelga a las Empresas," August 15, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁶⁹ "Información de Mexicali: La C.R.O.M. Presentó 10 Emplazamientos a Huelga y la C.T.M. por su Parte, Presentó Otros 3," August 20, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

Not to be outshone, some firms in the Chamber of Commerce of Baja California also went on a symbolic strike for one hour on August 27, 1974.⁷⁰ The chamber informed its members that it protested a wage increase under “current conditions,” the effects of which would be “disastrous” to the state.⁷¹ The group also issued a 22-point bulletin to workers in the state, some of which reiterated previous arguments of an economy on the verge of collapse and impending capital flight if a higher minimum wage passed. The bulletin also linked campesinos, migrants from other parts of Mexico, and maquiladoras. The chamber argued that campesinos were already having difficulties with low cotton prices, reflecting the precarious presence of the cotton industry in the post-salinity and pink bollworm crisis discussed in chapter 2. A wage increase only served to make farming materials more expensive, “leading to another agricultural disaster like the one we had a few years ago.”⁷²

The chamber also connected national and regional liberal economic policy with what it perceived as undesirable migration to northern states. In its rebuke of a higher minimum wage, the chamber argued that migrants from other parts of Mexico already went to Baja California for higher wages. With unemployment already high, a pay increase would increase unemployment and migration, exacerbating Baja California’s struggles. The bulletin made a passing mention of the *zona libre* and how a higher minimum wage could favor U.S. retailers since they “buy in bulk and can sell at lower prices,” prices Baja California merchants were unable to compete with since the general price of goods was feared to also go up. In effect, the chamber argued that a U.S. product dump was manufactured by Mexico City policy.⁷³ After the strike, the Coordinating Committee of Organized Businesses of Baja California confidently declared the shut down a

⁷⁰ “Información de Ensenada: La Camara de Comercio de Baja California, Determino que Mañana Cierren Sus Puertas los Comercios e Industrias,” August 26, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3.

“resounding success.”⁷⁴ Like organized labor, businesses also believed their cause to be just. Read critically, the coordinating committee and the chamber of commerce protested the minimum wage out of a concern of loss of power, priority, and dividends. They also resisted organized labor’s upper hand in public relations during Luis Echeverría’s presidency—one that exhorted public spending and a strain of nationalism similar to Lázaro Cárdenas—and a state minimum wage commission eager to increase wages.⁷⁵ Moreover, the chamber revealed the differential understanding of movement, where migrants were imagined as a burden and U.S. capital as a central component of economic and social development.

In a meeting in Mexico City in mid-September 1974, the CROC and businesspeople agreed on a 22-percent minimum wage increase.⁷⁶ The CTM, CROM, Baja California governor Milton Castellanos, and Baja California businesses were quickly displeased with the deal. The CTM and CROM still pushed for a 35 percent boost while Castellanos favored a series of vaguely defined studies to determine a wage increase that reflected the state’s economic context. Moreover, he favored an increase only on a case-by-case basis while maquiladoras should receive “special treatment” (read: exempt) from wage increases.⁷⁷ Tellingly, Ricardo Equia Balderrama—who served as the regional minimum wage commissioner of Baja California and was also president of Mexicali’s JLCA—adjusted his earlier support for a pay boost to one that aimed at making Baja California an exception to the 22 percent increase.⁷⁸ Nevertheless,

⁷⁴ “La Industria Paró en su Mayoría, el Comercio se Dividió en el Movimiento,” *La Voz*, August 28, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁷⁵ Michael Snodgrass, “How Can We Speak of Democracy in Mexico?: Workers and Organized Labor in the Cárdenas and Echeverría Years,” in *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, edited by Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 168-173.

⁷⁶ “Información de Mexicali: Hoy a las 20:30 horas se dio a Conocer por Medio de las Estaciones de Radio,” Sept. 13, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁷⁷ “Información de Mexicali: En Declaraciones de Prensa,” September 17, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁷⁸ “Confían las Autoridades que Baja California Será una Excepción en el Aumento de los Sueldos,” *La Voz*, Sept. 15, 1974, 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

maquilas and other businesses complied with the order and on September 24, 1974, Homero Guajardo, Mextel, and the CTM agreed to the wage increase, ending the strike and demonstrating the power of collective action.⁷⁹

Two months later in November of 1974, Mextel buzzed with activity. Rather than roaring machinery, this activity was caused by Mextel's request to the JLCA to suspend 562 workers starting on December 1, 1974. Workers already suspected the company of surreptitious plans in early November. The union and company met to pledge mutual support and transparency. Homero Guajardo even urged workers to increase production so as to lessen any potential financial losses.⁸⁰ The maquila that was once the "most important in the number of workers in the northeast of Mexico" with a peak workforce of 3,000, Mextel cited a lack of primary materials and components for production. It also cited the recession in the United States and its precarious influence on the global market.⁸¹ Tensions continued to rise as the CTM refused to accept the suspension, Homero Guajardo increased the suspension to 909 workers, and on December 3, workers established a perimeter around Mextel to prevent machinery and raw materials from leaving the maquila under cover of darkness.⁸² Workers also demonstrated in front of the governor's mansion to bring their fight to the center of the city rather than secluded in the factory.

Workers at Mextel did not want to lose their jobs. They sought to keep their jobs, to maintain production, and to have their labor rights respected and upheld. On January 17, 1975, the JLCA ruled that Mextel rehire the suspended workers or pay them over 5 million pesos.

⁷⁹ "Información de Mexicali: La Ensambladora de Juguetes 'Mextel' S.A. Reanudará Labores el Próximo día 27," 1, record 1118-001, DGIPS.

⁸⁰ "Información de Mexicali: Hoy se Celebró una Plática Ante la JLCA," Nov. 11, 1974, 1-2, record 1118-003, DGIPS.

⁸¹ Información de Mexicali: La Maquiladora 'Mextel', S.A., Solicitó a la J.L.C.A., Nov. 28, 1974, 1, record 1118-003, DGIPS.

⁸² "Información de Mexicali: Grupos de Trabajadores de la Maquiladora 'Mextel', S.A. de C.V.," Dec. 18, 1974, 1, record 1118-004, DGIPS.

Mextel, however, refused to comply with the order. Less than a month later, Mextel closed its doors. When the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) broke the story to its readership in an issue dedicated to transnational firms, it pointed out that for the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) at Mextel, “Their concept of union-building seldom went beyond the need for self-protection within the given framework of Mexican labor laws.”⁸³ NACLA identified that part of the difficulty of contesting capitalism on the borderlands were the very laws established to protect workers against unfair employers, which was made more troublesome with the presence of U.S. companies. Another hurdle was the labor movement in Mexico itself, which left many workers suspicious of union bosses and their relationships with politicians. A major obstacle, perhaps the largest one, was the transnational bourgeoisie. In lieu of submitting to the JLCA or petitioning Mattel, Mextel and the Guajardos preferred to shut down the plant. Workers who filed claims in the JLCA—and those unnamed peoples who experienced similar issues but refrained from arbitration—demanded justice from Mextel and questioned the legitimacy of transnational capitalism in Mexicali. Their arguments articulated a grassroots labor consciousness that emerged from experiences on the shop floor and led to demonstrations that went beyond the JLCA and Mexican labor laws.

There was a much different environment at the large U.S. transnational firm Kenworth Mexicana (KenMex). The majority of the cases in the JLCA were filed by men and most ended in mutual agreement of termination with some severance. Out of 54 cases between 1961 and 1975 (some with more than one worker on the petition), 57 male and 7 female workers appeared in suits. There were also no strikes at KenMex during the accelerated development of transnational firms in Mexicali. KenMex differed significantly from Mextel in ownership and labor force. As shown in chapter 2, Gustavo Vildósola Castro saw himself as ushering an era of

⁸³ “Border Crisis 1975,” 17.

prosperity and growth for Mexicali. Part of the formula for growth was the maintenance of a satisfied workforce. Vildósola often carried out company picnics and ensured there was no shortage of food, especially beef. He was also hostile to unions. Aiding Vildósola was worker wariness of corrupt unions that extracted dues with little labor action.⁸⁴ The overwhelmingly male workforce was also paid well.⁸⁵ Not only did this reflect industrial assumptions about the earnings of a gendered labor force, it also kept unions out in an environment invested in ideas racialized Mexican labor on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Section 2: Making Law in the Fields

Since the first UFW strike in Delano in 1965, agriculture remained outside the scope of comprehensive farm labor legislation. In 1935, the heralded passage of the National Labor Relations Act and the establishment of the National Labor Relations Board exempted farm and domestic workers from coverage, many of whom Mexican, Filipino, and African Americans.⁸⁶ California politicians, including Imperial Valley state assemblymen and later Congressman Victor V. Veysey, introduced farm labor legislation, but made little traction and failed to win over the UFW because of strict strike and boycott provisions.⁸⁷ Political momentum swung in the United Farm Workers direction with the 1975 gubernatorial victory of Edmund “Jerry” Brown along with Los Angeles assemblymen Richard Alatorre and Howard Berman.⁸⁸ The UFW previously resisted farm labor legislation and the establishment of boards composed of former

⁸⁴ Evelia García, interview by Michael D. Aguirre, January 23, 2016, Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. Interview in author’s possession.

⁸⁵ “Border Crisis 1975,” 17.

⁸⁶ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 111.

⁸⁷ For example, see “CA A.B No.1333, July 17, 1969;” “CA A.B. 964, March 15, 1971;” “Tentative Draft, Mr. Veysey, National Farm Labor Relations Board, 92nd Congress, 1st session, circa 1971,” in Box 5, Folder 1, Victor V. Veysey Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. Many of the proposed acts did not permit the secondary boycott, one of the UFW’s most effective tactics.

⁸⁸ Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Strategy, and the Organization in the California Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 234.

governor Ronald Reagan appointees that could heavily skew laws and decisions in favor of growers. However, the UFW did support farm labor legislation under Brown. In May 1975, the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of California (ALRA) was passed and on September 2, the offices of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) were set to open and receive petitions from workers.⁸⁹

Passage and implementation of the ALRA was significant and introduced the time-consuming gauntlet of the ALRB. For the first time, farmworkers in California could choose collective bargaining, conduct union elections via secret ballot, file claims of unfair labor practices, and have growers pay make-whole agreements.⁹⁰ Farmworkers were able to select the union that they wanted rather than have growers sign sweetheart deals that mitigated the voice of workers in the fields. Moreover, the ALRA established the ALRB, which was the main body that heard complaints and ruled on cases. The ALRB was composed of a five-person committee, one of whom—LeRoy Chatfield—was a former UFW organizer.⁹¹ Before cases reached the full board, they passed through local ALRB offices. Depending on the type of complaint, either an administrative law officer (ALO) or an investigative hearing examiner (IHE) conducted hearings at the local ALRB offices.⁹² If an appeal was filed, then the ALRB heard the case. Decisions could be appealed further to the California state courts and ultimately to the U.S. Supreme Court. The ALRB developed much of its precedence from National Labor Relations Board cases as well as the California courts and U.S. Supreme Court. Indeed, the ALRB nullified some its previous rulings based on new U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

⁸⁹ Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*, 234; Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2012), 145-146.

⁹⁰ Garcia, *Jaws of Victory*, 148.

⁹¹ Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*, 234.

⁹² For the purposes of this study, I collectively term these the ALRB.

This section focuses on labor cases filed by the United Farm Workers as a way to understand the ways that the UFW provided an alternative interpretation of labor and immigration law to undermine the power of growers in exploiting farmworkers, undocumented, commuter/resident, and citizen alike. This section will also look beyond the Imperial Valley to other parts of California and, in two instances, Arizona. Indeed, it is necessary to look outside of the Imperial Valley to understand the ways the UFW exercised the ALRB and impacted definitions of racialized labor, even ones that it relied on and reified during the mid-1960s and 1970s. While the ALRA and ALRB caused concern among UFW leadership in terms of the shift from visible protests in the fields to legalistic debates in board hearings along with the backlog of cases, the union looked beyond the Cartesian break of citizen/non-citizen, U.S./Mexico, modern/belated subjectivity and created new meanings of labor and borders beyond the contiguous U.S.-Mexico border.⁹³ In this form of “border thinking” the UFW exercised the ALRB to demand labor rights for transborder workers and ensure its own survival.⁹⁴

The Imperial Valley cities of El Centro and Holtville contained the two ALRB offices in the area. The UFW filed the vast majority of cases at these offices. Out of seventeen cases that dealt with labor issues from 1975 through 1980, eight involved the 1979 Imperial Valley strike.⁹⁵ The location of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands did not translate to numerous cases involving questions of undocumented, resident, or commuter labor. Instead, cases dealt with questions of unfair labor practices including undercounting of potential union voters and arbitrary wage hikes by growers. Coupled with UFW activists who were targeted and/or blacklisted for dismissal for

⁹³ For UFW frustrations with the ALRA and ALRB, see Miriam Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and the Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 156.

⁹⁴ Cite Mignolo

⁹⁵ This number was derived by noting the dates when complaints were first filed, not when the complaint was adjudicated. For example, in *Joe Maggio, Inc.*, 4 ALRB No. 37 (CA 1978), the initial complaint stemmed from a 1976 complaint and ruled in 1978.

their organizing efforts, raising wages was a tactic used by growers to undermine the UFW's campaign efforts. In a case stemming from 1975 and decided in 1979, the ALRB determined that lettuce grower Mario Saikhon fired pro-UFW workers and replaced them with pro-Teamster crews in an effort to reduce the presence of pro-UFW voices in his fields. As was shown in the hearing, employment was contingent on a worker favoring the Teamsters. Moreover, four workers were fired because "the boss [Saikhon] does not want people who live in Mexico or who are Chavistas," that is supporters of Chavez.⁹⁶ The latter claim was a widespread sentiment among anti-UFW growers, but the former qualification was rare. Saikhon's demand that workers not live in Mexico belies the rhetoric and actuality that U.S. growers and businesses depended on laborers from Mexico to allow their companies to thrive. As was shown in chapter three, labor unions since the 1950s reinforced the lines of the international border and citizenship to secure jobs for their members. Unions charged that growers hired undocumented or commuter workers from Mexico to maintain low wages and freeze unionization in the fields. However, Saikhon did *not* want to hire workers who lived in Mexico as he inflated his crews with pro-Teamster workers to sign a sweetheart contract.

Saikhon's apparent break from over twenty years of grower practices was due in part to the expanding efforts of the UFW, commuter workers, and undocumented peoples. The relationship between the UFW, commuter and undocumented workers was highly uneven. As early as 1967, commuter workers already supported the UFW and sought collective bargaining in anti-union Arizona, but the UFW remained ambivalent of commuter workers and their presence

⁹⁶ Mario Saikhon, Inc., 5 ALRB No. 44, at 37 (CA 1979). The cases are cited here according to the case names. All ALRB decisions can be accessed at: https://www.alrb.ca.gov/legal_searches/decision_index/decision_index_default.shtml.

in the fields.⁹⁷ Compounding the issue was the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Saxbe v. Bustos* (1974), the conclusion of the “Wet Line” in late 1974, and the backlash from the Phoenix boycott team.⁹⁸ During the 1975-1976 Imperial Valley unionization campaign, the UFW needed election observers to ensure that there was no pressure or fraud from growers. 55 of the 106 UFW observers lived in Mexicali.⁹⁹ That is, over half of the peoples entrusted to carry out fair elections in Imperial Valley fields were transborder workers. The UFW was initially clear about its antipathy toward undocumented workers, but then debated how to approach these same workers in 1975. Jerry Cohen, the UFW’s main lawyer, pointed out that undocumented workers would most likely be allowed to vote in union elections since the ALRA made no mention of immigration status. Richard and Manuel Chavez argued that undocumented workers should be organized while Cesar Chavez and Gilbert Padilla were against it.¹⁰⁰ In August 1975, the union took an official position to organize undocumented workers as a way to counteract employer recruitment, hiring, and strikebreaking.¹⁰¹

Two labor cases from San Diego, California, illuminate the tenuous relationship between commuter workers, the UFW, and undocumented workers. In 1976, the Kawano tomato firm fired 53 commuter workers from Tijuana, Baja California, after the company discovered that they were UFW supporters. During the summer of 1975, Kawano learned that the *tijuanenses* (peoples from Tijuana) took time from work to reach out to undocumented workers in an attempt to organize them as well. The *tijuanenses* were well aware that undocumented workers formed a

⁹⁷ “Workers at Macchiaroli Ranch in Arizona,” circa 1967, 1-4, box 23, folder 1, UFW Cesar Chavez Papers, Office of the President, Part 1, Series III, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated as CCP, Pt.1, S.3.

⁹⁸ See chapter 3.

⁹⁹ “Election, Calexico Staff Lists, 1975-76,” box 6, folder 20, Marshall Ganz Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated as MGP.

¹⁰⁰ Garcia, *Jaws of Victory*, 149-150.

¹⁰¹ Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011), 511.

core component of the farm's labor force and any successful campaign depended on developing a relationship with undocumented workers beyond casual conversation in the rows. As a company foreman stated, "Everybody knew that the legals from Tijuana were the driving force behind the union campaign."¹⁰² The ALRB further characterized these workers "as the strongest and most active supporters of the UFW."¹⁰³ Kawano fired them to "discourage such activities" and keep the farm without a collective bargaining body.¹⁰⁴ The ALRB decided in favor of the *tijuanenses* and ordered Kawano to pay restitution. Just as important for the farm labor movement was that commuter workers were central in this organizing drive, they looked beyond citizenship to demand collective bargaining, and the UFW represented both workers in the ALRB.

In the strawberry and tomato fields of Nagata Brothers Farms, commuter workers from Tijuana once more demanded the right to organize in 1977. Nagata Farms was located outside of Oceanside in San Diego County and, like Kawano, actively employed undocumented workers. The *tijuanenses* and the UFW did not decry the employment of undocumented workers; rather, they sought access to the undocumented workers' dwellings to speak to them. The case revealed that the undocumented workers lived on Nagata property in makeshift housing, which consisted of "plastic tents and boxes."¹⁰⁵ That is, the workers were deprived of adequate housing despite working for Nagata and living on company property. The commuter workers from Tijuana wanted to dialogue with the undocumented workers at the places they called home, but Nagata refused them entry and even denied that workers lived on its property or in the makeshift

¹⁰² Kawano Inc., 4 ALRB No. 104 at 11 (CA 1978). The field was located in San Luis Rey in northern San Diego County.

¹⁰³ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* at 52.

