ABSTRACT

THE BRACERO PROGRAM, 1942-1964: THE DEMISE OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION AND BIRTH OF THE U.S. IMMIGRATION CRISIS

This thesis argues that the Bracero Program, a series of migrant labor agreements between Mexico and the United States, represented the pivotal deviation from, and ultimate failure of, the Mexican revolutionary project started in 1910. By abandoning the land and labor reforms championed by the Mexican Revolution and embodied in the Constitution of 1917, post-revolutionary Mexican governments perpetuated the historical cycle of poverty and abuse experienced by Mexico's agrarian and migrant poor within Mexico and the United States. After President Lázaro Cárdenas's ambitious reforms in the 1930s, successive Mexican administrations refocused the state's efforts on both increasing the mechanization and industrialization of agricultural production and fostering technology and jobs in the urban centers. In the process, they shifted policy and protection away from the Mexican countryside. The Bracero Program thus became a socio-economic pressure release valve during Mexico's impressive yet fragile economic development from 1940 to 1970. By encouraging its migrants – both documented and undocumented – to leave Mexico and labor in the United States for the sake of national progress, these post-Cárdenas Mexican administrations enabled both the demise of the revolutionary project in Mexico and the birth of the illegal immigration crisis in the United States by the 1970s.

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THE BRACERO PROGRAM, 1942-1964: THE DEMISE OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION AND BIRTH OF THE U.S. IMMIGRATION CRISIS

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For Beca, Bella, and Elias, who inspire me to better myself.

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INTRODUCTION

For a young Rose Castillo, everyday life revolved around the fields.[1] Of course she had friends, thrived at school, and was a typical eleven year-old girl. But the land itself held a special place in her heart. Rose's stepfather, a farm laborer, toiled in the fields to support his family. The small community these fields enveloped was where Rose's mother, a waitress, earned extra money to help with household expenses. Without the employment this land created, and the bounty this land provided, existence would be impossible for the farmers, farmworkers, and communities it supported. But not only did these fields symbolize survival, they also represented opportunity – opportunity not available in Rose's parents' native Mexico. This land of possibility that Rose loved was found in California, in a country foreign to most who worked its soil. How Rose's family ended up in California is a familiar story, one that had occurred before her, and one that has been repeated after her, a story that highlights one of the most controversial issues of the present day: Mexican labor migration to the United States.

Rose Castillo, like the children of thousands of US immigrants during the 1960s, grew up in a household headed by a former *bracero,* a Mexican migrant laborer contracted to work in US agriculture and industry through the Bracero Program. Unlike past generations of Mexican migrant laborers to the United States, Rose's parents' generation ushered in an era of dramatic change between the two neighboring countries. The thousands of braceros who toiled in US fields over two decades beginning in 1942 could not have foreseen how fateful the Bracero Program would become to the social and economic destinies of both

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[1] For more see Rose Castillo Guilbault, *Farmworker's Daughter: Growing Up Mexican in America* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2005).

countries. The Bracero Era represents *the* watershed period that would forever cement Mexican migration patterns to the United States for decades to come. And, just as momentously but much more subtly, the bracero era symbolized the abandonment of land and labor reform principles espoused by the Mexican Revolution decades earlier. The creation and duration of the Bracero Program in the United States is critical to unlocking both the origins of the illegal immigration crisis in the United States and the ultimate failure of Mexico's social revolution.

The Bracero Program began as an informal diplomatic agreement between the United States and Mexican governments granting Mexican laborers temporary US visas during World War II to combat work shortages caused by the war. This was not the first instance that large groups of Mexican nationals toiled on American soil. What made the Bracero Program different, however, was that it signified a departure from an era when Mexican labor migration was unorganized, and seasonal fluctuations in labor demand coincided with the US crops these migrant laborers maintained.[2] This policy shift represented an important milestone in the neighboring countries' labor relations, since it was the first instance of the United States and Mexican governments taking an active role in the movement of Mexican workers, shifting the "drift" of migrant labor in the United States into a "flow" by employing "administered migration."[3] Migrant laborers who entered the bracero system were promised contracts and humane conditions in the United States, and were distributed primarily throughout the American Southwest.[4] As

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[2] Manuel García y Griego, *The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964: Antecedents, Operation, and Legacy* (La Jolla, CA: UCSD Mexican Studies Program, 1981), 5.

[3] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (San Jose: McNally and Loftin, 1964), 32.

[4] Richard Hancock, *The Role of the Bracero in the Economic and Cultural Dynamics of Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Hispanic American Society, 1959), 18-20.

the Bracero Program's profitability for US business interests manifested itself – and due in part to the outbreak of the Korean War – this "temporary" World War II agreement would be extended numerous times, officially ending in 1964.

Of course, the rise of large-scale transnational immigration is not unique to the US-Mexico relationship, nor is it a phenomenon confined to the late-twentieth century. According to Wayne Cornelius and Takeyuki Tsuda, humans have increasingly traversed borders due to a "robust demand for immigrant labor in advanced industrial economies, wide and growing economic disparities between First and Third World countries, and the steadily expanding web of transnational social and economic processes linking sending and receiving countries."[5] In short, immigration is powered by economics. Post-revolutionary Mexico is a superb example of this, where a general lack of political persecution and social unrest points toward economics as being the driving force behind rampant emigration during the twentieth century.

The Bracero Program, while representing a mere chapter in the span of the human migration experience, is critical in providing perspective on both the creation of the current illegal immigration crisis in the United States and the ultimate demise of Mexican agrarian reform championed by the Mexican Revolution. The bracero era witnessed, for the first time in history, a large bloc of Mexican nationals entering the US workforce legally and with explicit approval from their government in Mexico.[6] The bracero years also saw, for the first time in history, an enormous influx of illegal immigration due to US employers actively

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[5] Wayne A. Cornelius and others, eds., *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 4.

[6] Galarza, 48.

manipulating the demand for jobs.[7] While officially an emergency measure combating labor shortages during World War II, the Bracero Program's economic and social benefits would prove too alluring to abandon. Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946) ultimately permitted the program's continuation at war's end, against the pleadings of his Ministers of Labor and Agriculture.[8] This fateful decision stood in stark contrast to historical precedent, as Mexico's official labor policy since the adoption of the Constitution of 1917 had been to restrict Mexican nationals' emigration to the United States.[9] This shift in policy highlighted the acceptance the Bracero Program enjoyed on both sides of the border, not to mention the perceived benefits for Mexican migrants and US farmers, and both the Mexican and US governments. Yet, the mutually beneficial partnership between the US and Mexican governments would eventually result in the creation of the largest immigration network the world has ever seen, as well as bring the revolutionary goals of lasting land and labor reform in Mexico to a sudden – and ultimately terminal – halt.

Scholars examining the bracero era have tended to focus on one of three major issues. Some bracero writers examine legal braceros and undocumented immigrants of this era through the lens of a poor class exploited for cheap wage labor by US agribusiness, detailing their trials and tribulations at the expense of

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[7] Fred Krissman, "Apples and Oranges? Recruiting Indigenous Mexicans to Divide Farm Labor Markets in the Western U.S." *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the U.S.* forum, UC Santa Cruz, 11-12 October 2002, noted in Robert Stout, *Why Immigrants Come to America: Braceros, Indocumentados, and the Migra* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 16.

[8] Howard Campbell, "Bracero Migration and the Mexican Economy, 1951-1964" (Ph.D. diss., The American University, 1972), 56.

[9] Hancock, 16.

larger themes.[10] Most recently, Ronald Mize and Alicia Swords focused on the humiliations endured in the bracero processing centers, the corruption and injustice braceros experienced at every step in the migration process from Mexico to the United States and back, and the current fight for redress of funds held by the Mexican government.[11] Further recent scholarship has focused on economic themes, claiming the Bracero Program represented early US hegemonic economic policies in an increasingly globalized world.[12] These studies have tended to view the issue narrowly, failing to identify long-term socio-political effects.