¹⁰⁵ Nagata Brothers Farms, 5 ALRB No. 39 at 8 (CA 1979).

housing.¹⁰⁶ Even the Border Patrol confirmed that undocumented workers lived on the premises, though agents only verified this for dates prior to the UFW complaint.¹⁰⁷ The *tijuanenses*, however, noted that people did live there, but in less numbers than in previous seasons. They also provided details into the workday of commuter and undocumented workers, especially when the latter purchased food from catering trucks. Though undocumented workers sometimes used a propane stove at the farm to cook, their daily food purchases from the truck and none by the *tijuanenses* indicated that undocumented workers did not have access to refrigerated or fresh food to prepare on a regular basis.¹⁰⁸ The ALRB confirmed that undocumented workers lived on Nagata property and decided in favor of the UFW. The push to organize by commuter workers resulted in the UFW's ability to access the makeshift housing built by undocumented workers.¹⁰⁹

The Nagata case also indicated the continuation of stratified labor classes, but also the crucial move to organize beyond legal status. Commuter workers from Tijuana identified the undocumented workers as “illegals” and “wetbacks.”¹¹⁰ However, their testimony regarding denial of access to homes and the conditions in which undocumented workers lived also showed an interest in labor organizing rather than deportation. Nagata was also keen on segregating the “locals” (as he correctly labeled undocumented workers) into their own crews and policed their spaces.¹¹¹ When the *tijuanenses* approached undocumented workers after hours, Nagata's foreman picked up half of the undocumented peoples and moved them to a different place on the

¹⁰⁶ *Id.* at 3, 13.

¹⁰⁷ *Id.* at 7-8.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.* at 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ The issue of employing and “harboring” undocumented workers came up during the hearings. While it was not a crime for Nagata and other employers to hire undocumented workers, it was a punishable offense if they knowingly housed undocumented peoples. Nagata tried to skirt the issue when arguing that no housing was provided and the workers were in effect squatters. The Administrative Law Officer and the ALRB both did not seek to determine if Nagata operated a labor camp. See *Id.* at 16. The board pointed out that neither California nor federal law classified employment of undocumented workers as harboring. See *O. P. Murphy Produce Co., Inc.* 4 ALRB No. 62 at 21 (CA 1978).

¹¹⁰ *Nagata Brothers*, 5 ALRB No. 39 at 5-6.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 5-6.

farm in a ploy to not have the UFW speak with them.¹¹² The foreman's actions reified the notion that commuter workers were strong UFW activists and undocumented workers were a labor force that required extra control, even forced removal. The *tijuanenses* acknowledged the hierarchies of labor that previously functioned as a wall to organizing. After all, they were not removed from workspaces or lived on hillsides in tents. Yet, they saw a common need between commuter and undocumented worker, between "legal" and "illegal" to organize. They understood that Mexicans were a racialized labor force and a crucial strategy to mitigate its effects was through transborder organizing.

The Agricultural Labor Relations Board cases in San Diego County illuminate the ways that commuter, undocumented, and UFW members alike struggled to have representation in the fields beyond unwritten assurances by employers. For Saikhon in the Imperial Valley, Mexican workers wore out their welcome the moment they ceased to be field instruments and they forced him to see Mexicans as peoples with the right to work, the right to move, the right to organize. The UFW dealt a further blow to Saikhon in 1977 while the case of Saikhon's use of pro-Teamster crews was still in the hands of the ALRB. In late March 1977, a Saikhon foreman in Welton, Arizona, fired lettuce worker Efraín Robles. Welton was the same irrigation project that increased the Imperial-Mexicali's water salinity since 1961 (see chapter 2). Saikhon's company alleged it employed an excess number of workers and Robles was on the low end of the seniority scale.¹¹³ After much confusion and obfuscation about the accounting of work periods for seniority purposes at the company, the administrative law officer of the ALRB determined that the skilled Robles was fired and not rehired because he was a known and highly active member of the UFW. Indeed, Robles served as his crew's UFW representative during a strike against

¹¹² *Id.* at 11-12.

¹¹³ Mario Saikhon, Inc., 4 ALRB No. 72 at 8-10 (CA 1978).

Saikhon in February 1976.¹¹⁴ In October 1978, the ALRB upheld the administrative law officer's findings and ruling and ordered Robles to be reinstated for the 1978 lettuce season and financial compensation.¹¹⁵

Efraín Robles's case was a victory for the UFW for two key reasons. First, the UFW's Lupe Gamboa and Deidre Olsen successfully proved Saikhon's anti-union animus once more and obtained job and financial restitution for Robles. The union showed members and potential members that it was capable of delivering concrete results in cases that frustratingly took years to settle. Secondly, the UFW and the ALRB applied the ALRA to workers with Mexican citizenship and who worked in a different state. In Robles's case, it was Arizona. Saikhon almost immediately attempted to nullify Robles's claim when it argued that his dismissal occurred when he was working in Welton, Arizona. According to Saikhon, the ALRA did not apply outside of California.¹¹⁶ The administrative law officer and the board disagreed. The officer initially concluded that Robles was represented by the UFW and he worked for several months in Salinas and the Imperial Valley. The officer noted, "His [Robles] status as a California farm worker for a large part of the year entitles him to the protection of the Act." Robles also commuted daily from Calexico to Welton for work during the period of his dismissal, meaning that he was recruited in California to work in Arizona. The officer concluded, "His [Robles] extensive contacts with California as an agricultural worker entitle him to protection under the Act."¹¹⁷ The board determined in 1978 that Robles was covered by the ALRA, citing a 1935 U.S. Supreme Court case on workers contracted in California for the Alaska fishing industry.¹¹⁸ The UFW was able to

¹¹⁴ *Id.* at 5, 10.

¹¹⁵ *Id.* at 13.

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at 3.

¹¹⁷ *Id.* at 15. The board upheld the decision in October 1978. See *Id.* at 6-7.

¹¹⁸ The case was *Alaska Packers Association v. Industrial Accident Commission of California* 294 U.S. 532 (1935). See *Saikhon*, 4 ALRB No. 72 at 4-5.

cross international and state borders to reflect the working lives of farmworkers. Moreover, the union undermined Saikhon's double use the borderlands as both a place hosting a surplus Mexican labor pool and exploiting the legal divisions that borders can create.

The United Farm Workers also made creative use of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board to obtain temporary visa permits for members to remain in the U.S. Cases in the ALRB could be ruled in as little as two weeks, one year, or five years.¹¹⁹ The ALRB's general counsel and Immigration and Naturalization Service put in place an informal agreement that granted 30-day permits to witnesses in a labor case. These permits covered farmworkers in the U.S. on a temporary work permit and undocumented workers. The determination to grant the permit was at the discretion of the INS, which appeared to put limited objections to the ALRB's requests.¹²⁰ Though the INS permits were well known to both growers and the UFW, the more looming threat was deportation. Growers attempted to dissuade workers from joining the UFW, no doubt reminding workers of the union's position in previous years and even going so far as to threaten workers with deportation if a company voted for the UFW.¹²¹ In a 1979 case in Salinas, a company sought to charge the UFW with unfairly using the permits to coerce workers to sign with the UFW.¹²² The UFW's cases put in motion the potential to temporarily stay an undocumented worker's removal or formal deportation process.

Agustín Baltazar's work with the UFW epitomized the ALRB-INS-UFW permit dynamic. Baltazar initially filed an unfair labor practice case against J.R. Norton in 1977. Norton, like many other lettuce growers, operated in the "harvest circuit" that stretched from

¹¹⁹ This timeframe includes the exhaustion of ALRB procedures including filing, hearings, initial rulings, and final board review. See Eugene Acosta et al., 1 ALRB No. 1 (CA 1975); Sam Andrews' Sons, 11 ALRB No. 5 (CA 1985).

¹²⁰ *Veg-A-Mix*, 5 ALRB No. 14 at 5-7 (CA 1979).

¹²¹ Paul W. Bertuccio & Bertuccio Farms, 5 ALRB No. 5 at 5, 13, 22 (CA 1979); Mission Packing Company, Inc., 8 ALRB No. 14 at 15-17 (1982).

¹²² *Veg-A-Mix*, 5 ALRB No. 14 at 14-18. The complaint stemmed from 1978 and the board ruled in 1979. The charge was dismissed.

New Mexico, Arizona, and California.¹²³ Baltazar served on the UFW contract negotiating committee in Salinas and traveled to Blythe, California following the lettuce route.¹²⁴ When Baltazar arrived in Blythe and reported for work at Norton, the company demanded that he show his green card (*mica*) “knowing that he didn’t have one.”¹²⁵ Norton’s action strongly suggested that the company denied Baltazar work as retribution for his role in the UFW. The union was able to acquire three 30-day permits for him as the unfair labor practice case developed. The INS refused to issue a fourth because “the Board [ALRB] refused to cooperate by giving a tentative hearing date.”¹²⁶ Baltazar left Norton and joined the behemoth Bud Antle company in Eloy, Arizona, in early March 1978. Baltazar’s interest in pursuing the unjust firing waned because the UFW was unable to obtain more temporary permits for him. This meant that Baltazar “is presently in the U.S. illegally.”¹²⁷

In effect, Norton’s anti-union intransigence transformed Baltazar from a UFW contract negotiator into an undocumented worker, from highly visible to required invisibility. The UFW allowed the ALRB to believe that Baltazar was in Mexico and asked others to respond to any ALRB inquiries as such. The UFW shielded Baltazar from the INS with an eye on future cases and the rights of undocumented workers, “A lot depends on any precedents set in regards to the hiring of workers if they are illegals.”¹²⁸ Though Norton temporarily silenced Baltazar in the ALRB, the company was unable to usurp his mobility and labor.

¹²³ J.R. Norton Company, 8 ALRB No. 76 at 28 (CA 1982).

¹²⁴ Though Blythe was/is located in the extreme southeastern portion of Riverside County, the UFW placed the area under the Calexico office. See, UFW Calexico Census Report, circa February 1977, box 6, folder 23, MGP; Negotiations, Dec.14, 1977, 2, box, folder 28, MGP.

¹²⁵ Status of Unfair Labor Practices in Calexico, California, April 14, 1978, 4, box 6, folder 29, MGP.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. Readers may wonder if the UFW admitted to lying to a state agency or “harboring” an undocumented person, as brought up in *Nagata Brothers*, 5 ALRB No. 39. The waters are murky, but it is my opinion that neither applies in this situation since the UFW did not keep track of Baltazar, there was no indication he continued to pursue the unfair labor practice, there was no log of the ALRB inquiring about Baltazar, and there was no evidence

The UFW Calexico legal department and the national United Farm Workers was abreast of cases that involved growers and undocumented workers throughout California. Cases like those of Agustín Baltazar could chip away to do so, the UFW's concern was two-fold in these ALRB cases. First, they wanted to establish that undocumented workers were indeed employees. This was critical because a worker's undocumented status in the U.S. could be used to intimidate them from testifying before the board, as was shown in the ALRB *Murphy Produce* case (1978).¹²⁹ In this case, the administrative law officer determined that questions on immigration status should be barred from hearings. Moreover, the administrative law officer stated, "Undocumented aliens are included in the definition of employee under the NLRA [National Labor Relations Act] and the ALRA," and, "Alienage is irrelevant to a determination of legal rights under the ALRA."¹³⁰ The board did not support the administrative law officer's decision on immigration status questions, but agreed with the original ruling nonetheless.¹³¹ Undocumented workers were thus determined to be employees.

The second reason for the UFW's concern with undocumented workers and their employment status was to determine reinstatement and financial compensation. The *Murphy Produce* case ruled that undocumented workers were employees, but placed them in an ambiguous category where they were unable to be rehired and awarded financial

suggesting that he and the union were in contact after April 1978. The UFW was not "harboring" since it did not provide housing to Baltazar, as far as the union's Calexico legal office was aware of in April 1978. Of course, UFW members possibly extended housing assistance to him as they worked the fields and learned of his story, potentially reuniting with former coworkers from previous harvests. If UFW members did so, it was an unofficial capacity and an uncomplicated situation of friends helping friends. Agustín Baltazar does not appear again in my research or in ALRB settlements, leaving me to speculate about his fate after joining Bud Antle in March 1978 with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) and its January 1, 1982 date for "amnesty" less than a decade away from Ronald Reagan's desk.

¹²⁹ *O. P. Murphy Produce*, 4 ALRB No. 62 at 22. In another case, a company alleged that the UFW threatened workers with deportation if they did not vote for the UFW. The investigative hearing examiner and the ALRB dismissed the allegations. See *Veg-A-Mix*, 5 ALRB No. 14 at 1-2, 14-18.

¹³⁰ *O. P. Murphy Produce*, 4 ALRB No. 62 at 22.

¹³¹ *Id.* at 2.

compensation.¹³² It was from this interstitial jurisprudential space that the UFW imagined labor law as encompassing peoples regardless of citizenship, most visible in cases stemming from the major strikes and organizing in 1979 and 1980.

The UFW soon brought a reinstatement case for undocumented workers before the ALRB. Associated Produce Distributors fired eight broccoli workers—Arturo Coriel, Luis Robles, Francisco Ledesma Gutierrez, Valentino Serrano Estrada, Salvador Gomez Hernandez, Jose Gonzales, Preciliano Torres, and Alvaro Aquino Estrada—in Castroville (Central Valley) in April 1979. The grower claimed that they were fired because the INS removed them from the U.S. and the company’s policy was to not hire undocumented peoples. The administrative law officer and the ALRB both questioned Associated Produce’s motivation and focused on anti-union animus. The workers were dedicated to Chavez and the UFW to the point that they skipped work to see the union leader in Salinas in March 1979.¹³³ When the INS removed the workers from the U.S., they were able to return to Associated Produce, but denied their jobs back on the grounds of their undocumented status. The administrative law officer saw through the shaky defense, noting that the company “knowingly hired illegal aliens and rehired them again after they had been picked up by the INS and transported across the border.”¹³⁴ Associated Produce attempted to exploit the workers’ immigration status to fire them, but the administrative law officer and ALRB concurred, “The fact that the employees were also illegal aliens does not thereby excuse Respondent's [Associated Produce] treatment of them if the treatment was discriminatorily motivated.”¹³⁵ That is, the board ruled that the company discriminated against

¹³² *Id.* at 22. In *De Canas v. Bica* (1976), the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the California Supreme Court and decided that California did not create immigration policy when state law made hiring undocumented peoples a misdemeanor. The rationale was that the state supported the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. See, *De Canas et al. v. Bica et al.* 424 U.S. 351 (1976).

¹³³ Associated Produce Distributors, 6 ALRB No. 54 at 14 (CA 1980).

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 14-15.

¹³⁵ *Id.* at 22.

the workers based on their support of the UFW and not because of immigration reasons. The board went beyond the NLRB and ordered the eight undocumented workers to be reinstated.¹³⁶

The United Farm Workers' use of the ALRB secured the status of undocumented workers as recognized employees. The union's labor imaginary legitimized the group of workers who served as specters for both the UFW and growers. The union's efforts were further supported by the ALRB when the board ruled that it possessed jurisdiction and enforcement to compel an employer to reinstate and pay lost wages to undocumented workers.¹³⁷ The board wanted enforcement of the ALRA to prevent—perhaps optimistically—employer abuses of undocumented workers. Moreover, the board was adamant of its enforcement of the ALRA, which made no mention of immigration status.¹³⁸ In Pixley, California (roughly ten miles north of Delano), a tomato grower hired exclusively undocumented workers and then refused to pay the laborers because of their protests to non-payment. The grower unsuccessfully argued for dismissal on the grounds that the workers were undocumented and that the board attempted to supersede Congressional oversight of immigration law.¹³⁹

While the UFW secured the status of undocumented laborers as legitimate workers, it was undocumented workers themselves who made their presence known and felt across the expansive borderlands as people, not solely a labor force. They were often maligned and scapegoated for taking jobs by numerous racial groups, but they were also a reality that demanded change. Historian Ana Raquel Minian argues that undocumented immigrants were not only transborder migrants and sources of remittances for their hometowns in Mexico (especially

¹³⁶ In 1981, the board again ruled for reinstatement and lost wages for two undocumented workers in Salinas. The employer's anti-union animus was determined as the cause for the failure to rehire. Prior to this, neither the National Labor Relations Board nor the U.S. Supreme Court made rulings on these issues. See *Nishi Greenhouse*, 7 ALRB No. 18 (CA 1981).

¹³⁷ *Mini Ranch Farms*, 7 ALRB No. 48 at 15-20 (CA 1981).

¹³⁸ *Id.* at 15-17.

¹³⁹ *Id.* at 15-16.

central states), they also started to call for rights in the 1970s. Immigration debates continued in the 1970s, with increasing attention on undocumented immigration as a national problem in need of heightened surveillance. Yet, undocumented immigrants fought for their children school in Texas, civil rights groups like the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund assisted with proposing legal challenges to immigration and civil law, and the Maricopa County Organizing Project (Arizona) split from the UFW to specifically organize undocumented workers.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, labor groups like the AFL-CIO and UFW supported unauthorized migrants because “they understood that if they did not protect the labor rights of undocumented migrants, they would be depressing the status of all workers.”¹⁴¹ Though many undocumented migrants remained underground, there was a palpable shift in the debates of inclusion or exclusion of undocumented migrants via a groundswell of organizing. Profoundly influencing the direction of this this dialogue were undocumented migrants themselves and their struggles to be seen.

The U.S. Supreme Court altered the trajectory of labor rights for undocumented workers by severely limiting a person’s ability to receive lost wages or reinstatement, regardless of an employer’s hiring and firing practices. In the landmark case, *Sure-Tan Inc. v. National Labor Relations Board* (1984), the Supreme Court held that undocumented workers were employees. The Court reasoned it acted within the scope of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 since Congress did not prohibit employment of undocumented workers and the Court sought to prevent the legal normalization of “a subclass of workers without a comparable stake in the collective goals of their legally resident co-workers.”¹⁴² The Court saw its decision as assisting

¹⁴⁰ Ana Raquel Minian, *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2018), 157-182.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁴² *Sure-Tan Inc. et al. v. National Labor Relations Board* 467 U.S. 883 at 892 (1984).

the spirit of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 because it made hiring undocumented workers less attractive, at least on the surface. The Court overruled the NLRB, and consequently, the ALRB's logic in the Pixley case as well, when it concluded that the undocumented workers in *Sure-Tan* could get their jobs back and backpay *if* they reentered the U.S. through sanctioned channels. The Supreme Court itself offered a bleak outlook of their decision, "We share the [Seventh Circuit] Court of Appeals' uncertainty concerning whether any of the discharged employees will be able either to enter the country lawfully to accept the reinstatement offers" or receive lost wages.¹⁴³ In effect, the Supreme Court reinforced the vulnerability of undocumented workers by not offering a realistic mechanism to claim awards. Nearly two decades later in *Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. v. National Labor Relations Board* (2002), the U.S. Supreme Court used the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) to deny undocumented workers financial compensation.¹⁴⁴ After *Sure Tan*, undocumented workers were defined once more as "impossible subjects" who could only claim awards by navigating the state apparatuses that (re)produced their impossibility.¹⁴⁵

Section 3: The Strike of 1979-1980 and the Facets of Farmworker Politics

On January 19, 1979, the UFW launched the largest strike against Imperial Valley growers. The union's contracts with several vegetable growers were set to expire at the end of 1978 and the union wanted new contracts that included a \$5.25 minimum wage rather than \$3.75, an increase in employer contributions to the healthcare and pension plans, cost-of-living

¹⁴³ *Id.* at 904.

¹⁴⁴ *Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. v. National Labor Relations Board* 535 U.S. 137 (2002).

¹⁴⁵ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).

adjustments, and union representatives paid by the company to properly administer contracts.¹⁴⁶ The last two demands were especially novel for farmworkers. Growers across the Imperial Valley soundly rejected the UFW proposal. By the fourth day of the strike, over 2,000 workers at four large companies (Cal Coastal, Vessey, Saikhon, and Sun Harvest) walked off the job.¹⁴⁷ Workers at other companies soon joined and increased the strike force to 3,000 workers.¹⁴⁸ However, the Imperial Valley lettuce harvest required approximately 8,000 workers, which meant that thousands of farmworkers remained non-strikers.¹⁴⁹ A “circus” soon developed as Imperial Valley growers hired strikebreakers from the ranks of their family members, local students, and teachers, some donning sun hats and white tennis shoes for field labor.¹⁵⁰ Increasing the tension during the early months of the strike, a gun was flashed at a vegetable cooler and the Ku Klux Klan appeared as vigilante security for growers in Holtville.¹⁵¹ The strike proceeded to the Central Valley following the Imperial Valley lettuce harvest. The union limited the Central Valley strike to those companies that were originally struck in the Imperial Valley. By September 1979, the UFW signed new and vastly improved contracts with all but one of Salinas’s lettuce growers previously under UFW collective bargaining agreement.¹⁵² Momentum from the Salinas campaign did not migrate back to the Imperial Valley. Several growers did not

¹⁴⁶ Pawel, *Union of Their Dreams*, 266.

¹⁴⁷ Pawel, *Union of Their Dreams*, 267. Pawel titles her chapter, “The Dream Strike.” Though she borrowed from Cesar Chavez’s words, the idea of any strike as a “dream” is both a testament to labor’s imaginary and the potential fetishization of strike actions. In the first case, Pawel points to the possibility of the UFW guaranteeing its members some of the highest wages and benefits in agricultural labor history. Strikes take a financial and personal toll on workers and the 1979 strike tragically showed this with the murder of Rufino Contreras in February 1979 and the frustrated workers in 1980. 1979 was a moment of high hope, but the strike must also be understood as a time of uncertainty for already vulnerable workers. Failing to do so may result in a Chávez-centric labor history that emphasizes lost opportunities rather than highlighting the exhausting work of rank-and-file members who bore the brunt of job uncertainty, financial struggle, and stress associated with strikes.

¹⁴⁸ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 601.

¹⁴⁹ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 600.

¹⁵⁰ Image, *La Voz*, February 1, 1979, 1; Coordinating Meeting, January 31, 1979, box 6, folder 39, MGP; Pawel, *Union of Their Dreams*, 267.

¹⁵¹ Report, February 6, 1979; Report, February 7, 1979; Coordinating Meeting, February 7, 1979, all in box 6, folder 39, MGP.

¹⁵² Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 622, 651-653.

sign new contracts, including the influential lettuce magnate, Bruce Church.¹⁵³ Growers continued to refuse the UFW's demands in the following Imperial Valley harvest.¹⁵⁴ To keep the UFW out, growers offered attractive contracts that equaled or surpassed the union's, simultaneously stripping the UFW of its power while demonstrating the benefits of collective bargaining to workers throughout the industry.

Two vital developments mark the strike's importance in transborder labor history and bourgeois fantasies of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. First, the UFW demanded assistance from the Border Patrol and, second, Rufino Contreras was murdered in February 1979 (discussed in chapter 5). The work of the UFW in the ALRB and its inclusion of Mexicans and Mexicali residents in its ranks was marred by a resurgent anti-undocumented worker campaign. As Cedric Robinson notes, "Working-class consciousness [was not] necessarily *the* negation of bourgeois culture," of which deportation was a visceral tool to cease movement in a dynamic area and gain an economic foothold in the United States.¹⁵⁵ The union kept track of scab workers at the major growers of the valley, including Mario Saikhon, Cal Coastal, Lu-Ette, Bruce Church, and Joe Maggio. Between January and February 1979, the UFW Calexico office seldom reported any arrests by the Border Patrol, despite immigration checks from the Imperial County sheriff.¹⁵⁶ At Gourmet, the UFW counted at least eight undocumented workers apprehended in early April 1979. Later that month, the Border Patrol instructed union members to not enter fields themselves. The UFW obliged and instead waited on Border Patrol raid reports. The lettuce harvest moved to the Central Valley, where U.S. Senator Harrison Williams held hearings

¹⁵³ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 660.

¹⁵⁴ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage*, 690.

¹⁵⁵ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983, 2000), 4. Robinson was speaking of Marx and Engels and nineteenth century revolutions in Europe, but his point remains instructive when considering the power of capitalism in working class cultures.

¹⁵⁶ Coordinating Meeting, Feb. 8, 1979, Box 6, Folder 39, MGP.

regarding California's agricultural labor relations. Chávez opened the hearings with a call for a national lettuce boycott and labeled the Border Patrol an ineffective agency that "engaged in a conspiracy to provide illegal workers for the struck fields."¹⁵⁷ The INS refuted the allegations and added that it was understaffed. Growers protested the hearings, but did mention that the UFW previously welcomed undocumented workers into the union.¹⁵⁸ The numerous spaces that undocumented workers occupied as scab, exploitable labor, and picketer, was lost to both the UFW and growers.

As the strike continued, UFW leadership demanded an increased presence by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the Imperial Valley and California. When the harvest returned to the Imperial Valley in the winter of 1979-1980, Cal Coastal reportedly actively used both scab and "*pollo*" (undocumented) laborers.¹⁵⁹ In the ALRB, Cesar Chávez again charged growers with hiring replacement crews composed of undocumented workers. But, when pressed on his evidence, Chávez was unable to verify his claim.¹⁶⁰ During the hearings with Senator Williams in April 1979 and two years after President Jimmy Carter's failed immigration plan, Chávez flexed his political muscle and requested that the INS increase its presence in California. INS director Leonel Castillo obliged and commenced immigration raids. Undocumented workers served as reliable targets for removal as the UFW struggled against growers and non-deportable workers in one of its largest labor battles.

During the labor demonstrations in the Imperial Valley, the strikebreakers were mostly migrant workers from other parts of the Imperial Valley and Southwest. Filipinos and ethnic

¹⁵⁷ Lou Cannon, "Chavez Employs Senate Hearing to Urge National Lettuce Boycott, *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1979.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Calexico notes, April 9, 1979; Calexico notes, April 27, 1979; Staff Meeting, circa January 8, 1980, all in box 6, folder 21, MGP.

¹⁶⁰ *Sam Andrews' Sons*, 11 ALRB No. 5 at 28-33.

Mexican strikebreakers were bussed in by growers or arrived in private vehicles from Texas, Arizona, and the Central Valley to work in Imperial Valley lettuce.¹⁶¹ Most importantly, these workers were not threatened by the same deportation regime that the UFW called upon during a heated labor dispute, including the 1979-1980 strike. Union members took names and license plates to verify strikebreakers' identities and followed them. On at least one occasion, the UFW picketed outside a strikebreaker's house, which the ALRB ruled violated a worker's right to privacy and comfort.¹⁶² The UFW's tactics occasionally convinced strikebreakers to leave their jobs, but the high market price of lettuce, police protection for growers and strikebreakers, and a sizeable reserve labor pool kept some growers and strikebreakers' pockets full. Some valley growers did lose money because of the strike, but, as a whole, the inelasticity of lettuce nearly guaranteed a full rebound of the valley's lettuce industry.¹⁶³

The 1979-1980 strike affected the spaces growers viewed as profitable. Some growers, like Holtville Farms, elected to contract production to other firms while Vessey moved operations to right-to-work Arizona.¹⁶⁴ The UFW also lost cases in the ALRB that involved the union trying to show grower wage hikes during the strike were unfair labor practices as well as unfair use of labor contractors.¹⁶⁵ Grower actions were further validated when the ALRB determined that growers bargained in good faith insofar as there was a negotiation impasse and there was no anti-union animus in partial or whole shutting down of operations in the Imperial

¹⁶¹ Report, Feb. 2, 1979; Report, Feb. 4, 1979; Coordinating Meeting, Feb. 7, 1979; Report, Feb. 7, 1979, all in box 6, folder 39, MGP.

¹⁶² United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO, 6 ALRB No. 58 at 4-6 (CA 1980).

¹⁶³ Colin A. Carter, Darrell L. Hueth, John W. Mamer and Andrew Schmitz, "Labor Strikes and the Price of Lettuce," *Western Journal of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 6, no. 1 (July 1981): 1-14.

¹⁶⁴ Holtville Farms, Inc., Growers Exchange, Inc., Gilbert Chell, and Kal-Ed, Inc., 10 ALRB No. 49 at 162-163, 166 (CA 1984); Vessey & Company, Inc., Martori Brothers Distributors, Joe Maggio, Inc., 13 ALRB No. 17 at 28 (CA 1987).

¹⁶⁵ Lu-Ette Farms, 12 ALRB No. 3 at 3-6 (CA 1986); J.J. Crosetti, 6 ALRB No. 10 at 1-2 (CA 1980).

Valley.¹⁶⁶ From its initial hearings up to the final ALRB ruling, the latter case took eight years, a period of time that far exceeded the needs of farmworkers working season-to-season.

Conclusion

Returning the border thinking of Fidel Valdéz during the Mextel strike of 1975 elucidates the central argument of this chapter. As a lettuce worker in the Imperial Valley with two family members laboring in Mexicali's maquilas, he was intimately aware of the bourgeois construct of racialized Mexican labor and the necessity for transborder labor action. He also recognized that the international border was a project of divisions and dichotomies. His call to see the Imperial-Mexicali valley's two major industrial workforces as limbs on one body went beyond the separation fantasy of borders. It was a radical departure from nationalist investment in a single country and its laws.

The focus on labor arbitration cases and labor activism reveals the costs of state-sanctioned recourse. The labor cases not only took several months—even years—to resolve, they also bound workers to labor laws that misrepresented workers as confined to a single country. Even when the Agricultural Labor Relations Board ruled that undocumented workers were legitimate employees, later cases made it highly unlikely that these same workers could claim restitution or their jobs back. In the *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje*, only one lawyer indicted U.S. capital and Mexican businesspeople as jointly responsible for the pay and working conditions of workers at U.S. transnational facilities. Nevertheless, transborder working populations in the greater Californias borderlands pushed Mexican and California labor law to its limit before the laws buckled under their own geographic and ideological restrictions. The facilitation of capital moving from places where labor exercised a collective voice to ones more

¹⁶⁶ Vessey & Company et al., 13 ALRB No. 17 at 5-11, 14-34 (CA 1987).

amenable to bourgeois desires bore little consideration for working peoples. In labor arbitration courts, labor remained regulated while capital was restricted in the laws of profits. Working within the strictures of legal statutes could stifle a transborder labor movement, yet, as will be shown in chapter 5, organizations in the Imperial Valley implement healthcare based on needs rather than citizenship or strictly labor concerns.

Chapter 5: Challenging Border Confinement: Organized Labor, the Chicano Movement, and the Transborder Politics of Farmworker Healthcare

Introduction

The February 1979 air was cool and the fields were quiet. As morning gave way to afternoon, a vastly different scene took hold. For three weeks the United Farm Workers (UFW) were involved in a labor strike against ten Imperial Valley growers. On the morning of February 10, 1979, UFW member Rufino Contreras made his way from his home in Mexicali to the struck Mario Saikhon lettuce fields near Imperial, California. Contreras and others rushed Saikon's fields and were met with bullets, one of them striking Contreras in the face. He was declared dead soon after. One day prior to his murder, Contreras proudly declared his eligibility for the UFW medical insurance plan, a plan that covered UFW members and their families on both sides of the Imperial-Mexicali border.

Also in 1979, a different development in Imperial Valley healthcare occurred as the *Clinica de Salud del Pueblo* (The People's Clinic) opened its first satellite clinic in Calexico. The *Clinica de Salud del Pueblo* originated with the Chicano Movement and the Black Power movement's drive to establish free clinics, most notably the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California.¹ Based in the northern Imperial Valley city of Brawley and initially named the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* (Farmworker Healthcare Clinic, *Clinica*), clinic leadership obtained funding from the War on Poverty's Office of Economic Opportunity in 1970. The *Clinica* was soon locked in a three-year struggle against hyper-vigilant conservatives in the valley, namely the medical establishment and Republican Congressman, Victor V. Veysey. The

¹ Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 229-232. The Black Panther Party called their comprehensive project "Survival Programs."

Clinica fought against assumptions of Chicano incompetence, notions of an overly expansive federal government misallocating funds to peoples of color and other marginalized peoples, and colorblindness veiled through the sanctity of laissez faire opportunity and competition. Through Congress, the press, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's policies, the *Clinica* transformed itself from a nuisance to elite conservatives into an institution that provided medical services to farmworkers, farmworking families, and low-income peoples in the Imperial Valley.

This chapter charts the development of farmworker and migrant healthcare by the United Farm Workers and the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands as a labor and social movement politic to provide access to medicine to marginalized farmworkers from both sides of the international border. UFW leadership saw its clinics as a labor-organizing tool to recruit and serve members while the *Clinica* was a Chicano Movement and War on Poverty response to inadequate access to healthcare for farmworkers and their families. Both medical programs were complementing strategies that sought to transcend the limits of borders by providing access to healthcare to migrant fieldworkers and their families. Though growers and conservative voices continued to see the border as a site of exploitable labor, the UFW and *Clinica* offered a counternarrative that understood the borderlands as a place of opportunity to launch an innovative social and labor policy that challenged the confines of a regulated and bifurcated border space. The personal and financial investments by both organizations to provide accessible healthcare and their extensive use by enrollees demonstrated that upholding restrictive labor and movement regimes was anathema to the wants and needs of the peoples they served. The transborder nature of field labor in the Imperial Valley signaled to the UFW and *Clinica* that their success depended on efforts to organize and welcome peoples

beyond borders or U.S. citizenship. By doing so, both organizations showed the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics as a departure from capitalism and U.S. nationalism.

Section 1: *Clinica Obrera* and the Politics of Transborder Union Medical Care

The United Farm Workers remained uncertain of what labor organizing on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the Imperial-Mexicali valleys looked like. The transborder reality of workers from Mexicali was familiar to the United Farm Workers (UFW), but one that defied a monolithic approach. As the “commuter” debates of 1967 and 1968 heated up (see chapter 3), the union took an alternative approach to labor organizing, one that borrowed from the rival Teamsters union. In 1967, Cesar Chavez sent his cousin Manuel Chavez to Mexicali to inquire establishing a UFW medical clinic in the city. At its earliest iteration, the clinic provided medical services as well as an information distribution center for potential undocumented workers and scabs. According to historians Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Garcia, the purpose of the clinic was “to serve as an organizing center for illegals.” Additionally, Mexicali’s government allowed the union’s clinic, “Hoping that Mexican workers using the clinic could be informed of the strike and encouraged to avoid working at the struck ranches.”² For del Castillo and Garcia, the city of Mexicali and the union formed a symbiotic relationship to end scab labor from Mexico in U.S. fields. This section shows how union members, volunteers, and patients challenged the leadership’s linear meaning of healthcare in Mexicali and pushed the UFW on a transborder labor and health politic.

Between 1967 and 1974, the UFW’s clinic in Mexicali, *Clinica Obrera* (Workers’ Clinic), served numerous UFW members and their families and kept the union competitive for

² Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *César Chávez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 81-82.

new recruits. *Clinica Obrera* covered medical services and claims in Mexicali and its intended clientele were those who were unable to enter the United States and receive union care there. Not only did the clinic provide services to UFW members in Mexicali, it also kept the union in competition with the Teamsters union in that city. The Teamsters provided a system of medical claims for its members in Mexicali, which UFW organizer Marshall Ganz characterized as, “It’s a big rip off, but people still see it as a service on the Mexican side.” The Teamster plan was beneficial for many of its workers’ families who lacked medical coverage in Mexicali or were unable to obtain medical care in the U.S. In order for a person in Mexico to be enrolled in Mexico’s national healthcare system, the Mexican Social Security Institute (*Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*, IMSS), their employer must pay into the national system. UFW organizer Jessica Govea recalled that the Teamsters explicitly used their medical plan as leverage for recruitment. She also noted that Teamster enrollees in Mexicali took extended family members to receive care under the Teamster plan, furthering the appeal of the plan for fieldworkers living in Mexicali.³ From the perspective of the UFW, the efficiency of the Teamster system was nonexistent. But, when considering the UFW’s healthcare move into Mexicali to compete with the Teamsters, farmworkers living in Mexicali favored union medical services for themselves and their families and compelled both unions to maintain a presence in the city.

Between 1971 and 1974, the *Clinica Obrera* faced pressure from union leadership and Mexican authorities to close and shift its resources to Calexico. Margaret Murphy, a registered nurse and later director of the UFW’s Delano clinic, recalled that she went on a trip from La Paz, California, to Mexicali in 1971 with the idea to establish a clinic in Calexico. Chavez wanted to

³ Jessica Govea, interview by Frank Bardacke, box 38, cassette 20, side a, Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

open a clinic in Calexico rather than have workers receive union medical care only in Mexicali.⁴ Philip Traynor, director of *Clinica Obrera* and later the Calexico clinic, stated that he was dogged by the *Clinica Obrera*'s landlord and Mexican immigration officers. The landlord began a series of rent and utility and hikes that disturbed Traynor and Mexicali physician Juan Escobedo. Both confronted the landlord and asked him to respect the clinic's lease. According to Traynor, the landlord was incensed and soon after, Mexican immigration officials arrested Traynor for being an "illegal immigrant" in Mexico since he did not possess a visa nor was Traynor authorized to work in Mexico. Prior to 1979, the Mexican federal government attempted to prevent the emigration of Mexican workers to the United States.⁵ *Clinica Obrera* represented one of the benefits of migration to the United States for workers and families on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. Interestingly, Traynor was released from jail because of a strike by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union redirected United Fruit cargo from Los Angeles to Ensenada, Baja California. United Fruit (owner of the agricultural company Inter Harvest) decided to dock and ship from Ensenada rather than bargain with the ILWU, continuing the construction of Mexico as a bailout for corporations and a thorn for U.S. labor.⁶ The UFW was in negotiations with Inter Harvest and Cesar Chavez relayed Traynor's arrest to Inter Harvest. United Fruit refused to dock in Ensenada, Baja California, if Traynor—a U.S. citizen—remained in custody. He was soon released and, in 1972, the UFW's Calexico clinic opened its doors.