The other major issue examined by scholars is the Bracero Program's role in exacerbating illegal immigration to the United States and setting it on a permanent path to crisis. Authors have described how the legally contracted braceros were closely shadowed by a flood of illegal immigrants to the United States during the years 1942-1964.[13] Most works explore how US agribusiness encouraged this flood of illegal immigration and relied on the US government as a tool of control whenever it was politically or economically expedient.[14] These scholars correctly argue that illegal immigration had already reached crisis proportions toward the end of the Bracero Program in 1964.[15] And, unlike the

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[10] See Jose Rodolfo Jacobo, *Los Braceros: Memories of Bracero Workers* (San Diego: Southern Border Press, 2004), and Robert Stout, *Why Immigrants Come to America: Braceros, Indocumentados, and the Migra* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).

[11] Ronald Mize and Alicia Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[12] See Gilbert Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

[13] Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (San Jose: McNally and Loftin, 1964).

[14] For more on US deportation strategies see Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[15] Krissman, 16.

seasonal and sporadic migration patterns of the braceros' migrant Mexican predecessors, the Bracero Program ultimately resulted in the "irreversible solidification of migration routes" between the United States and Mexico.[16]

While migrant labor exploitation, the influence of globalization, and a spike in illegal immigration are extremely important legacies of the Bracero Program, some of its most critical consequences have been overlooked. Chief among these is the Program's role as the symbol and conduit of a pivotal policy era when the agrarian and labor ideals espoused by the Mexican Revolution and embodied in the revolutionary Constitution of 1917 were ultimately abandoned. Moreover, much of the land and labor reform that had been instituted in the decades leading up to 1942 would be dismantled either *de jure* or *de facto* through Mexican policies enacted during the bracero era. Unfortunately, the role that post-revolutionary Mexican governments played in the exacerbation of the immigration crisis and downfall of the revolutionary project is rarely examined. "Mexico's ambivalence" – as scholar Larry García y Griego describes the deleterious effects of Mexican policy during the bracero era – has been a somewhat taboo subject for bracero researchers. Focusing largely on the socio-economic fallout of the Bracero Program from a United States-as-primary-antagonist perspective, recent historiography has been loath to identity the significant ramifications Mexico's own decisions had on both Mexican and US society. The historiography will only become more comprehensive once the Bracero Program's role in the Mexican revolutionary project is examined, and the effects of Mexican policy on social reform at home and immigration abroad are detailed.

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[16] Ann Aurelia López, *The Farmworkers' Journey* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007), 34.

The story of the failure of the Revolution of 1910 and origin of the illegal immigration crisis begins at the start of the twentieth century. This century would represent one of the most momentous periods in North American history. The Mexican Revolution, an incredibly violent and destructive conflict, would begin in 1910. Illegal immigration to the United States, one of the most polarizing issues in the history of US-Mexican relations, would reach critical proportions in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Sandwiched in between these crises was a period of great upheaval and uncertainty for both countries. The post World War II era would witness the rise of the United States as a global political and economic superpower, and also witness a Mexico desperate to shed its legacy of poverty and agrarianism and eager to join the family of progressive and industrialized nations. These two forces would collide in the middle of the twentieth century with the start of the Bracero Program. The political, social, and economic ambitions of two nations, and the Mexican migrant laborers caught in the middle, would inextricably link and alter the destinies of these North American neighbors forever.

What this thesis will reveal is that the Bracero Program – its very existence, its process, and its legacy – embodies the ultimate failure of the very ideals that hundreds of thousands of people died for during the Mexican Revolution, and the same ideals that Mexican governments helped implement in varying degrees in the post-Revolutionary period. Also, due to this abandonment of revolutionary principles that began in earnest with the advent of the Bracero Program, economic policy decisions made by successive Mexican administrations would exacerbate these reform rollbacks, helping to solidify the illegal immigration issue that has roiled US politics and society for nearly half a century.