⁴ Margaret Murphy, "Six Years with *La Causa*," Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, UC San Diego Library, n.d., 3, 7, accessed March 1, 2018.

https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/essays/essays/106%20Murphy_Margaret.pdf.

⁵ Ana Raquel Minian, *Undocumented Lives: The Untold Story of Mexican Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2018), 15-17.

⁶ Traynor gave credit to United Fruit for securing his release and only briefly mentioned the role the ILWU strike played. The appreciation reserved for United Fruit is indicative of a larger issue within the United States labor movement that favored a fragmented and individual movement instead of a united labor movement that would keep Traynor in jail, but show support for the ILWU in their cause in a similar way that the ILWU refused to unload grapes from companies struck by the UFW.

Traynor read his imprisonment ordeal as ironic largely because of his privileged position as a white, male, U.S. citizen on the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. He referred to his detention and legal status as an “illegal alien” with incredulity (scare quotes in the original). Indeed, Traynor’s use of scare quotes signals his difficulty to understand his body and presence as illegal. After all, he was directing medical services for Mexicali fieldworkers and the UFW was the union that struggled with undocumented scabs in the Imperial Valley and other states (see chapter 3). Traynor learned that declaring a person “illegal” was also a method used in Mexico to silence opposition by those who wanted to control the narrative of border making, including the Mexicali bourgeoisie and federal government.

In 1972, *Clinica Obrera* director Philip Traynor moved from Mexicali to Calexico to run the new clinic there.⁷ The phasing out of *Clinica Obrera* and the move to Calexico created an unknown situation for UFW members and family enrollees who received care at *Clinica Obrera*, but could not obtain legal entry into the U.S. to obtain UFW medical attention in Calexico. In June 1972, Traynor worked out an informal deal with Eldon W. Woolley, director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Calexico office. With services severely restricted in Mexicali and Chavez’s push for a clinic in Calexico, Traynor successfully argued to allow UFW members living in Mexicali to receive care in Calexico. Woolley’s stipulation was that the UFW guaranteed payment of members’ medical expenses at the clinic or Calexico’s hospital.⁸ As Woolley put it, “It may be well to advise members of your insurance group that admissions

⁷ Philip Traynor, “Memoir, United Farm Workers, Philip and Carol Traynor,” Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, UC San Diego Library, n.d., accessed March 12, 2018, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/50th-anniversary-documentation-project-1962-1993/philip-traynor/>.

⁸ “Union Clinic Struggles Against Border Patrol in Calexico,” *El Malcriado*, No.7, August 18, 1972, 3, accessed March 9, 2018. https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/1972/August%2018,%201972%20No%207_PDF.pdf.

for hospitalization must be prearranged.”⁹ Woolley and Traynor effectively created a de facto visa system, one that was predicated on guarantee of payment rather than larger connections between Mexicans and illegality.

The UFW-INS arrangement lasted into early July 1972, when the Immigration and Naturalization district office in Los Angeles overruled Woolley. The INS office in Los Angeles only allowed Mexicali residents to visit the clinic and hospital if the visit was out-patient, an emergency, or when the “required medical treatment is not available in their country.”¹⁰ In addition to the change in INS procedure, Traynor expressed his concern for people who could cross the border (that is, possess U.S. government documentation), but were still subject to waiting over an hour in line to enter Calexico’s port of entry under the hot desert sun. Traynor worried about union members receiving timely and adequate care in Calexico, yet he also worried that border wait times and Woolley’s about-face interfered with the tenets of the UFW healthcare system. Traynor stressed, “Until we get the border thing pressed out, I believe that those most in need of the services we offer won’t be receiving them.”¹¹ Traynor and the clinic staff pushed a limited open border policy so that Mexicali members could receive the care that was negotiated in union contracts as well as to ensure quality of life for union members.

The debate about crossing the border and healthcare was waged on the bodies of women. Specifically, policy questions revolved on pregnant women from Mexicali. The INS Los Angeles and Calexico offices were clear on this. The director of the Los Angeles office plainly stated, “We [INS] are not in the business of giving birth to citizens of the United States.” Woolley,

⁹ “Union Clinic Struggles Against Border Patrol in Calexico,” *El Malcriado*, No. 7, August 18, 1972, 3, accessed March 9, 2018, https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/1972/August%2018,%201972%20No%207_PDF.pdf.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

director of the Calexico office echoed his superiors, “We can’t have undocumented people crossing the border to have babies.” Woolley continued, “That newborn baby is an American citizen, regardless of the status of the parents.”¹² Woolley touched on the concept of *jus soli*, U.S. citizenship by birthright, as an impediment to policing the border. Similar to the threatening horde of migrant workers (see chapters 1 and 3), Woolley feared a deluge of pregnant Mexican women overcrowding hospital beds in the United States with the newborn now capable of sponsoring its mother, father, and siblings, “Perhaps none of them American citizens” until the mother was allowed to deliver in Calexico. The mother and fetus acquired a sinister meaning, which both turned the 1965 Immigration Act’s family reunification policy into one of illegitimate citizen, immigrant, and immigrant family. The INS district office was more concerned about enforcement of federal immigration law rather than any local context such as the UFW and the INS Calexico office. Approximately five women from Mexicali delivered children in the two months that the Calexico was open. Unlike growers, the UFW was not able to sponsor Mexican workers and the INS subtly reinforced its power to police bodies while further legitimizing the immigration power of growers and curbing the UFW’s influence.

The UFW’s quasi visa position was further rooted in the experiences of pregnant women and the unofficial deal between Traynor and Woolley. Traynor’s most significant critique against the INS was the case of Maria Cárdenas de Corona. She was pregnant and had a late prenatal care visit in Calexico on July 4, 1972. De Corona was told to return in two weeks for another checkup. However, she went into labor on July 8. At 2 a.m. the next day, De Corona and her husband attempted to enter Calexico at the port of entry. They explained that De Corona was preregistered to deliver in Calexico, per the agreement between the UFW and the INS. She was denied entry and gave birth at a well-reputed hospital in Mexicali. The newborn died thirty hours

¹² Ibid.

later. While the denied entry may not have directly caused the death of the child, the added stress of moving from place to place to deliver as well as trying to understand the break in the UFW-INS deal heightened the difficulty of childbirth. Moreover, at least five women from Mexicali delivered in Calexico since the clinic opened there, confounding de Corona and Traynor of the change in the agreement with Woolley. Traynor was perplexed at the INS renegeing as well as Mexicali members paying into a healthcare system that required a visa to utilize. De Corona's experience shows how the language of policy, coverage, and borders can mask the lives of the peoples who make and live the borderlands, those who encounter administrators' regulatory fascination with bodies and maneuver between borders to promote their wellbeing. De Corona and other UFW medical plan members who lived in Mexicali qualified for the plan because someone in the family was a UFW member, showing that the American working class was as confined to the United States as the U.S. capital that promoted transnational corporations in Mexico (see chapter 2). Pregnant women thus challenged the meaning of American working class through their influence on healthcare and transborder labor politics.

The UFW maintained a medical presence in Mexicali up to 1974. This was marked more by confusion and controversy than by the delivery of medical services. In late 1974, Marshall Ganz produced a report and relayed to Cesar Chavez his frustration with the UFW clinics in Mexicali and San Luis, Sonora, Mexico (near Yuma, Arizona). Ganz's main questions centered on trust, finances, and necessity of the clinics in Mexicali and San Luis. Ganz interspersed his report to Chavez with his dwindling confidence in Mexicali physicians. Ganz believed doctors there grafted the clinic, "I think the deal is the doctors get to rip off the [medical] plan."¹³ Ganz's lack of confidence for Mexicali doctors was acute enough for him to declare, "We don't have a

¹³ Marshall Ganz, "Report on Clinics," 1974, 1, box 22, folder 27, UFW Cesar Chavez Papers, Office of the President, Part 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated as CCP, Pt.2.

clinic there [Mexicali] for all intents and purposes.”¹⁴ Throughout his report, Ganz was most perplexed about the utility of the Mexicali clinic to the United Farm Worker’s labor organizing drive, “The clinic in Mexicali question is whether the clinic could be useful in the campaign?”¹⁵ Exasperated, Ganz told Chavez, “I’m not sure what the purpose of that clinic is anymore.”¹⁶ However, Chavez and Ganz both agreed that the clinic was a labor organizing tool and planned to keep the clinic’s doors open at least until the end of the 1974-1975 harvest season.¹⁷

There was a moment of candor and vulnerability between Ganz and Chavez on the issue of the clinics. The unclear mission of *Clinica Obrera* openly flummoxed Ganz. The clinic transformed into a much more complicated issue beyond the primary purpose of labor organizing tool. Ganz expressed his frustration at the situation as well as at himself, “The other thing is I don’t know shit about clinics or the operation of clinics.”¹⁸ Ganz thrived as a participant and organizer in civil and labor rights stretching back to the early 1960s in the southern United States, especially Missouri. Healthcare was a new approach to labor organizing that was different from not only Ganz’s experience, but also others in the UFW. The novelty was partly due to its exogenous origin with the Teamsters and Manuel Chavez’s early crafting of the clinics. Ganz seemed to be near capitulation on the issue, yet, there was a sense of urgency and on-the-job training from the head of the Calexico union office. Ganz told Chavez, “I’m not saying I shouldn't be involved in it; I have to be involved in it.”¹⁹ Ganz was neither a medical professional nor a trained personnel manager. But he was a labor organizer and the clinics served

¹⁴ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 4, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁵ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 4, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁶ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 3, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁷ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 5, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁸ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 5, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁹ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 5, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

for collective bargaining; thus, Ganz and others trained themselves. The curve was steep and *Clinica Obrera* demonstrated its degrees.

UFW members and labor actions compelled union leadership to negotiate a working solution to its clinic plans on the borderlands. Union members working in contracted fields expected medical services and the union continued to use the clinics as a showcase of UFW benefits. This was especially important in San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, near Yuma, Arizona. Ganz argued in favor of the San Luis clinic, “We have to have it there.”²⁰ The urgency for the San Luis facility was rooted in the 1974 Arizona lemon strike, the demonstration that witnessed the union’s border vigilantism of the “Wet Line” (see chapter 3). As the strike developed, the UFW shifted its focus to San Luis and “started providing free medical care” at that clinic.²¹ Without a revenue stream from medical consultations and members continuing to seek care in San Luis, the clinic operated in uncertain financial waters. The San Luis clinic needed to remain open because it’s “important—the Kennedy Plan has a lot of members there.”²² As a consequence of UFW outreach in the city as early as 1970 and the 1974 lemon strike and future union actions in Arizona, Ganz anticipated more members in San Luis. Despite the financial and trust issues between the union and Mexican physicians, the San Luis clinic needed to remain in operation “to deliver medicine on the Mexican side of the border over there” for UFW members and potential members. Ganz’s critiques of Mexicali and support for San Luis revealed how labor organizing and healthcare were not instantly syncretic, but a politic that demanded negotiation in favor of a larger goal. Union leadership saw *Clinica Obrera* as a gear that moved farmworkers to the UFW. Once the clinical cog slipped, a different device was required to make

²⁰ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 5, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

²¹ Marshall Ganz, “Report on Clinics,” 1974, 3, box 22, folder 27, CCP, Pt.2.

²² Ibid. The Robert Kennedy Plan was the UFW medical benefits plan that operated in the U.S. and, for a short period, in Sonora and Baja California. As pointed out in this section, the union opened clinics in Mexicali and San Luis for members who were not able to cross the border and receive care in the U.S.

the UFW a transborder union. It would take another two years for the UFW to revisit Mexicali and healthcare with *Proyecto Mexicali* (Project Mexicali).

Section 2: The Chicano Movement, the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, and Conservative Opposition, 1970-1973

While the United Farm Workers implemented its health clinics in Mexicali and across California, the Imperial Valley felt the stirrings of the Chicano Movement. In 1969, the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) opened the academic year at Imperial Valley College with a call for “awareness” of Chicanas/os to eliminate their invisibility on campus.²³ The fight for this Chicana/o group was like the larger Chicano Movement (Movement) and black civil rights movement, which spearheaded and sustained projects that promoted access to higher education, opposition to the War in Vietnam, promotion of voting rights, labor rights, ethnic and racial pride, local control of institutions, and land grant challenges.²⁴ One year after UMAS at Imperial Valley College announced its arrival, the Movement also made inroads in migrant farmworker healthcare. In the northern Imperial County city of Brawley, the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* (*Clinica*) focused on delivering healthcare to migrant farmworkers and their families. Indeed, patients were initially required to be farmworkers or from farmworking families, have at least two dependents, and show proof of income to be enrolled in services.²⁵

²³ “Awareness Needed,” *Mirage*, March 10, 1969, 1, 4, Imperial Valley College Library, Imperial, CA.

²⁴ The historiography of the Chicano Movement is too expansive to provide an exhaustive list, and this note is intended to provide secondary sources that discuss the meanings and contestations of the Movement. See Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: UT Press, 2011); Ernesto Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero! Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966–1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jimmy Patiño, *Raza Sí, Migra No: Chicano Movement Struggles for Immigrant Rights in San Diego* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017); Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2005).

²⁵ HEW to Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Liaison, March 24, 1971, box 8, folder Migrant Health Project, Victor V. Veysey Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. This collection will hereafter be referred to as VVV Papers.

The *Clinica* emerged due to efforts by the non-profit organization *Casa de Amistad* (House of Friendship) and the clinic's director, Ventura Huerta (former husband of UFW board member, Dolores Huerta). The *Casa de Amistad* was credited with identifying the unmet need for migrant health in the Imperial Valley and sponsoring the first grant application to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in July 1970.²⁶ By October, the *Clinica* opened its doors to patients, albeit only for emergencies due to staff and facility limits. There was immediate resistance in the valley. In a county where the political economy, identity, and culture revolved overwhelmingly around agriculture; where the Congressional Representative, Victor V. Veysey, was a grower; and where county voters strongly favored Richard Nixon for president by nearly a 2:1 margin in 1972, the migrant health project in Brawley faced opposition from Veysey and the established medical community.²⁷ At the core of the *Clinica* struggle were questions of self-determination, federal funding, the presumed objectivity of medical care, and resistance to established social hierarchies in the Imperial Valley.

To better understand this resistance, it is important to trace the political and professional career of Victor Veysey. Born in Los Angeles, California, in 1915, Veysey received his Bachelor of Science degree from the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech), later earned a Master of Business Administration from Harvard in 1938 and joined the Industrial Relations Center at Cal Tech in 1939. During World War II, he worked on Project Camel, which focused on the housing for the atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9, 1945, respectively. Veysey arguably experienced posttraumatic stress disorder after he realized

²⁶ Henry Heilbrumm, "Research and Report," February 14, 1973, 1, 5, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

²⁷ 14,178 for Richard Nixon (R), 7,982 for George McGovern (D), Statement of Vote, General Election, November 7, 1972, Compiled by the Secretary of State, Sacramento, CA.

his involvement in the deaths of hundreds of thousands in those Japanese cities.²⁸ He left Cal Tech and moved to Brawley, where his father owned profitable and arable land. Veysey took to farming numerous cash crops and became president of the Imperial Valley branch of the California Beetgrowers Association, was active in the Imperial Grain Growers Association, and helped establish a cooperative cotton gin.²⁹ Veysey's entry into electoral politics began when he was elected to the Brawley school board in 1955, a position he held for five years. He was also involved in the establishment of Imperial Valley College in 1960 and served on the college's board. As Veysey put it, "So I became a sort of minor celebrity, a farmer who got the community college going."³⁰ This public activity and participation in one established component of the valley's political economy (agriculture) and an emerging one (education) caught the attention of the local Republican Party. He then successfully ran for California assemblyman and served from 1963-1971 and later Congressman from 1971-1975.³¹

Veysey's legislative interests in the California Assembly and U.S. House of Representatives ranged from agriculture, worker-employer relations, blood banks, clean air standards, and energy independence. His approach to farm labor was to create a proto-Agriculture Labor Relations Act at the state level and, as a Congressman, one on the national level that closely resembled the National Labor Relations Act. His sponsored legislation sought efficient labor relations between farmworkers and growers, but also included the removal of the secondary boycott (a key tool for the United Farm Workers) and what critics considered

²⁸Victor V. Veysey, Interview by Shirley K. Cohen, Oral History Project, California Institute of Technology Archives, Pasadena, California, July 14 & 21, 1993 and February 4, 1994, 17-18, 26-27, accessed January 29, 2018, http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechOH:OH_Veysey_V.

²⁹ Victor V. Veysey, interview by Enid H. Douglass, Oral History Program, Claremont Graduate School, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program, 1988, 51, accessed April 10, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/oh89-16-veysey>.

³⁰ Veysey, interview by Cohen, 27.

³¹ Victor V. Veysey, Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=V000093>.

unreasonable requirements to qualify for unemployment insurance. Veysey identified himself as a Republican “just sort of by inheritance more than anything.”³² Though Veysey “never really thought about it [party affiliation] that much,” he was a practitioner and proponent of conservative Republicanism, voted against the California Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1964, and disfavored school integration via busing in 1972.³³ Veysey also approved of Richard Nixon’s Revenue Sharing and reduction of the War on Poverty, especially the Office of Economic Opportunity. Veysey wrote to constituents that devolution, “Return[ed] both responsibility and resources to State and local governments,” and stood to supplant the federal OEO.³⁴ Indeed, devolution was a part of the 1972 Republican Party platform, where Veysey served as a delegate to the Republican National Committee.

The emergence of the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* during Veysey’s transition from Sacramento to Washington, D.C. in 1970-1971, placed the *Clinica* and Veysey in a tense relationship that highlighted debates about federal intervention, local control, and grassroots challenges to Imperial Valley elites’ power. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva identifies a recurrent belief in the United States that “social change should be the outcome of a rational and democratic process and not of the government’s coercive capacity” as a way to invalidate federal programs like those of the OEO.³⁵ Veysey was quick to focus his attention on the *Clinica* and pursue issues of federal overreach raised by constituents. Allegations of fraud and questions of merit surrounded the *Clinica* shortly after its initial grant and opening in October 1970. Some valleyites charged the *Clinica* and HEW with not knowing the actual medical needs of the

³² Veysey, interview by Cohen, 27.

³³ Veysey, interview by Douglass, 163; Press Release, March 21, 1972, box 15, folder Press Releases, VVV Papers.

³⁴ Veysey to Josephine Sabala, Luis Sanchez, Virginia Sanchez, Teresa Sandoval, March 5-6, 1973, box 53, folder correspondence #78, VVV Papers.