Chapter 1 will examine the history of Mexican labor migration from the beginning of the Mexican Revolution through the following three decades. The traditional push-pull factors influencing Mexican nationals' decisions to migrate were exacerbated by the Revolution. More importantly, land and labor reforms were articulated and outlined during the course of the Revolution, and enshrined in the Constitution of 1917. The loose implementation of these agrarian and labor ideals in the post-revolutionary period would be easily exploited by US efforts to recruit Mexican migrants and depress wages and, along with the relative ease of mass deportation, would expose the weaknesses of the Mexican revolutionary project in its early years. Successive post-revolutionary Mexican governments would not live up to the full promise of land and labor reform, but Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency from 1934-1940 redeemed hope for many of the promises of the Revolution.

Chapter 2 will examine the political and socio-economic reality facing both the United States and Mexico that led to the call for and creation of the Bracero Program. Many land and labor protections enshrined in the 1917 Constitution would be suspended for this emergency wartime measure, which would eventually last twenty years. But, most fatefully, the agrarian reform President Lázaro Cárdenas began in earnest would slow to a trickle as successive Mexican administrations turned their attention to industrialization, import-substitution, and urbanization. Busy with their attempts to bring Mexico into the progressive, industrialized world, Mexican policymakers depended on the Bracero Program as a pressure release valve for the agrarian poor, whose numbers exploded during this era thanks in part to the impact of Cárdenas's reforms on infant mortality rates and life expectancy. With attention turned toward the cities and away from small agriculture, and with *ejidos* and small landholdings under attack by the growth of

industrialized, privatized agriculture, the plight of the agrarian poor would worsen. Many lost their land or jobs and became rootless, flooding the major Mexican cities with unskilled labor and flooding the United States with documented and undocumented migrants. Mexico witnessed a period of impressive economic growth from 1940 through the 1960s, known as the 'Mexican Miracle,' where Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP) expanded at an astonishing rate that "exceeded 6 percent per year throughout most of the period."[17] This growth was achieved, however, at the Mexican poor's expense. While Mexican politicians constantly referenced the agrarian poor and the Revolution in their rhetoric, the US labor market became ultimately viewed – by both the Mexican government and people – as the most viable alternative to the failed promises of the revolutionary project.

Chapter 3 will focus on the decade following the end of the Bracero Program, and how the Mexican government's two decade-long shift away from agrarian and land reform had created a huge swath of jobless, unskilled workers susceptible to exploitation by US employers but desperate for work as the industrialization of the Mexican soil and economy continued to bypass them. Mexican administrations were shown, through diplomatic communications with US administrations, to be active supporters of the continuance of migrant labor agreements, even as their popularity dwindled among the Mexican public. Immigration into the United States continued virtually unabated even though the Bracero Program ended in 1964, especially since Mexican dependence on foreign jobs and worker remittances had only grown during and after the decades of the Bracero Program. The Mexican Miracle's façade began to crumble, exposing its

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[17] Francisco Alba and Joseph E. Potter, "Population and Development in Mexico since 1940: An Interpretation," *Population and Development Review* 12, no. 1 (Mar. 1986): 49.

inherent weaknesses during this decade. The Revolution's social project had failed, and the agrarian ideals of the Revolution lived on in political rhetoric only. Mexico's ruling party, in turn, had no choice but to continue its course of exporting laborers to subsidize Mexico's economic development.

The conclusion will reemphasize how the bracero era and the Mexican policies that supported it can be pinpointed as the origin of the illegal immigration crisis in the United States and the death knell to the agrarian and labor reforms inspired by the Mexican Revolution. With US agriculture's insatiable desire for cheap Mexican labor already established as early as 1910, multiple opportunities arose for Mexico to protect its migrant laborers throughout the first six decades of the twentieth century. The Revolution had sought to remedy the very reasons why many Mexican nationals chose to migrate north. The ultimate promise of land reform, partly realized by Lázaro Cárdenas, was abandoned by successive Mexican governments. And, ironically, while US government and agribusiness self-servingly believed they were benefitting greatly from cheap Mexican labor at little socio-economic cost to the United States, their actions ultimately helped exacerbate one of the most intractable immigration/political crises in today's world.