³⁵ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 2nd edition (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 34.

county and not consulting with the medical planning association in the valley. The city council of Imperial opposed the clinic because it was an “extreme duplication of present services...and a gross waste of federal monies.”³⁶ Moreover, valley doctors charged that they stood to lose \$25,000 of yearly income to the *Clinica* and that “there were no migrant farmworkers in the county.” According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there were at least 2,869 farmworkers and foreman who listed the valley as home, not including spouses and dependents. Doctors took their case to court, where the suit was dismissed with prejudice.³⁷ Critics requested a stop to the grant because they viewed the *Casa de Amistad* as an unqualified administrator of the clinic, but HEW noted that the Comprehensive Health Planning Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties was consulted and agreed to the *Clinica*’s funding.³⁸ HEW also informed Veysey of the diverse composition of the *Clinica*’s board of directors, including the Imperial County Health Department, the California Rural Legal Assistance, and farmworkers. Missing from the board was a representative from the Imperial County Medical Society. Though invited, the organization initially declined to serve on the board perhaps as a protest to federal involvement in the valley’s medical sector.³⁹

The late 1970 inquiries were the beginnings of Veysey’s deep interest in the *Clinica*. HEW advanced the fledgling clinic nearly \$50,000 for the clinic’s planning. In September 1970, Assemblyman Veysey contacted HEW to freeze future funds for at least ninety days, during which time the clinic should “prove their ability to properly operate the clinic” and ensure that

³⁶ “Imperial Joins Migrant Clinic Opposition,” *The Brawley News*, July 23, 1970.

³⁷ Henry Heilbrumm, “Research and Report,” February 14, 1973, 2, 9, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

³⁸ “HEW Denies Clinic Funds’ Suspension,” *San Diego Union*, September 1, 1970, *Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, Inc.*, Newspaper Clippings, 1970-1994, *Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo*, Brawley, CA; HEW to Veysey, March 4, 1971, 1, box 8, folder *Migrant Health Project*, VVV Papers. The agreement between HEW and Veysey also included a survey of medical needs to be conducted at a future date.

³⁹ HEW to Veysey, March 4, 1971, 2, box 8, folder *Migrant Health Project*, VVV Papers.

“sound business practices are incorporated in any facility of this kind.”⁴⁰ However, HEW stated that it did not place the *Clinica* under probation. It also noted the clinic was “reportedly well-operated” and the awarded funds were undisturbed.⁴¹ Veysey presented his argument from what he understood as the position of an objective evaluator motivated by efficiency, not politics. Veysey used this argumentative thread on numerous occasions to voice his opposition to the clinic. Evaluation and efficiency also complemented other arguments by *Clinica* detractors, including Veysey’s staff and some Imperial Valley medical professionals.

Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos was also in the crosshairs of conservatives because of its use of funds and push for property acquisition. Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty was most apparent through programs such as Model Cities, Operation Head Start, Job Corps, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Office of Economic Opportunity to oversee anti-poverty programs.⁴² While some programs were defunded, repackaged, or eliminated under the Nixon administration, others remained or were created, such as the Health Services and Mental Health Administration within HEW and overseen by Vernon Wilson. Brawley veterinarian Ben York, Jr. communicated with Veysey’s office and expressed his disapproval of the *Clinica*’s plans to purchase real estate for the clinic’s expansion. Ventura Huerta proposed the establishment of a savings account from clinic fees, which Dr. York thought was “very, very wrong.”⁴³ He suggested that excess funds be returned to the federal government and Veysey agreed. After hearing from York, Veysey asked HEW of the legality of the *Clinica* purchasing property and he

⁴⁰ “HEW Denies Clinic Funds’ Suspension,” *San Diego Union*, September 1, 1970, Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, Inc., Newspaper Clippings, 1970-1994, Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, Brawley, CA. This collection will hereafter be referred to as Clinicas Papers.

⁴¹ “HEW Denies Clinic Funds’ Suspension,” *San Diego Union*, September 1, 1970, Clinicas Papers.

⁴² Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America’s Enduring Confrontation with Poverty*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford UP, 2013), 103, 146-147.

⁴³ Memo to Veysey staff, July 1, 1971, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

was “especially interested why such funds are not returned to the general fund in the [U.S.] Treasury since the clinic operated almost wholly with federal funds.”⁴⁴

York’s contempt for the *Clinica* went beyond real estate. While watching a television segment on the *Clinica* by a local television network, York commended the visual presentation, but the subject of the story “made him sick.”⁴⁵ Much to the chagrin of Veysey and York, HEW’s goal was to make projects it funded “self-supporting,” including ownership of the building the organization rented.⁴⁶ HEW confirmed that the *Clinica* was permitted to seek a lease-purchase agreement, but only if the payments were competitive and funds came from money previously designated for rent. The Catholic Archdiocese of San Diego rented its space out to the *Clinica* at the “most reasonable rate” of \$600 per month, a figure HEW approved.⁴⁷ Despite the answer from HEW, York remained unsatisfied and demanded to know what precedent HEW cited to allow the *Clinica* to own property and become a “permanent institution.”⁴⁸ For York, the *Clinica* represented the overreaching and intruding arm of the federal state over local control determined by his interests. He expressed this sentiment through arguments of fiscal policy and logic. He asked Veysey just how a federally funded project that was renewed on a yearly basis could own land. The commitment and partnership between *Casa de Amistad*, medical providers, and the federal government was incongruous to York and other detractors. York sought to prevent the welfare state from pulling a veil over the public’s eyes, but he failed to comprehend the ways that the valley’s political economy served the interests of growers and their allies, leaving those who worked the fields to a laissez-faire healthcare system focused more on protecting its market over delivery of services to a threatened and underserved population.

⁴⁴ Veysey to Vernon Wilson, July 16, 1971, box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

⁴⁵ Memo to Veysey Staff, July 1, 1971, box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

⁴⁶ Vernon Wilson to Veysey, August 3, 1971, box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

⁴⁷ Vernon Wilson to Veysey, October 6, 1972, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁴⁸ Memo to Veysey, November 9, 1971, box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

HEW's decision to allow the *Clinica* to own property convinced Veysey and clinic opponents to politically discredit the clinic. Even as Nixon pursued devolution, the designation of funds for the *Clinica* continued. With the 1972 general election on the horizon, Nixon marked funds for different projects that targeted Latinas/os, which skeptics viewed as a political maneuver to curry votes rather than a commitment to Latina/o issues.⁴⁹ Regardless of the motivation, the one-time funds could be utilized to sustain the *Clinica* longer, a reality Veysey's office sought to change. His office was aware of HEW's monitoring of the *Clinica*, but Veysey staffers suggested collusion of surveillance between them and the Office of Economic Opportunity. A Veysey staffer stated that "friendly 'spies'" at the OEO wanted information on any *Clinica* workers who became "too visibly involved in [George] McGovern registration drives."⁵⁰ Migrant programs across the state saw their financial futures tied to McGovern rather than Nixon. Republicans "need[ed] hard evidence" to prove their case of political bias instead of relying on unverified data.⁵¹ The Veysey staffer linked Democrats to migrant programs and federal overspending, asking any potential detective to not worry about the "3 Cadillacs and 4 mistresses" that *Clinica* directors may have, given that "This is acceptable under today's morality by the Democrat majority here and most of the liberal media."⁵² Instead, the Veysey office wanted clear proof that *Clinica* workers were "spending their time outside the office during official duty time registering voters."⁵³ One year earlier, Ventura Huerta was admonished by HEW for his use of official stationery to support a House bill amendment to reduce military

⁴⁹ "U.S. Aid Gushes to Chicanos as Election Nears," *Washington Post*, August 22, 1972, A8.

⁵⁰ "Sensitive Information," August 24, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁵¹ "Sensitive Information," August 24, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁵² "Sensitive Information," August 24, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers. This perspective elevated the Republican Party and Veysey as upstanding keepers of morality while Democrats and the *Clinica* were sources of social and moral decay.

⁵³ "Sensitive Information," August 24, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

spending, an issue critical to the Chicano Movement's goal to end the War in Vietnam.⁵⁴ If Veysey supporters could gather evidence on *Clinica* personnel doing political work during hours of operation, Veysey's office was confident, "We can nail them to the wall," potentially closing off future federal grants, severely limit the possibility to buy property, and ensure the temporality of the *Clinica*.⁵⁵

The *Clinica*'s ties to the United Farm Workers deeply disturbed believers of the separation between politics and medicine. After Ben York visited the *Clinica* in April 1972, he was aghast to find copies of the UFW's newspaper and main organ of information dissemination, *El Malcriado*, for sale. Though he ostensibly supported the publication of the paper, York contended that it "has no place whatsoever in a government funded facility."⁵⁶ Soon after, Veysey queried Health Services and Mental Health Administration (HSMHA) director Vernon Wilson on the propriety of *El Malcriado* at the clinic, especially because of its stance on the national Republican Party. The HSMHA fell under the purview of HEW. *El Malcriado*'s March 1972 paper was an "emergency issue" that was highly critical of the National Labor Relations Board and the Republican Party, which the UFW saw as trying to end the union's use of boycotts through the NLRB. The paper vehemently protested that a date was even granted to hear the case against the use of boycotts while farmworkers remained outside coverage of the National Labor Relations Act. As *El Malcriado* put it, "The Republican Party cares only for the rich" and it "hates that" the union effectively used boycotts.⁵⁷ To add to Veysey's frustration, the paper

⁵⁴ Ivan Richardson to Veysey, July 9, 1971, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁵⁵ "Sensitive Information," August 24, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁵⁶ Memo to Veysey, April 14, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁵⁷ "Emergency Issue," *El Malcriado*, March 20, 1972, 4, 9,

https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/ufwarchives/elmalcriado/1972/March%2020,%201972%20No%201_PDF.pdf, accessed March 23, 2018.

asked for readers to send a million letters of protest to Bob Dole, chairman of the Republican National Committee.

While the request to bombard his party with letters of disapproval was aggravating enough, Veysey unwittingly captured the stakes for farmworkers in the union struggle. He asked Vernon Wilson, “Is the distribution of openly partisan pamphlets a proper health function for an activity under your supervision?”⁵⁸ That is, Veysey questioned if healthcare was a form of politics and vice versa. On one level, Veysey and York sought impartiality from the federal government’s funds and medical care. On a deeper level, both scoffed at their unfulfilled desire to close the clinic and the politicization of medical care from an alternative standpoint. Veysey, York, and other medical professionals were unable to revise their ideological opposition to the link between farm labor unionism, healthcare, and federal intervention. For staff and leadership at the *Clinica*, they understood both as nodes of self-determination. Disappointingly for Veysey, HEW responded, “As a private organization, the *Clinica* is free to make available in its facilities any material it selects” and its use of federal funds “does not, in any sense, make it a Federal agency.”⁵⁹

The *Clinica*’s link to the Chicano Movement and activism represented a larger challenge to the Imperial Valley’s established racial order. As shown in chapters 1 and 3, there was ambivalence in the valley on the presence of Mexicans (including those born and raised in the U.S. and/or Mexico). At least one person in 1964 was concerned about a “Mexican American takeover of public offices in the Imperial Valley,” while a youth swim club in Calexico was

⁵⁸ Veysey to Vernon Wilson, April 28, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁵⁹ Frederick L. Stone to Veysey, May 12, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers. Italics are used for consistency, but they were not in the original.

named the “Wetbacks” as late as 1969.⁶⁰ At Imperial Valley College—the local community college that Veysey helped launch—the student paper first reported on the Chicano Movement in March 1969. Student responses to the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) were quick and demonstrative of the Movement’s power. The unofficial representative of UMAS stated that the organization focused on educational equity, including learning Mexican American history, increasing graduation rates, and entering higher education administration.⁶¹ The paper surveyed 25 students and 15 expressed some knowledge or favorable opinion of UMAS with the remaining ten not knowing what UMAS was or holding an unfavorable view of the group, including the usage of dismissive language, such as, “I think it’s a bunch of &%*@!!.”⁶² Tellingly, two students expressed support for the group but were unaware of what UMAS was fighting for and one mentioned, “I don’t look down on them [Chicanas/os],” removing himself from larger issues of white supremacy and leaving Chicana/o frustration at the personal level.⁶³ In a cartoon in the paper, a Mexican bandit adorned with a sombrero, mustache, rifle, bandoliers, and horse, points his firearm to an “Arab” (IVC’s mascot) and his camel, stating, “I want an office, three secretaries, Mexican studies...”⁶⁴ The cartoon missed its satirical mark but struck its racist chord. Relying on the trope of the Mexican bandit, Chicanas/os were seen as holding the college captive until its demands were met rather than engaging historical silences in the college’s curriculum or larger Movement. The reportage in the student newspaper showed the dissonance between Chicanas/os and the student

⁶⁰ “Voice of the People,” *Imperial Valley Press*, June 23, 1964, 6; “Wetbacks Lose to Calipatria,” *Calexico Chronicle*, July 24, 1969, 7.

⁶¹ “Awareness Needed,” *Mirage*, Imperial Valley College, March 10, 1969, 1, 4. There was no chartered UMAS chapter at IVC in 1969, but the speaker was unofficially representing UMAS and the Chicano Movement.

⁶² “Rostrum,” *ibid.*, 2. Symbols in original.

⁶³ “Rostrum,” *ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁴ “Political Satire,” *El Barid*, Imperial Valley College, June 4, 1970, 3. The “Arab” was a reference to the desert landscape of the valley.

body at IVC as well as fears of the grassroots Movement demanding equity from institutions and valleyites.

Along with the momentum and visibility pushed by the Chicano Movement, the *Clinica* emerged because of an assessment of medical needs for valley farmworkers. This need was brought to the forefront by the resurgence of farmworker activism in the mid-1960s and 1970s and largely financed through federal programs. The *Clinica* was unashamed of its links with the Movement. The *Clinica's* letterhead included an image of Quetzalcoatl. An important Mesoamerican and Mexica deity recovered by the Chicano Movement, Quetzalcoatl unabashedly signaled the *Clinica's* ties to the Movement, and as *El Malcriado* showed, this included farmworker organizing. Conservatives perceived the *Casa de Amistad*, the supervising agency of the clinic, as a "militant organization."⁶⁵ Veysey's office was aware that the *Casa de Amistad* demonstrated against the Thrifty store in Brawley after the assistant manager accused two black teens of shoplifting.⁶⁶

One of the *Clinica's* most supportive groups was the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA). At its core, the "CRLA intended to offer its indigent clients the same economic, political and social bargaining power that large private law firms offered their affluent clients."⁶⁷ Supported by the OEO, CRLA offices opened up in California's agricultural areas in August 1966 and were soon met with opposition from the California State Bar. The Imperial County Bar Association echoed the California State Bar's complaint that the CRLA was an outside organization that unfairly focused on California's poor and low-income peoples.⁶⁸ Like the *Casa*

⁶⁵ "Clinic Controversy Spurs New Health Needs Survey," August 4, 1970, *The Brawley News*.

⁶⁶ "20 Demonstrate at Drug Store for Accusation," *Imperial Valley Press*, May 8, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁶⁷ Michael Bennett, Cruz Reynoso, "California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA): Survival of a Poverty Law Practice," *Chicana/o Latina/o Law Review*, 1 no. 4 (1972), 3.

⁶⁸ Bennett and Reynoso, "California Rural Legal Assistance," 5, fn. 11.

de Amistad, the CRLA was viewed as an overly opinionated organization tied to the Chicano Movement and the Clinica. Veysey's office went so far as to refer to the CRLA as "masterminds" when the organization challenged a 1972 grand jury's critical assessment of the *Clinica*, arguing that the grand jury went beyond its scope.⁶⁹

The 1972 grand jury placed scrutiny on the misapplication of federal funds on Chicana/o programs as a critique of the OEO and the *Clinica*. The jury found that two other OEO projects—Pocho Enterprises and Service, Employment, and Redevelopment—misused or mishandled funds, which the chairman of both programs (under the federal Jobs for Progress) stated it was a simple bookkeeping error that was since corrected.⁷⁰ The local OEO director pointed out that SER and the *Clinica* were "limited almost exclusively to Mexican-Americans," while Phillip Sanchez, national OEO director, stated that millions of people remained below the poverty line despite the War on Poverty.⁷¹ Both OEO leaders were part of a growing chorus against federal control and reach. One member of the grand jury argued that the *Clinica* should request fewer funds from the federal government because of the clinic's financial "surplus" from services delivered. The same person pointed to inefficiency at the clinic's drivers, who "just sit there all day long and play cards or whatever."⁷²

A member of the clinic's board of directors also aided opposition to the *Clinica*. Dr. Burke Schoensee worked for the Imperial County Health Department and also served on the clinic's board. Schoensee echoed Veysey and his office's view that tax dollars were flowing into the clinic with minimal evaluation or return on investment. Schoensee was especially critical of

⁶⁹ Notes, circa late 1972, box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

⁷⁰ Michael James, "Exiting Grand Jury Hits Poverty Funds Handling," *Imperial Valley Press*, January 30, 1973, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁷¹ "Coordination Asked on I.C. Job Training," *Imperial Valley Press*, May 5, 1972, 1-2; "OEO Director Critical of Plan Operation," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 9, 1972, both in box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

⁷² "Jury Report Critical of Health Clinic," January 30, 1973, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

the cost of services and number of patients seen at the clinic. The doctor noted that between 1971 and 1972, over 1,000 new patients were admitted and an average of 32 were seen per day. There were also 412 migrant farmworkers who visited the clinic and resided in Imperial County, which signaled that many more farmworkers received care at other facilities, if at all.⁷³ Importantly, the report cited by Schoensee did not mention in which city the farmworkers lived. Regardless of the amount of new patients seen or population served, the issue for Schoensee rested with costs. The 1973 grants for the clinic were estimated at over one million dollars combined, a figure Schoensee conceived as exorbitant for the services provided.⁷⁴ This critique of the *Clinica*, however, ran afoul with the rest of the board of directors. In January 1973, Dr. Schoensee was removed from his position on the board and replaced by Dr. Amalia Katsigeanis, a physician who described herself as, “Sensitive, interested and sympathetic to the clinic.”⁷⁵

Tension arose between the main Brawley hospital and the *Clinica* over the nature of healthcare in the valley. A Health, Education, and Welfare-appointed site team delivered its second review of the *Clinica* in October 1972. The first review appeared overly favorable to the clinic for Veysey and his staff.⁷⁶ For Ron Lane, administrator of Pioneers Memorial Hospital in Brawley, the second report was again replete with flattery as well as misunderstandings. With critical assessments of the report’s findings, such as, “absolutely wrong,” “over-stated,” and “a very grave exaggeration,” Lane demonstrated the uneasy coexistence between medical facilities, even when Pioneers initially agreed to lend administrative support to the fledgling clinic.⁷⁷ Like

⁷³ *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, Statistics, July 1971-June 1972, tables 1, 6, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers. Both patient figures derived from this report.

⁷⁴ Memo from Burke Schoensee to Veysey, October 27, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁷⁵ “Dr. Katsigeanis Named to Farm Worker Clinic Board,” *Imperial Valley Press*, January 26, 1973, box 101, folder *Migrant Health Clinic*, VVV Papers.

⁷⁶ “Chronological Order,” circa February 1973, box 101, folder *Migrant Health Clinic*, VVV Papers.

⁷⁷ Dr. Gustav Bansmer, et al., “Report to Site Visit to California Migrant Health Projects,” October 31, 1972; Ron Lane, Comments, December 13, 1972, box 101, folder *Migrant Health Clinic*, VVV Papers. Lane’s comments

Veysey, Lane inadvertently highlighted the central issue between the *Clinica*, farmworkers and farmworker families, and the professional medical community. The report stated, “But, in the general community, there was a feeling that the clinic was meeting an unmet need, that the potential of services was at a level not available to the general community.” The report continued, “There was uniform agreement that the greatest opposition was from the doctors.”⁷⁸ Lane took exception to the indictment against his professional community and Pioneers with the curt comment, “Distorted and frankly not completely true.”⁷⁹ For Lane and other medical practitioners, they refused to recognize the necessity of the clinic and understand the needs of a farmworking and migrant population, especially as the valley’s medical community was critiqued by a federal body.

As he and his office relayed concerns from a limited number of constituents, Veysey added his own voice to the *Clinica* debate with the weight of social science training and presumed objectivity. Since his academic work at Cal Tech and his participation in Operation Camel and atomic weapons, Veysey was drawn to Taylorist understandings of the workplace. His 1944 study, *Selecting, Training, and Rating Supervisors*, provided guidelines on effective communication between executives and management, “unprejudiced appraisal of performance,” and “will remind executives, supervisors, and the rank and file of the important difference which distinguishes the supervisor from the craftsman—leadership.”⁸⁰ In his correspondence with HEW, Veysey was fixated on ways to “maximize the return on our investment” of tax dollars in the *Clinica* and remove “the apparent lack of accountability and sound fiscal reporting included

appear on the margins of the report. Henry Heilbrumm, “Research and Report,” February 14, 1973, 4, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁷⁸ Dr. Gustav Bansmer, et al., “Report to Site Visit to California Migrant Health Projects,” October 31, 1972, 14; Ron Lane, Comments on Site Visit, December 13, 1972, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁷⁹ Ron Lane, Comments on Site Visit, December 13, 1972, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁸⁰ Victor V. Veysey, *Selecting, Training, and Rating Supervisors*, California Institute of Technology, Industrial Relations Section, Bulletin No. 6. (Pasadena, CA.: Industrial Relations Section, California Institute of Technology, 1944), 2.

in the terms of the grant.”⁸¹ As Veysey put it, “Nothing promotes efficiency more than vigorous evaluation,” which should be spelled out rather than left to individual’s determinations.⁸² Veysey’s initial opposition to the clinic was almost verbatim from his Cal Tech study. When the Clinica was awarded a second grant by HEW, Veysey was incensed that the terms of “accountability and evaluation” were not applied to the *Clinica* like Cruz Reynoso (director of California Rural Legal Assistance and former political rival) claimed. Veysey also questioned HEW’s process that determined the clinic’s “effectiveness,” which appeared replete with bureaucratic shortcomings. For Veysey, the clinic was funded following an “uncritical” methodology that was an affront to his academic training, his anti-inflationary stance, his promotion of medicine as a private venture, and his desire for growers to maintain their position of power against an active social and labor movement.⁸³

The battle between the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, Victor Veysey, and the Imperial Valley medical community was epitomized in the *Clinica*’s struggle to add a dental wing from 1971-1972. The Imperial Valley Dental Association and James McMichael, D.D.S. sought out Veysey’s assistance almost immediately after the clinic’s announcement to provide dental services in 1971.⁸⁴ McMichael and his colleagues viewed this development as a waste of expenditures and the federal government’s intrusion into a geographic area it knew little about. As a medical professional in an agricultural area, McMichael could access local lawmakers much

⁸¹ Veysey to Vernon Wilson, June 28, 1971; Veysey to William Sandlin, March 14, 1972, both in box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁸² Veysey to William Sandlin, March 14, 1972, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers. Interestingly, he considered free medical care to be exceptions that were permissible if codified.

⁸³ Veysey to Ron Lane, January 2, 1973, box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

⁸⁴ John G. Walters, President of Imperial Valley Dental Association, March 22, 1971; James C. McMichael to Veysey, March 26, 1971; Ventura Huerta to G.L. Tunnison, January 3, 1972, 3, all in box 101, folder Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos, VVV Papers.

quicker than other peoples, such as farmworkers and their allies.⁸⁵ The El Centro dentist also caught the ear of local assemblyman Raymond Seeley. McMichael questioned the “fantastic budget for treating a projected group of 500 families, many covered by Medi-Cal, and many [live] here in this area seasonally.”⁸⁶ McMichael also requested that no new facilities be constructed for the clinic, meaning that the clinic should not compete with landlords and facilities that already existed in the valley.

It was much easier to dismiss the *Clinica* as an overfunded arm of the UFW rather than comprehend the needs of farmworkers or recognize the shortcomings of the Imperial Valley medical establishment. McMichael further showed contempt at the possibility of the politicization of medical care, “Their support [*Clinica*] seems to come from Mr. Chavez in relationship with his union fight with the Teamsters, or so it seems.”⁸⁷ Assemblyman Seeley wasted little time in supporting McMichael, arguing that the clinic (and other federal programs) was “certainly a waste” and he knew of “two Mexican ladies working for the housing authority in Brawley who are also very much opposed to this program.”⁸⁸ Seeley then took the issue to Vernon Wilson under a multiracial claim, “Since there is so much opposition to the program by both Mexican-Americans as well as the whites it would appear that a thorough study should be made before this request is granted.”⁸⁹ Valley dentists succeeded and the *Clinica* dental funding application was rejected in July 1971.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Indeed, the Veysey Papers contain almost no correspondence or notes between farmworkers and their allies, except for Ventura Huerta. Importantly, this correspondence was limited to Huerta reporting to Veysey rather than Veysey listening or organically conversing with the *Clinica*. Other farmworker issues revolve around Veysey-sponsored legislation and not input from farmworkers or farmworker unions.

⁸⁶ James C. McMichael to Raymond Seeley, April 12, 1971, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁸⁷ James C. McMichael to Raymond Seeley, April 12, 1971, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁸⁸ Raymond Seeley to James C. McMichael, April 21, 1971, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁸⁹ Raymond Seeley to Vernon Wilson, April 21, 1971, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers.

⁹⁰ Henry Heilbrumm, “Research and Report,” February 14, 1973, 9, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

The debate on the dental wing of the *Clinica* reached a fevered pitch between August and October of 1972. The *Clinica* reapplied to HEW for a grant and, in July 1972, it was awarded nearly \$60,000 to begin a dental facility. The *Clinica* soon purchased dental equipment, put a dentist on the payroll, and was developing a dental assistant program.⁹¹ HEW and the Health Services and Mental Health Administration soon delayed the awarded funds. Vernon Wilson stated, “In response to repeated congressional inquiries, including those of Congressman Veysey,” funds were frozen until HEW conducted site visits across California’s migrant health clinics and consolidated HEW-supported clinics under one plan.⁹² HEW was in accord with Veysey when it acknowledged that HEW’s review policy “had not provided an adequate opportunity for expression by the local dental professional community.”⁹³ Funds were thus delayed to clinics across California, including the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, until a study and testimony of local dentists were conducted.

Supporters of the dental clinic filtered the evaluation and bureaucratic debate differently. For them, the optics of delayed funds and Veysey’s involvement pointed to the Congressman’s entrenched resistance to the *Clinica* since his first challenge to the clinic’s funds in September 1970. *Clinica* supporters interpreted the latest freeze to Veysey’s “little faith in the farmworker community...to help themselves obtain good dental care.”⁹⁴ The ad-hoc Concerned Citizens for Health Committee stated that dental issues were “the most urgent health problem” for *Clinica* patients and a study by Loma Linda Dental School (part of Loma Linda University) found that

⁹¹ Press Release, Concerned Citizens for Health Committee, circa August 1972, 1, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁹² Vernon Wilson to Veysey, October 17, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁹³ Vernon Wilson to Veysey, October 17, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁹⁴ Press Release, Concerned Citizens for Health Committee, circa August 1972, 1, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

Clinica patient needs were “three to five times greater than that of the general population.”⁹⁵ The committee and supporters of the dental clinic held that Veysey “exerted political power and influence in an unprecedented manner” to cajole HEW from dispensing awarded funds and stifling the dental program, “An integral part of the total comprehensive health programs envisioned for the farmworkers of Imperial County.”⁹⁶ The committee also pointed to Veysey’s upper class position as a Congressman with access to capital and federal health insurance, “Mr. Veysey has no problems with his dental care and it is possible for him to obtain the finest care possible,” while farmworkers were fighting for basic care.⁹⁷

The *Clinica* increased its push to open the dental clinic against obfuscated bureaucratic wrangling. The *Clinica* took its fight to the international sphere and wrote an open letter to Mexican federal government—though proximity to the border signaled Mexicali—in a case of reciprocated Good Neighbor Policy. The United States assisted Mexico in medical needs and now the *Clinica* asked, “Will you send us volunteer dentists and equipment to aid us in Brawley?”⁹⁸ This appeal invoked the internal colonial model utilized by the Chicano and Black Power movements.⁹⁹ The *Clinica* understood Veysey’s actions as ransom to forward the Congressman’s interests and those of his supporters, but it was a political and ideological payment the *Clinica* felt undermined the determination of farmworkers and the clinic for adequate healthcare. Veysey was taken aback at the *Clinica*’s actions and naming him as the

⁹⁵ Press Release, Concerned Citizens for Health Committee, circa August 1972, 1, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers; Vernon Wilson to Veysey, October 6, 1972, 3, box 101, folder *Migrant Health Clinic*, VVV Papers.

⁹⁶ Press Release, Concerned Citizens for Health Committee, circa August 1972, 1, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁹⁷ Press Release, Concerned Citizens for Health Committee, circa August 1972, 2, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁹⁸ *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, “An Open to the Mexican Government,” circa September 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

⁹⁹ This model proposed that people of color, particularly African Americans and Chicanos/as, were placed on unequal grounds because they were colonized within the United States; that is, they were “domestic” colonies. See Ramón Gutiérrez, “Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 1, no. 2 (Sept. 2004): 281-295.

cause for the frozen funds. It was incomprehensible to Veysey that he was accused of unfairness when he only applied his academic training to a social, medical, and human rights issue. He was only able to understand the clinic from the perspective of valley elites rather than those of marginalized farmworkers and other marginalized peoples. When the HEW-approved comprehensive planning program was finalized in late 1972, the funds flowed into the *Clinica*'s coffers as Veysey's influential protestations waned. On February 1, 1973, the *Clinica* broke ground on the new dental wing.¹⁰⁰

By October 1972, conservative opposition to the *Clinica* lost its economic argument. HEW informed Veysey that the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* was operating at fiscal efficiency, even coming below other OEO health centers' service costs. As a migrant health center—unlike urban OEO centers—the *Clinica* cost per visit was almost half the cost of the migrant clinic in Toppenish, Washington.¹⁰¹ Veysey remained skeptical and requested clarification of a joint statement by Ventura Huerta and Adán Juárez, director of Orange Cove Family Health Center in Fresno County. According to them, both clinics served a combined 13,091 patients at an annual cost of \$82.47 per person.¹⁰² Like his previous comment, Wilson noted that this was “considerably less” than other OEO health centers.¹⁰³ Moreover, Wilson once more determined that the *Clinica* cost-per-visit was on par with other OEO health centers.¹⁰⁴ To the chagrin of Veysey and his dollars-and-cents argument, the *Clinica* provided low-cost healthcare to both patients and the federal government.

¹⁰⁰ “Dental Facility Groundbreaking,” *The Brawley News*, February 1, 1973, 2.

¹⁰¹ Vernon Wilson to Veysey, October 6, 1972, 2, box 101, folder Migrant Health Clinic, VVV Papers. The *Clinica* cost per visit was \$20.77 and Toppenish was \$38.49.

¹⁰² U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Health Services for Domestic Agricultural Workers: Joint Hearing before the Subcommittee on Health and the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., August 1, 1972 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O, 1972), 71.

¹⁰³ Vernon Wilson to Veysey, November 2, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Vernon Wilson to Veysey, November 2, 1972, box 101, folder *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*, VVV Papers.

After January 1973, the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* removed the scrutinizing microscope from Victor Veysey and his office. The *Clinica* continued to have funds awarded, positive evaluations, and intense resistance from valley medical professionals ebbed enough to form a partnership with local dentists until a permanent facility could be completed on the *Clinica*'s property. Along with the *Clinica*, Veysey was concerned with several issues in the valley and the country, namely inflation and geothermal energy to forward energy independence from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. He also continued to push against agricultural prices and work stoppages in the fields. In 1974, Veysey was gerrymandered into the 35th District, an area in the center of Southern California and away from his base and political roots in the Imperial Valley and eastern Riverside County. Veysey was also among several Republicans who lost their seat because of the Watergate scandal. Veysey lost the election by only 607 votes and this margin spurred a sense of frustration and bitterness to elected office.¹⁰⁵ The valley's new Republican Congressman, Clair Burgener, was not fixated on the *Clinica* and later recalled unemployment, immigration, water (including the Salton Sea), and farm issues (especially the 160-acre limit on farms) as the valley's most pressing concerns.¹⁰⁶ Also in early 1973, Ventura Huerta announced his departure from the *Clinica*. He accepted a position as administrator of the Rural Health Project in King City, Monterey County, where local physicians appeared open to providing medical care to low-income patients.¹⁰⁷ The *Clinica* continued to

¹⁰⁵ Veysey chose not to seek further elected positions, but did pursue appointed ones beginning in the Department of Interior and was later appointed by President Gerald Ford to the newly created Assistant Secretary of the Army, Civil Works. Veysey then made his way back to California as the state's Secretary of Industrial Relations for one year in 1983 and maintained ties to Cal Tech. Veysey, interview by Cohen, 30, 41.

¹⁰⁶ Congressman Clair W. Burgener, interview by Phillip L. Gianos, Oral History Program, History Department, California State University, Fullerton, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program (1990), 107-108, 141-142, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://ia800101.us.archive.org/11/items/oh93-7-burgener/oh93-7-burgener.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ "Huerta Will Replace Paul Gookins at RHP," *The Rustler* (King City, CA), January 18, 1973; "Rural Aid Clinic Chief Quits Post," *San Diego Union*, January 27, 1973; both in Clinics de Salud del Pueblo, Inc., Newspaper Clippings, 1970-1994, Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo Archive.

serve a need for the valley's farmworkers and lower-income peoples as it developed from a project into an institution with planned satellite clinics across the farmed and urbanizing desert.

With the *Clinica* in the north county and the UFW clinics in the south, farmworker healthcare mushroomed to levels previously unrealized with the impetus of both the Chicano Movement and the farm worker labor movement. The clinics were initially separated by 25 miles, which prevented a direct competition for clients but were close enough to be reached by patients across the valley. For over a decade, migrant farmworkers could choose to receive medical care in at least two facilities outside of the main hospitals in the Imperial Valley. The relationship between the UFW Calexico clinic and the *Clinica* in Brawley was based on reciprocity and a drive to serve neglected peoples. The *Clinica*'s first director—Ventura Huerta—and Adán Juárez (of the Orange Cove clinic in Fresno County) stated that their facilities readily accepted the RFK Plan while other facilities refused to accept the UFW's insurance.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, former UFW staff at the Calexico clinic recalled that the *Clinica* helped the UFW with labor shortages.¹⁰⁹ The honoring of the RFK Plan and sharing of labor went beyond a payment of benefits. It was a show of trust between the two organizations; one funded by government grants and the other by union dues and diversified investments. It demonstrated that both medical groups were keenly interested in providing access to medical care to farmworkers and farmworker families and to give them a place of belonging even as they faced precarious stations in social and labor relations.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 59.

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Murphy, "Calexico, Parts 1-5," Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, Online Discussion, July 3, 2004, 14-15, accessed June 12, 2017, [https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/disc/July\[1\]\[2\].pdf](https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/disc/July[1][2].pdf).

Section 3: Revisiting Transborder Healthcare: *Proyecto Mexicali* and a Murder in the Fields

Soon after the closure of *Clinica Obrera* in 1974, union farm workers wanted their medical care in Mexicali back. The termination of *Clinica Obrera* was a decision by leadership to focus its attention and resources on the fledgling clinic in Calexico, but members did not stop expecting medical care in Mexicali. As Jessica Govea noted, the request for medical coverage in Mexico came from members since the earliest contracts were negotiated with growers.¹¹⁰ Regarding medical care in Mexicali, Govea recalled, “The clamor for coverage in Mexico really heated up” especially when the Inter Harvest negotiating committee brought up the “the problem” of healthcare in Mexico to Cesar Chavez in 1975.¹¹¹ After two days of deliberations in December 1975, union leadership moved forward with a plan to “provide quality medical care” in northwestern Mexico.¹¹² Farm workers pushed the union to implement healthcare on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border to reflect their transborder lives and move beyond the confines of the border. The latter was critical for farm workers with families in Mexicali who were unable to receive a visa to enter the United States or who preferred to visit physicians they were already familiar with and accessible without a visa requirement. Similar to the network of UFW clinics across California, members wanted a plan that reflected their labor patterns as they lived and worked the factories in the fields across the Imperial Valley, Central Valley, and Mexicali. The union responded in 1977 with the creation of a Preferred Provider Organization in Mexicali: *Proyecto Mexicali*.

¹¹⁰ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

¹¹¹ Proposición al Comité de Servicios Médicos de Mexicali, December 2, 1977, 3, box 6, folder 25, MGP. Govea, interview by Bardacke.

¹¹² Proposición al Comité de Servicios Médicos de Mexicali, December 2, 1977, 3, box 6, folder 25, Marshall Ganz Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter, this collection will be abbreviated as MGP.

The development and launch of *Proyecto Mexicali* (PM) fell on the desk of Jessica Govea. Govea served in numerous positions in the union from 1966 through 1981 and like others in the union, she was adept in numerous duties and roles, especially as an effective boycott leader and a tactful manager.¹¹³ Cesar Chavez assigned Govea to Calexico to “figure out what to do with this medical care stuff in Mexicali.” Govea humorously referred to this monumental task as a, “Typical assignment.”¹¹⁴ The job at hand was extensive and Govea sought assistance and input from affected and interested individuals because she, “Didn’t want to do this by myself.”¹¹⁵ Once the PM team was set, they began to hold informational and planning meetings. During one of the earliest meetings with UFW members on PM, Govea reported to the Calexico coordinating meeting, “It [PM] went over big.”¹¹⁶ The first meeting yielded an interested audience of twenty people; subsequent meetings whittled attendance to five. Much of the reduction in audience was caused by disaffection with the policies and procedures of PM. Govea and the PM team were scrapping the inefficient procedures of *Clinica Obrera* and starting the medical plan in Mexicali from their experience with the UFW Robert F. Kennedy medical insurance plan.