The epilogue will briefly examine major developments in the two decades after 1974, considering how the effects of the Bracero Program and abandonment of land and agricultural reform has continued to impact the people and nation of Mexico both socially and economically. The signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 will be examined through the lens of the legacy of the Bracero Program.

To reiterate, this thesis will reveal that the Bracero Program represented the pivotal deviation from, and the ultimate failure of, the Mexican revolutionary project. By moving away from agrarian reforms and labor protections started haltingly in 1917 and bolstered by Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, by building up technology, development, and jobs in the urban centers and taking its focus off the struggles of the agrarian and working poor, by using the Bracero Program as a socio-economic pressure release valve for its industrialization and modernization efforts, and by allowing its migrant laborers to be exploited by US agribusiness and politicians, successive Mexican governments by the 1970s had enabled both the demise of the revolutionary project in Mexico and the birth of the illegal immigration epidemic in the United States. The story of the migrant Mexican laborer and the death of the Mexican Revolution begins with the eruption of war in 1910.

CHAPTER 1: FROM THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION TO CÁRDENAS: MEXICAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES, 1910-1940

"¡Pobre México! ¡Tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos!"

Attributed to Porfirio Díaz

The 1910 Mexican Revolution was fought for many different reasons, and by many different factions, all seeking differing goals and objectives. Originally a political uprising, the Revolution evolved almost immediately from a battle for regime change to a struggle seeking lasting social reform. This latter struggle is the dimension that has defined the Mexican Revolution over the resulting decades, and the struggle that has directly impacted Mexico's poor. The Revolution and its immediate aftermath would attempt to permanently reform Mexican land and labor policy during the twentieth century, both at home and across the border. For the Mexican Revolution was, at its core, a "rural revolution, and in many instances an agrarian revolution," where the struggle over land and water was supreme.[1]

At the center of the social Revolution and its purported goals was the protection of the rights of the farmer and laborer. The ultimate decades of the nineteenth century in Mexico had witnessed "a land-grab of unprecedented proportions" where acres became "increasingly concentrated into few hands, ensuring landlessness for the great majority."[2] To understand where the Bracero

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[1] Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 1: Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 170. For class and labor-based interpretations of the Mexican Revolution, see John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), and François-Xavier Guerra, "Le Révolution Mexicaine: D'abord Une Révolution Minière?" *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 36, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1981): 785-814.

[2] Knight, 95.

Program fits into Mexican and US history one must first understand the centrality of land to the rural Mexican population – and this group's legacy of alienation from it, as seen at the start of the twentieth century.[3] Soil was the lifeblood of most Mexicans and the Mexican economy. According to Alan Knight, "Unlike many earlier peasant revolts… those of Porfirian and revolutionary Mexico centered upon and derived their character from the struggle for land."[4] As peasants' communal landholdings fell victim to the machinations of local, state, and federal governments, plus local and foreign landholders and businessmen – all with the blessings of the Porfirio Díaz regime – the rural peasants, *campesinos*, and workers were faced with two stark choices by 1910: become a migrant laborer or revolutionary soldier. Many of the rural poor, alienated from the land during the decades of the *Porfiriato*, would opt to migrate to the United States in order to support their families. It is the Mexican government's response to the alienation of the agrarian, poor Mexican laborer throughout the twentieth century – and the influence exerted over this vulnerable population by the United States at every turn – that primarily concerns this thesis.

The Mexican Revolution sought to remedy the exploitation of *campesinos* and workers that occurred when they left their homeland to labor in the United States. But, it is important to acknowledge the role the Revolution itself played in forcing many rural poor to emigrate from Mexico in search of work in the north. The Mexican Revolution gave momentum to a steady stream of immigration that had already been underway since the beginning of the twentieth century, as "agricultural production plummeted" and "unemployment, malnutrition, and

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[3] For more on land and agrarian issues on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, see Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los Grandes Problemas Nacionales* (México, D.F.: Impresa de A. Carranza y Hijos, 1909).

[4] Knight, 155.

prices increased" in revolutionary Mexico.[5] The irony of the Mexican Revolution and its social reform agenda is that the Revolution itself compelled many poor agrarian Mexicans to trade the exploitation by *hacendados* or injustices of the Porfirian regime for the exploitation of US agribusiness or the injustices of US government ambivalence. At the outset of the Revolution in 1910 US agricultural interests had already created "an informal network for recruiting Mexicans," with US agents "travel[ing] to the interior of Mexico to spread the news of high American wages."[6] Therefore, by the time the first shots were fired in the Revolution of 1910, Mexican migrants were already a valued and exploited commodity inside the United States.[7]

By 1911 the revolutionary factions that were primarily focused on changing the dismal reality of Mexico's rural poor had coalesced. Based in southern Mexico, Emiliano Zapata's peasant army would issue its revolutionary *Plan de Ayala*, which articulated and outlined a strong social and land reform platform. Most importantly and most noticeably, Article 7 of the *Plan* demanded *ejidos* and *colonias* for peasants to be distributed from corporate and *hacienda* holdings.[8] The goals of land redistribution and improved workers rights championed by the *Plan de Ayala* were pillars of the social and agrarian reform ideals that became synonymous with the Revolution from that point forward. The indirect impact of social and land reform on emigration would be simple: if Mexico's rural poor

[5] Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 15.

[6] Ibid., 8-9.

[7] According to one California farmer in 1907, Mexican laborers were "plentiful, generally peaceable, and are satisfied with very low social conditions." Quoted in Ibid., 6.

[8] Emiliano Zapata and others, "Plan de Ayala," in Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, eds., *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 340.

possessed both land to cultivate and agricultural jobs to work, then the need to leave Mexico would be curtailed.

However, in a scenario similar to the one that would play out twenty-five years later with the Bracero Program during World War II, increased US involvement in World War I would lead to American demands for an increase in Mexican migrant labor. The United States and its business community, already firmly established at the outset of World War I as the dominant political and economic force in the region, would exert copious amounts of influence on both Mexico and the Mexican Revolution itself.[9] Since the bloody fighting in the Mexican Revolution continued to rage, many Mexicans were eager to be recruited.

By 1917, however, the newly enacted US Immigration Act stood in the path of both Mexicans fleeing their war-torn land and US employers eager to exploit their cheap labor. Provisions of the 1917 US Immigration Act, fueled in part by recent surges of Mexican nationals escaping the strife, barred those immigrants it called "contract laborers" who had been

> induced, assisted, encouraged, or solicited to migrate [to the United States] by offers or promises of employment, whether such offers or promises are true or false, or in consequence of agreements, oral, written, or printed, express or implied, to perform labor in this country of any kind, skilled or unskilled.[10]

The Act also barred aliens who had migrated "in consequence of advertisements for laborers printed, published, or distributed in a foreign country."[11] While

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[9] For views on the United States' pivotal involvement in the prosecution of the Mexican Revolution, see John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[10] U.S. Congress, House, *An Act to Regulate the Immigration of Aliens to, and the Residence of Aliens in, the United States,* 64th Cong., 2nd sess., 1917, H.R. 10384, 874.

[11] Ibid.

migrants had been actively recruited since the beginning of the twentieth century, and were aggressively courted by US agribusiness at the outset of US involvement in World War I, the US government's mixed messages would set a precedent for the decades that followed. And, the Mexican state, in the throes of revolution, continued to be powerless to counteract the US influence over its citizenry.