Govea was aware of the Teamster health plan in Mexicali and she wanted to legitimate PM by getting a sense of the number of potential enrollees. In early 1977, the UFW conducted a census and estimated 1,100 members in the area, including Mexicali up to Blythe 100 miles north.¹¹⁷ The census was done in haste, but PM registration one year later noted 926 registered

¹¹³ Miriam Pawel, *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and the Struggle in Cesar Chavez’s Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 39, 175-176, 263.

¹¹⁴ Govea, interview by Bardacke. Frank Bardacke also shared in the humor of the gargantuan task, sarcastically quipping, “Go take care of it.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Minutes, Feb. 21, 1977, box 6, folder 22, MGP.

¹¹⁷ UFW Calexico Census Report, circa February 1977, box 6, folder 23, MGP. Like other censuses, there was potential for undercounting. The report notes that the main focus around that time was negotiating with Inter Harvest, not the census itself. There was also a problem with over 500 union cards having incomplete information before the cards could officially be counted and entered into the UFW database in La Paz, CA.

families with the program.¹¹⁸ The UFW calculated five people per family with metrics from the Mexican Social Security Institute (*Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*, IMSS), placing potential PM enrollment at 4,630. Calculating its medical service further, there were 1,193 consultations in January 1978, showing PM's acceptance and use by numerous individuals during the valley's key winter harvest.¹¹⁹ The census was also a way to mitigate unsanctioned use of PM and set it apart from the Teamster plan. The census created a database with addresses, which allowed the PM team to cross check and verify that enrollees lived in the stated Mexicali residencies. Furthermore, enrollees were required to carry insurance identification cards with the picture of the UFW worker and family members, if applicable. Govea wanted to ensure PM's longevity by understanding the number of peoples who were potential enrollees.

Proyecto Mexicali also sought to increase its legitimacy to enrollees and the medical community in Mexicali by focusing on the "costs and quality" of medicine in Mexicali. Specifically, the issue was focused on physicians in Mexicali charging "American rates" for people with US insurance and ordering "unnecessary surgical procedures" such as appendectomies and caesareans.¹²⁰ As Govea and the PM committee strategized on the most effective method by which to get "UFW people his [physician's] first priority," they also sought to remove graft and the use of subpar medicines.¹²¹ The PM committee visited and interviewed 27 physicians and two medical laboratories to obtain fee schedules at each. Govea requested that other union members visit the same facilities to crosscheck the figures, and, most likely end the relationship with that facility if there was a sizeable discrepancy.¹²² Some physicians rescinded

¹¹⁸ Registros, Proyecto Mexicali, January 1978, box 6, folder 25, MGP. This was an adjusted figure from a previous count of 786.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

¹²¹ Proposición al Comité de Servicios Médicos de Mexicali, December 2, 1977, 3, box 6, folder 25, MGP.

¹²² Govea to Ganz, "Staff Person to the Comité Provsional to Establish Medical Services in Mexico," December 29, 1976, box 2, folder 28, MGP.

their offers to work with PM while others were not contracted by PM. The committee decided to make offers to five doctors, all of whom accepted. The language of the contracts required that the doctors clearly explain “how they’d work for us,” meaning that they were legally obligated to perform only the duties and procedures agreed upon rather than bill for extra procedures.¹²³ One such physician was Doctor Juan Escobedo, the physician who came under intense scrutiny from Marshall Ganz and the National Farmworkers Health Group in 1974.

PM further required that physicians itemize their monthly transactions including services, supplies, referrals, and appliances in order to receive payment. A PM physician reviewed the statements and if there were no irregularities, payment was dispensed. If there was a question on the statement, the physician in question was brought to the PM central office to account for oversights. When a well-reputed Mexicali pharmacy overcharged by a few dollars, PM immediately returned the invoice, noting the market costs for the medications billed. The larger issue was legitimacy rather than money and PM’s action signaled to other PM providers, “This was a serious operation [and] we weren’t going to be screwed with.”¹²⁴ The vetting process and layers of accountability garnered PM a positive reputation among Mexicali’s medical community to the extent that physicians who rejected the UFW were “knocking on the door” to become part of the program.¹²⁵

The parameters of *Proyecto Mexicali* were still in flux in early April 1977 as the United Farm Workers debated a medical plan with the Mexican Social Security Institute (*Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*, IMSS). This was inventive since it could limit competition from

¹²³ There is a slight discrepancy between Govea’s memory and the archive. According to one of PM’s earliest enrollment records, four doctors were listed between May and November 1977. It is possible that a fifth physician was part of the program, but more than likely the archive is incomplete. It is also possible that the physician in question joined the PM network at a later date. See, “Proyecto Mexicali, Family Registrations,” May through November 1977, box 22, folder 28, CCP, Pt.2.

¹²⁴ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

¹²⁵ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

IMSS and also served as a buffer against repeating the bureaucratic issues from *Clinica Obrera* in 1972. The UFW entered negotiations with one of its principle competitors in Mexicali, IMSS.¹²⁶ Interestingly, Govea noted that a physician at IMSS was helpful in determining prices for prescription medications, pointing to a working relationship with the national insurance firm.¹²⁷ The union was open to furthering this relationship and pursued talks with IMSS. In April 1977, Anthony Quinn took Cesar Chavez, Marshall Ganz, and Richard Chavez as his guests to Mexico City. There, the union leaders obtained audience with the national director of IMSS. Because their UFW employers did not pay into IMSS or participate in its network, farmworkers who lived in Mexico and worked in U.S. fields were not eligible for IMSS coverage.¹²⁸ The director approved covering UFW workers and dependents living in Mexicali at annual fee of \$1,047 pesos per person (roughly \$52 U.S. dollars).¹²⁹ IMSS promised medical care “from the beginning of the illness until the end of the corresponding paid annuity,” obstetrics, and moving patients to different facilities as necessary.¹³⁰ The UFW was unsatisfied with the offer by IMSS and dropped the plan from consideration. Govea recalled that the talks and plan were “very complicated and didn’t appear to be a good possibility.”¹³¹ However, there *was* a possibility for an IMSS plan, but the UFW ultimately moved away from it and decided to structure its own plan, with its own benefits, with physicians accountable to the union.

Soon after the April 1977 meeting with IMSS, *Proyecto Mexicali* issued its eligibility and benefits policy. PM offered high, medium, and low benefits categories following an hours’

¹²⁶ To be sure, other private insurers operated in Mexicali. Archival evidence only revealed the UFW’s discussion with IMSS rather than other companies.

¹²⁷ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

¹²⁸ As stated earlier, in order for a Mexican citizen to receive benefits under IMSS, their employer must pay into a national account.

¹²⁹ Alfonso Murillo G. to Cesar Chavez, April 22, 1977, box 22, folder 28, CCP, Pt.2.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Govea, interview by Bardacke. The only other mention of the meeting with IMSS in Mexico City appeared as the brief entry, “Mexico Trip/Medical Plan.” Calexico Staff Meeting, May 7, 1977, box 6, folder 36, MGP.

worked hour rubric.¹³² PM provided coverage for hospital stays, surgeries, childbirth, prescription medications, eye and dental exams and procedures, and physician consultations. Keeping in line with UFW policy, the plan did not cover abortion and it observed Mexico's strict abortion policy.¹³³ To receive care, a patient first visited the PM central office in downtown Mexicali (adjacent to the central cathedral and the port of entry). The person was given a voucher to visit a primary care physician in the PM network, which was a five-minute process.¹³⁴ The person then returned to the PM office with a receipt of the consultation and any additional medications or procedures completed, after which PM processed the claim and dispensed the appropriate benefits.¹³⁵ Importantly, PM was intended only for workers and their dependents who lived within the "Mexicali Service Area," a 45-mile radius from downtown Mexicali that reached San Luis, Río Colorado, Sonora. Moreover, a person was required to choose between the RFK plan and PM.¹³⁶ This was done to avoid a person using double insurances from the UFW. The union did provide some leeway in the residency category. If a recipient moved to the U.S. but lived within the 45-mile radius, they could still use PM so long as "the Plan...has sufficient providers in Mexico to continue covering such Employee or Family." The PM committee was well aware of transborder families and realities, thus it elected to prioritize PM for *mexicalicenses* while not disqualifying people outright whose living situation changed.¹³⁷

¹³² This was the same rubric of the Robert F. Kennedy medical plan.

¹³³ Jessica Govea to Cesar Chavez, Re: Refugio Lopez, June 2, 1978, 1-2, box 22, folder 28, CCP, Pt.2.

¹³⁴ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

¹³⁵ Plan Instrument, the Robert F. Kennedy Farm Workers Medical Plan, 1978, 48, box 17, folder 22, CCP, Pt.2; Proposición al Comité de Servicios Médicos de Mexicali, December 2, 1977, 3, box 6, folder 25, MGP.

¹³⁶ Plan Instrument, the Robert F. Kennedy Farm Workers Medical Plan, 1978, 42, 44-45, box 17, folder 22, CCP, Pt.2.

¹³⁷ PM was not intended to cover workplace injuries and would not pay benefits associated with such care. This was a matter of finances and victorious battles against growers for worker's compensation injuries. See Robert F. Kennedy Plan Instrument, 1978, 48, in box 17, folder 22, CCP, Pt.2.

On May 24, 1977, Proyecto Mexicali officially opened its doors and began enrollment.¹³⁸ In the final week of May, PM enrolled an inaugural group of a dozen families. In its first full month in June, PM enrollment skyrocketed to 119 families. By November, Proyecto Mexicali counted a cumulative enrollment of 485 families.¹³⁹ The opening of PM in May 1977 and its growth were only possible due to the relationships forged between the PM committee, UFW members, families, and the Mexicali medical community. Although Mexicali is a town on the immediate borderlands, it is located in Mexico, a country with its own history, government, labor unions, schools, and nationalisms. The PM committee and staff became cultural and political interlopers and interlocutors for the union and its members on the borderlands. The PM office interviewed physicians, labs, IMSS, met with ranch committees, traveled to farms to speak to workers, and interacted with recipients in Mexicali to provide a sense of care beyond medicine. Indeed, this was union medicine. The PM team sought to cement its steadfast dedication to UFW members in Mexicali by codifying care and empathy in its organizational goals. To “protect” the UFW and PM, Mexicali staff was expected to, “Show and take an interest in the health of the [PM] membership.” Moreover, staff were asked to “visit the sick and interned, be watchful of members’ health and advise them” of appropriate course of action, and “promote programs of preventative medicine.”¹⁴⁰ Jessica Govea and the PM committee not only navigated the bureaucracy of California and Baja California medical insurances and programs; they also negotiated the policies of UFW leadership and their own desire for responsiveness and accountability to union members.

As *Proyecto Mexicali* was debated, the United Farm Workers remained steadfast in unionization campaigns in the Imperial Valley. Two strikes in 1977 and 1979 reveal the power of

¹³⁸ Plan Instrument, the Robert F. Kennedy Farm Workers Medical Plan, 1978, 11, box 17, folder 22, CCP, Pt.2.

¹³⁹ “Proyecto Mexicali, Family Registrations,” May through November 1977, box 22, folder 28, CCP, Pt.2.

¹⁴⁰ Proposición al Comité de Servicios Médicos de Mexicali, December 2, 1977, 2, box 6, folder 25, MGP.

healthcare and labor organizing. Almost two months before the opening of *Proyecto Mexicali* in May 1977, the UFW conducted an asparagus organizing drive in the Imperial Valley and Coachella. By the time of the organizing drive, the UFW already reached a truce with the archrival Teamsters, or, what another farm labor union called, the “grand wedding” between the two unions that left the fields to the UFW and “truck drivers, cannery workers, and other non-field workers” to Teamsters.¹⁴¹ On March 27, 1977, the UFW held its first ever march-rally at 3 a.m. from Mecca to Coachella (both southeastern Riverside County, adjacent to Imperial County) to symbolize the time asparagus workers showed up for work and to commemorate the successful unionization of over 2,000 asparagus workers in the Imperial Valley. Both the hour of the rally and the unionizing of asparagus workers were historical firsts in UFW history.¹⁴² The UFW already used the Robert Kennedy medical insurance plan (RFK Plan) in its fliers and site visits to advertise the benefits of joining the union.¹⁴³ With the launch of *Proyecto Mexicali* in May 1977, the fliers included information on both the RFK Plan (U.S.) and *Proyecto Mexicali* (Mexico) along with the end to the detested 3 a.m. (*madrugada*) work time.¹⁴⁴ The first successful asparagus drive and the opening of PM were symbiotic labor tactics to increase the strength of the UFW and meet the wants of the rank-and-file.

Returning to the opening of this chapter, the confluence and dangers of labor organizing and medical care was epitomized in the murder of Rufino Contreras during the 1979-1980 lettuce strike. Born in the Mexican state of Oaxaca in 1951, Contreras followed in his father’s path of

¹⁴¹ “Gran Boda de 1977,” circa early 1977, box 1, folder 38, MGP. Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2012), 181.

¹⁴² “Rally and Election Schedule,” March 22, 1977, box 6, folder 40, MGP; “Farm Workers' Union Begins Campaign to Organize Workers in the Coachella Valley,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1977, B20.

¹⁴³ Bill Granfield, “Meeting at West Foods (Ventura, CA),” December 21, 1976, box 6, folder 36, MGP; “Where Are the Teamster’s Benefits for Farm Workers?” circa 1976, box 1, folder 39, MGP; “Una Sola Union,” circa 1976 box 1, folder 40, MGP.

¹⁴⁴ “¡Atención! Compañeros Esparragueros,” circa 1977; “La Unión ha Logrado,” circa 1977, “Un Buen Plan Médico,” circa 1977, all in box 1, folder 40, MGP.

field work in the United States when he was 20 years old; his father was a previously a bracero.¹⁴⁵ As discussed in chapter 4, this strike was the largest demonstration against Imperial Valley growers, with the UFW calling for a higher minimum wage and an increase in employer contributions to medical coverage. Arguably one of the most visceral and disturbing events in the history of the United Farm Workers, Imperial Valley growers, and the larger Mexicali-Imperial valleys, Contreras and eighteen others ran into the fields of Mario Saikhon to stop scabbing workers during the three-week-old lettuce strike.¹⁴⁶ Gunfire from a .38 caliber firearm pierced the air through the yells of the protestors and forced them to take refuge by running or dropping to the ground. One of the bullets entered Contreras's skull from beneath his right eye and he was pronounced dead at 1:40 p.m. One year earlier, Saikhon was one of the growers under UFW contract, and one the union boasted about.¹⁴⁷

Strike activity already turned to instances of physical intimidation by strikers, strikebreakers, private security, and police by early February. However, Contreras's murder marked a point of contrast between threats of violence and death, between anti-trespassing rules and capital punishment. There was a massive vigil and march of over 2,000 UFW members and supporters in Calexico, where the widowed Rosa Maximina Contreras told listeners that she was praying at the time Rufino died and asked him to go in peace into the afterlife now that he "completed his duties."¹⁴⁸ This was followed by a 7,000-person funeral march from the UFW office near the border to a cemetery three miles north on Valentine's Day. Rosa Contreras, her two children, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Governor Jerry Brown were among the

¹⁴⁵ "Rufino Contreras," February 13, 1979, 1, box 1, folder 12, MGP.

¹⁴⁶ "Striker's Killing Brings Mourning, Picket Halt," *Imperial Valley Press*, February 12, 1979, A1, A6.

¹⁴⁷ "Contrato UFW con Mario Saikhon," 1978, box 1, folder 40, MGP.

¹⁴⁸ Esther Padilla, "Rufino Contreras Eulogy by Maximina Contreras," February 13, 1979, box 1, folder 12, MGP.

thousands paying their respects to Contreras.¹⁴⁹ Just one day before his death, Contreras exclaimed to friends that he qualified for UFW medical insurance.¹⁵⁰ Contreras's excitement revealed the impact of healthcare for farmworkers living in Mexicali as well as the energy and sacrifice they expended to maintain their benefits and the union. Labor and healthcare could not be separated into separate spheres.

Just as important as Contreras obtaining UFW medical coverage was the aftermath of his murder. Three people were arrested in connection to the shooting, two of them were from Mexicali and the other was a Filipino labor contractor. On April 23, 1979, the presiding judge, William E. Lehnhardt, dismissed the case against the defendants based largely on the apathetic effort by Imperial County District Attorney Fielding Kimball, who clearly showed his intent to drop the charges during hearings.¹⁵¹ The forces rallied to oppose the UFW created the environment to allow a transborder murder to go unprosecuted and unsolved. Yet, these same forces exerted pressure on the UFW to not be held captive by citizenship or residency as preconditions for organizing.

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the cementation of the RFK Plan and the obsolescence of the United Farm Worker clinics as the union's healthcare model. The UFW's plan for in-house medical clinics and insurance programs was part of its dual strategy to chip away at the Teamsters and offer a service that farmworkers desired, but both were expensive to maintain simultaneously. In an interview with the libertarian magazine, *Reason*, UFW press

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Nevins, *Dying to Live: A Story of U.S. Immigration in an Age of Global Apartheid* (San Francisco: Open Media/City Lights Books, 2008), 54.

¹⁵⁰ There is a question as to which plan Rufino Contreras elected: the RFK or PM. My communications with Patrick Pine, current UFW administrator of the RFK insurance plan and Juan de la Cruz Pension Plan, revealed that the union was/is also unsure what plan Contreras chose. We are both inclined to surmise that Contreras selected *Proyecto Mexicali* because he and his family lived in Mexicali. The more important thread in Contreras's excited statement is the personal and labor investment in healthcare by UFW rank-and-file.

¹⁵¹ Lou Cannon and Carl Cannon, "Doubts Raised by Transcript of Dismissed Case," *The Washington Post*, September 16, 1979, A1, A10.

secretary Marc Grossman stated that in late 1979 only the Coachella clinic remained opened, “There’s just not much need for them [UFW members] to have their own clinics.”¹⁵² Instead, the insurance packages of the RFK Plan and *Proyecto Mexicali* were the main form of healthcare the UFW offered. The UFW decided to cut physicians as well. Clinics went from three or four doctors down to one, further straining medical staff and potentially making some staff become unlicensed providers as a consequence.¹⁵³ The reduced number of physicians increased the stress on those that remained since physicians were asked to spend more time at the clinic while still working at local hospitals for admitting privileges. Moreover, in 1979, the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* (rebranded as the *Clinica de Salud del Pueblo*, The People’s Health Clinic), expanded its facilities and opened its first satellite clinic in Calexico and continued to expand into the 21st century.¹⁵⁴ By the early 1980s, the United Farm Workers closed the doors to its clinics.