The years of World War I would be the first time – and definitely not the last – that Mexican migrants received contradictory messages from across the border. The US government, often at odds with US agribusiness, also saw the benefit of migrant laborers, but on its terms, in numbers of its choosing, for periods of time at its discretion. The Immigration Act of 1917 would impact rural, uneducated Mexicans especially hard due to the harsh and particular demands of the law. The Act stipulated that a literacy test be employed "[a]scertaining whether aliens can read."[12] Therefore, while World War I prompted calls from US industrial, agricultural, and business leaders for the hiring of Mexican workers, the 1917 Immigration Act made it difficult for rural Mexicans – largely illiterate – to migrate to the US.[13] The Immigration Act, in theory, attempted to limit US employers eager to take advantage of cheap Mexican labor. Section 5 of the 1917 Immigration Act claimed

> [t]hat it shall be unlawful for any person, company, partnership, or corporation, in any manner whatsoever, to prepay the transportation or in any way to induce, assist, encourage, or solicit the importation or migration of any contract laborer or contract laborers into the United States….[14]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Fernando Saúl Alanis Enciso, *El Primer Programa Bracero y El Gobierno de México 1917-1918* (San Luis Potosi: El Colegio de San Luis, 1999), 13.

[14] *An Act to Regulate the Immigration of Aliens,* 879.

This is one of the first examples of the demands of powerful US agribusiness interests running contrary to the political demands of certain sectors of the US public and government. During one of the earliest immigration debates pitting US farmers against the US government, Mexican migrant laborers found themselves stuck in the middle, a position that would not change in the following decades. In the midst of their social revolution, many Mexican revolutionaries recognized this trend of current and past exploitation and would seek to rectify it. And after the combative phase of the Mexican Revolution had reached its zenith, many of these revolutionary factions would turn their attention to the plight of their rural countrymen both at home and abroad.

At the outset of US involvement in World War I in 1917, the revolutionary Mexican government combated the "exodus of its nationals" in different ways.[15] Constitutionalist forces led by Venustiano Carranza had taken control of most of Mexico starting in 1916, bringing about some sense of order, and the railways were finally made safe for civilian travel after years of warfare. Consequently a steady and rising stream of workers would head north, encouraged by US business and in defiance of the 1917 Immigration Act, in what Fernando Alanis Enciso labels "The First Bracero Program."[16] According to Mexican government statistics during the year 1917 alone 139,922 Mexicans entered the United States.[17] Faced with the emigration of its nationals and continued social turmoil at home, the revolutionary factions would come together to draft the Constitution of 1917, where many social and land reforms were enshrined. This revolutionary document would make sweeping changes to land and labor laws. These ideals were to guide

[15] Alanis Enciso, 65.

[16] Ibid., 21-22.

[17] Ibid., 22.

the fate of Mexican political, social, and economic theory – but not necessarily practice – for decades to follow.

The framers of the Constitution, championing social reform, attempted to turn back the clock on Porfirian land and agrarian policies. Attacking decades of infringement on communal properties, water, and workers rights, the revolutionary factions fashioned Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917 to provide redress for Mexico's agrarian poor. This radical text called for expropriation of vast tracts of private and corporate land to be redistributed to the peasants and *campesinos*. The introduction to Article 27 states

> necessary measures shall be taken to divide up large landed estates; to develop small landed holdings in operation; to create new agricultural centers, with necessary lands and waters; to encourage agriculture in general and to prevent the destruction of natural resources…. Centers of population which at present either have no lands or water or which do not possess them in sufficient quantities for the needs of their inhabitants, shall be entitled to grants thereof….[18]

This radical decree sought to return the rural poor back to the soil they had lost years or decades before. Reuniting the rural poor with the land would have the added effect of reducing Mexican labor emigration to the United States. Section VIII of Article 27 would delve even further into radical territory and void all transfers and deals involving land and water by local, state, and federal government agencies dating back as far as the mid-nineteenth century.[19] While some modern scholars consider the reform sections of the Constitution of 1917 a "preconceived and cynical attempt" to co-opt the defeated agrarian and labor factions of the Revolution, the fact of the matter was that land reform had now

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[18] Mexican Constitution of 1917, art. 27, http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexico/1917-Constitution.htm (accessed January 4, 2011).