Complicating the UFW’s healthcare service was internal politics in the union and the slow processing of insurance claims. In 1979, a larger debate developed over the role of paid union representatives. Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and others established camps between those members supportive of Chavez and those who supported Marshall Ganz. Ganz denied the bifurcation of the union along these lines, but Chavez and other forwarded the schism with claims that Ganz spoke ill of Chavez and his leadership abilities. The RFK Medical Plan and *Proyecto Mexicali* were thrust into the center of this debate. The RFK Plan was hampered by the

¹⁵² Patty Newman, “Who’s Bankrolling the UFW? A Story of Fraud and Illegality Involving Cesar Chavez’s Union and People in Power,” *Reason*, November 1, 1979, 21, box 49, folder 37, Frank Bardacke Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. The article only mentions the clinics in passing; Newman is heavily focused on exposing financial fraud and mismanagement of funds by the UFW’s microwave telecommunications network.

¹⁵³ Margaret Murphy, “Calexico, Parts 1-5,” Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, Online Discussion, July 4, 2004, 26, accessed June 12, 2017, [https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/disc/July\[1\]\[2\].pdf](https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/disc/July[1][2].pdf).

¹⁵⁴ *Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo: Celebrating 35 Years of Service to Our Community* (Brawley, CA, 2005), 4-5, Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo Archive.

number of claims it was required to process and its schedule to pay benefits. In 1971, two people handled the entire plan with few complaints from farmworkers. By 1980, the RFK Plan had over 30,000 enrollees with no additional permanent staff to process claims.¹⁵⁵ As a result, insurance benefits were delayed while the union accrued interest on those same delayed payments. Decades later, Jessica Govea first heard of allegations of intentional delayed payment for interest accrual and exasperatedly responded, “Oh, Jesus Christ.” Cesar Chavez summoned Jessica Govea to La Paz in late 1979 to speed up the processing of claims. She left *Proyecto Mexicali*, which she described as, “Smooth, *Proyecto* was tight, *Proyecto* was happening.”¹⁵⁶ According to Govea, she was able to reduce claims processing from three months to two weeks. Nevertheless, Chavez and others accused those he imagined in Camp Ganz of manipulating the RFK Plan to harm the union. In 1981, Jessica Govea and Marshall Ganz left the union.

Conclusion

The establishment and delivery of healthcare for farmworkers and farmworker families was a joint struggle by two of the most visible and influential social movements in U.S. history, the United Farm Workers and the Chicano Movement. The UFW clinics in Calexico, Mexicali, and *Proyecto Mexicali* complemented the Chicano Movement’s *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* to meet a similar need of medical care for peoples unattended or afforded low-quality care by rivals, whether the valley’s central hospitals or other unions. The UFW and the *Clinica* made a concerted effort to create a welcoming environment for marginalized peoples in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands to provide access and meet patient needs. The continuation of the Robert Kennedy medical insurance plan and the growth of the *Clinica de Salud del Pueblo*

¹⁵⁵ Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011), 669-670.

¹⁵⁶ Govea, interview by Bardacke.

(the rebranded *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos*) are a testament to those struggles in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The UFW plans in Mexicali and Calexico and the *Clinica de Salubridad de Campesinos* imagined and crafted a transborder labor and healthcare politic that transgressed the fictional neatness of the U.S.-Mexico border, a contested space of containment and mobility. It also reimagined the meaning of public health. Healthcare was and is a business, but it was also one that historically placed Mexican peoples, Latinos/as, black Americans, and people of color at the wayside or, as in the case of medical experimentation and sterilization of brown and black women, at the center of social, racial, and national engineering. The number of enrollees and enthusiasm surrounding each program reveal the success and necessity to understand the needs of working peoples irrespective of national borders. Transcending the U.S.-Mexico border not only ensured the survival of a medical program (or other social and labor programs), it also invested in the betterment of the lives of peoples beyond race, across class, and irrespective of citizenship.

Conclusion: Trajectories of Wages and Borders

From Mexicali's Chinese expulsion and anti-U.S. landholding campaigns in 1937 to the murder of transborder farmworker Rufino Contreras in the Imperial Valley in 1979, *The Wages of Borders* has shown the intersecting political, social, labor, and economic histories of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands. It has shown how U.S. and Mexican business and political interests actively sought one another to create a pro-capitalist environment with a fluid U.S.-Mexico border to promote profit margins for a transnational bourgeoisie. The ease of mobility for capital was conditionally reproduced for Mexicans and peoples of Mexican descent so long as racialized employment was stipulated. That is, the mobility of capital functioned in tandem with concepts of racialized Mexican labor on both sides of the border for agriculture and transnational manufacturing. Reform-minded politicians attempted to ameliorate the worst of employer abuse with the development of labor laws and labor arbitration boards with varying results for the purported lofty goal of worker justice under capitalism, as seen with the *Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje* and the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board.

Workers on the ground played a key role in the making of the labor landscape of the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands, in particular with the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics. While growers exploited braceros and undocumented workers to weaken union drives, the National Farm Labor Union focused its attention on deportation and vigilante policing of the Calexico-Mexicali border as an organizing strategy. This tactic was later adopted by the United Farm Workers during their 1974 "Project Mexico" and "Wet Line" campaigns. There were alternative forms of organizing and challenges to the power of capitalism in both Mexicali and Imperial County. In Mexicali, workers at the toy maquiladora, Mextel, attempted to redefine factory discipline and hire-and-fire practices by management. Some chastised the Mexican local

and federal government for allowing U.S. companies to operate with seeming immunity from observing the central tenets of the Mexican Revolution. The UFW revised its course and actively organized commuter workers from Baja California while using the Agricultural Labor Relations Board to secure recognition of undocumented workers by the board. The UFW also opened up a clinic and referral office in Mexicali as a way to respond to the needs of farmworkers who lived in Mexicali. Though the UFW lost its momentum in the 1980s and once more revived undocumented workers as impediments, it cannot be missed that for a time its inclusive practices offered non-deportation labor organizing.

Beyond 1979, the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands continued to be a transborder space of developing movements and political economy. The close of the 1970s rang with very familiar tones for the peoples that lived and experienced the borderlands. Cross-border movement remained at the center. Working-class peoples went to work, others spent time with friends and family on either side of the fence, flora and fauna continued to grow irrespective of the fence, capital pursued different regions, people accessed healthcare in both countries and private insurers in the U.S. began to provide coverage for clients seeking treatment in Mexicali. Talks about a trilateral trade bloc, the North American Free Trade Agreement, began in 1988, later codifying many aspects of transnational capital already in existence since the mid-twentieth century with firms like KenMex and Mextel, and the dealings of economic and political power brokers in the U.S. and Mexico. Moreover, debates of race and belonging went unabated, sparking legislation such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986), the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (1996), California's Propositions 187 (1994) and 209 (1996). In addition to migrants from central and southern Mexico, migrants from Central America (especially Honduras) and Haiti began to arrive in Mexicali in increasing numbers in 2016. Both groups sought entrance

into the U.S. as refugees. Central Americans were reported to be ungrateful, leeches of the dole, and were met with nationalist responses in Mexicali and Tijuana. Haitian migrants, on the other hand, garnered a reputation as proactive workers along with less public demands for their deportation as Central Americans.¹

The closure of Mextel in 1975 marked a new thread in the longer history of Mattel and U.S. transnational companies in Mexico. The Guajardo family shut Mextel's doors and left workers unemployed despite reassurances that the company would continue business as usual. Ironically, it was business as usual for maquiladoras to open and close quickly, but Mextel's stay in Mexicali of nearly a decade and its role as the largest private employer appeared to mark its exceptionalism. When Mextel closed, a new facility in Tijuana soon replaced it, the very city where the Guajardos already invested in electronics maquilas. Moreover, Mattel closed its Los Angeles, California, production facility, along with another factory in Taiwan. In February of 1988, Mattel closed two plants in the Philippines amidst labor strife there and other East Asian and Mexican facilities picked up the slack.² As the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was being discussed in 1990, Mattel indicated that facilities in Tijuana and Monterey, Nuevo Leon, accounted for roughly 35 percent of its products sold in the U.S. The remainder came from East Asia. For Mattel, NAFTA signaled the opportunity to increase its presence and production in Mexico. Moreover, no jobs would be lost with NAFTA because Mattel did not produce its products in the U.S. If anything, Mattel argued, U.S. suppliers of dyes, plastics, and other materials stood to

¹ "Migrante agradece hospitalidad de Mexicali," *La Voz*, 24 de octubre 2016, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://www.lavozdelafrontera.com.mx/local/migrante-agradece-hospitalidad-de-mexicali-680156.html>; Alejandro Dominguez, "Descarta Instituto Nacional de Migración cacería contra haitianos en Mexicali," *La Voz*, 7 octubre 2017, accessed April 25, 2019; <https://www.lavozdelafrontera.com.mx/republica/sociedad/descarta-instituto-nacional-de-migracion-caceria-contra-haitianos-en-mexicali-262213.html>; "'Tijuana First!': Protests Grow Against Migrant Caravan in Mexico," *The Guardian*, Nov. 19, 2018, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/19/mexico-protests-grow-in-tijuana-against-migrant-caravan>.

² "Mattel Closes Two Plants," *New York Times*, February 13, 1988, 47.

benefit from Mattel's post-NAFTA plans.³ Mattel was in a race to save its profits and its very existence by cutting the number of workers and plants across wage-depressed global capitalism.

Yet, even this track has a limit. Mattel was in a row in 2018 for its decision to manufacture a Frida Kahlo doll as part of its Barbie series, "Inspiring Women." Mexican courts temporarily banned the sale of the doll as the rights to the image of Kahlo were in dispute. Commentators noted that the doll was "more Barbie-like than Frida-like."⁴ Three months later, Mattel announced that it planned to fire over 2,000 workers worldwide. The company tied this new series of layoffs to a decline in sales after the bankruptcy of toy store giant Toys "R" Us. It also stated that Mattel would sell its plant in Mexico, marking an end to Mattel's operations in that country.⁵ The desire of Mattel to dilute Frida Kahlo along with the announcement of its closure in Mexico marked the limits of outsourced production as subsidized schemes to create and maintain jobs. The "competitive edge" in low wages that the Baja California Chamber of Commerce feared it would lose during the minimum wage debates in the early 1970s kept Mattel in Mexico, but the company's loyalties rested with stockholders rather than workers or countries.

Mexicali and Baja California continue to wrestle with the role of globalization, transnational capital, and local residents. Recently, the major New York-based beer and alcohol corporation, Constellation Brands, began construction of a facility in Mexicali. Constellation produces and distributes well-known beer brands such as Modelo and Pacífico. The brewery is scheduled to open by 2024. The water used for the manufacture of beer is slated to derive from underground aquifers rather than the Colorado River. Baja California aquifers are one of the most

³ Richard Stevenson, "Selling a Free-Trade Pact with Mexico," *New York Times*, November 11, 1990, section 3, 12.

⁴ "Relatives Win Injunction Against Mattel's Frida Kahlo Barbie," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2018, accessed April 23, 2019; <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-mexico-frida-court-20180420-story.html>

⁵ "Mattel Fires Over 2,000 Employees and Shuts Down Plant in Mexico," *El Universal*, July 27, 2018, accessed April 23, 2019; <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/english/mattel-fires-over-2000-employees-and-shuts-down-plant-in-mexico>

exploited in all of Mexico, and campesinos rely on groundwater systems to irrigate their crops. The group *Mexicali Resiste* (Resist Mexicali) and campesinos soon demonstrated against the project, demanding to know how campesinos' crop acreage whittled while 1.8 billion gallons of water per year were reserved for beer. Moreover, all of the beer is marked for sale in the United States. Mexican politicians are working alongside Constellation and local Constellation agents are trying to assure *mexicalicenses* that no laws are being broken. The principal benefit for Mexicali, both groups argue, are permanent jobs. A member of *Mexicali Resiste* summed up the situation, "It's a model of exploitation and capitalism where they [Constellation] basically come for the natural resources to exploit them and take them away to wherever the market is." The organizer continued, "When the market grows and has to satisfy consumers, they're [Constellation] going to deplete the water here. So what's going to happen? They're going to go to another place where there's more water to satisfy the same market and deplete their water. They're going to leave this region without the resources to live a dignified life."⁶ That is, a U.S. company looked to Mexico as a manufacturing point, expects to use local resources, will work within flexible laws, and ship the product for consumption in the United States. The legacies of mid-twentieth century transnational capitalism continue to be felt and deployed.

The Imperial Valley's political economy was also in flux as agriculture continued to be important, but was superseded by wholesale trade and retail in number of people employed in 1980. In 2000, education and social services employed the most people, while agriculture slipped to third. There was also a rise in the prison industrial complex, with two California state correctional facilities opened between 1992 and 1993. For one prison, 27 bids by landowners and

⁶ Alex Zaragoza, "As Big Beer Moves In, Activists in Mexicali Fight To Keep Their Water," *National Public Radio*, March 26, 2018, accessed April 24, 2019; <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2018/03/26/596448290/as-big-beer-moves-in-activists-in-mexicali-fight-to-keep-their-water>.

corporations were submitted, which surprised the chief probation officer.⁷ Each party understood the profits of prisons as an industry. In 2014, a larger immigration detention facility outside of Calexico opened for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, resulting in the closure of a smaller and older facility in El Centro. Indeed, there was a major outcry when the El Centro facility closed and detainees relocated to Calexico because of the loss of jobs for El Centro guards and staff. These political economy trends were part of larger changes in agriculture-dominated areas, what Ruth Wilson Gilmore identifies prisons—and, by extension, detention centers—as “partial geographical solutions to political economic crises.”⁸ Moreover, the county’s population by race shifted to majority Latina/o, with “Mexican origin” peoples comprising 96 percent of the Latina/o population 1980.

Yet, the “green card” residency debates of the 1960s continued into the 21st century with mirrored momentum. In 2005, the Calexico Unified School District hired a photographer, a veteran of the Chicano Movement, to police the Calexico port of entry and snap images of pupils suspected of living in Mexicali. He would also conduct home visits, sometimes as late as 9 p.m., to verify if a student lived at the listed address. A student was required to live in the borders of the school district to attend Calexico schools. If a student was documented to reside in Mexicali, the student could possibly be expelled. There were concerns by both the schoolboard and parents that commuting students did not pay local property taxes, contribute to the district’s budget, and lowered standardized test scores because of language barriers. Such a perspective was strikingly similar to the immediate post-Bracero Program fears of “domestic” laborers and their families overwhelming county schools and housing, putting valley residents at a disadvantage to receive

⁷ Susan Giller, “Prison Selection Calls for Sorting 27 Potential Sites,” *Imperial Valley Press*, Jan. 11, 1988, A1, A5.

⁸ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2007), 26.

quality education and housing. It also resembled the National Farm Labor Union, the United Farm Workers, and the AFL-CIO in their desire to limit the movement of migrants from Mexico and, relatedly, their claims of living and belonging in the Imperial Valley, California, and the United States. And, yet, in 2016, the United Farm Workers dedicated its Calexico Robert Kennedy insurance office as the Rufino Contreras Memorial Office.⁹ Transborder movement elicits multiple feeling and emotions historically and today, where the latter elevates itself above the former in a bid to show progress.

On June 16, 2015, presidential candidate Donald Trump launched his campaign with a slew of indictments against the movement of capital and peoples. In the former, he played on fears of the U.S. losing its position as sole economic hegemon like it once enjoyed after Bretton Woods, the end of the Soviet Union, but placed at risk with the aggressiveness of capitalism in China. For the latter, Trump reserved a special place for Mexico. On Mexico as a whole, the presidential candidate opined, “They are not our friend, believe me.” He followed up with a statement that launched him to the White House, “They’re [Mexico] bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”¹⁰ Less than a month later, Trump claimed, “I love the Mexican people. I’ve had a great relationship with Mexico and the Mexican people.” Supporting his point a year later, he held up a “taco bowl” as a gesture of goodwill, once again stating, “I love Hispanics.”¹¹ As *The Wages of Borders* has shown, the rhetoric of the candidate-turned-45th President of the United States of America was a recognizable tune. Trump encapsulates the historically split relationship the United States maintains with Mexico. He can “love” Mexico,

⁹ Edwin Delgado, “UFW Give Homage to Slain Valley Worker Rufino Contreras,” *Imperial Valley Press*, Feb. 12, 2016, A1.

¹⁰ Transcript, Donald Trump, June 16, 2016, accessed April 24, 2019; <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

¹¹ “Trump: ‘I Love the Mexican People,’” *USA Today*, July 2, 2015, accessed April 24, 2019; <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/07/02/donald-trump-campaign/29599835/>; Donald Trump, Twitter, May 5, 2016, accessed April 24, 2019; <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/728297587418247168>.

even going so far as to lend his name to a failed condominium resort in Rosarito, Baja California, while still decrying capital flight in the United States.¹² Trump can adulterate a staple of Mexican and Latina/o cuisine and claim it as evidence of his paternalistic affection for these same peoples. Trump's unapologetic message reinforced a racial hierarchy in the United States, where Mexicans, peoples of Mexican descent, and Latinas/os were considered criminals before they were and are considered human. Their marked subjectivity guarantees an extra layer scrutiny not placed on others.

Much gets missed in compartmentalizing immigrants into subjective categories of good and bad, of legal and illegal, of contributors and pilferers. The desire for restriction and deportation are underwritten by fears of race and culture, by struggles to find and maintain affordable housing, by economic and job insecurity that searches for a tangible culprit not protected by a bulwark of corporate and tax law. *The Wages of Borders* has shown movement to be a central facet of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. It has also demonstrated how immigrants, regardless of generations in the U.S., are multifaceted peoples inhabiting numerous social spaces. Working-class peoples in the Imperial-Mexicali borderlands took control of their lives, often in creative and highly taxing ways. Their principal impediments were those placed on them by economic and political elites invested in structures that privileged peoples of similar social and class positions. Unions and workers made their cases visible and they sought to de-normalize social, political, and economic systems of inequality. The lessons beyond the 2016 presidential election are to think historically rather than reactively of the financial and social values attached to peoples. By listening to the emancipatory imaginary of transborder politics, walls may be repurposed as bridges, and bridges can prevent drowning in rivers of hostile distrust.

¹² Jean Guerrero, "Investors in Donald Trump's Failed Resort Speak Out," *KPBS*, July 14, 2016, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2016/jul/14/investors-trumps-failed-mexico-resort-speak-out/>.

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