[19] Ibid., art. 27, sec. VIII.

been enshrined in the nation's principal document.[20] It seemed there would be no ignoring the plight of the rural peasant and *campesino* anymore.

With concessions made in earlier Articles of the Constitution of 1917 for improving the plight of Mexico's agrarian and working poor at home, Article 123 turned the document's focus on the Mexican laborer abroad. Section XXVI of Article 123 would establish the first legal concepts relating to the emigration of Mexican laborers, and attempted to ensure the fair treatment of the Mexican migrant laborer in foreign countries. Also, this clause sought to secure for the migrant desirable working and living conditions when abroad.[21] Section XXVI of Article 123 states

> [e]very labor contract made between a Mexican and a foreign employer must be notarized by a competent municipal authority and countersigned by the consul of the nation to which the worker intends to go, because, in addition to the ordinary stipulations, it shall be clearly specified that the expenses of repatriation shall be borne by the contracting employer.[22]

This clause would represent the first instance when the Mexican government became involved in the migration of its nationals. This would also mark the first time the Mexican state mandated mediation on behalf of its migrant labor force. Here, in Article 123, the revolutionary government is seen taking responsibility for the well-being of its nationals abroad. Now one could witness, enshrined in the revolutionary Constitution through various land and labor reforms, the explicit recognition that the revolutionary government was a protector and provider for Mexico's agrarian and migrant poor. The Revolution, at least in writing, represented a rebirth for Mexico's countryside and migrant laborers. Fulfilling

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[20] John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 328-29.

[21] Alanis Enciso, 68.

[22] Mexican Constitution of 1917, art. 123, sec. XXVI (accessed January 4, 2011).

these promises in the years and decades that followed, however, would prove more difficult.

Many of Mexico's rural poor had not been content to wait for a negotiated deal at the end of the Revolution to improve their plight. During the Revolution, peasant groups had taken the promise of social and land reform into their own hands and reclaimed *hacienda* and private land for their own personal or communal use. These actions were often committed with the blessing or ambivalence of the revolutionary forces preoccupied with brutal warfare. When the dust settled after the drafting of the Constitution of 1917, however, it was up to *Primer Jefe* Venustiano Carranza to enact its sweeping land and labor reforms. But the bad blood of the Revolution was still fresh, and Carranza was assassinated in 1920 after enacting few concrete measures to improve the plight of the rural poor. Álvaro Obregón took his place as president and continued Carranza's policy of legalizing the "previous locally initiated peasant land seizures" which had occurred between 1913 and 1916, but eventually would do little more than Carranza for land and labor reform.[23] Obregón, before meeting his own untimely death at the hands of an assassin, would make his greatest contribution to the revolutionary land project: the creation of the National Agrarian Commission. The National Agrarian Commission surveyed and inventoried the rural population of Mexico, and, as John Mason Hart argues, the "enthusiastic employees of the National Agrarian Commission of the period 1916-1924 laid the basis for the agrarian reforms carried out by President Lázaro Cárdenas."[24] But in the chaotic and unstable aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, things would get worse for the rural poor before they got better.

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[23] Hart, 341.

[24] Ibid.

While the Mexican Revolution was fought in part to provide both social justice for Mexico's rural poor and to provide protection for Mexico's laborers, migrants included, real land and labor reform was slow in coming. In the decade following the end of the Revolution, the Mexican government did not take great interest in the repatriation of its nationals.[25] Even though Article 123 of the Constitution of 1917 provided governmental protections for Mexican workers and put the onus on the revolutionary government to protect Mexican migrants working in the United States, no great effort was made to repatriate those displaced either by the Revolution or by poverty during the immediate post-Revolutionary years. In fact, government efforts to encourage and aid in the return of willing Mexicans who had ventured to the United States were minimal and sporadic at best.[26] In short, the Mexican migrant laborer, intricately linked to the land, realized little concrete social and political benefit in the decade following the end of the Mexican Revolution. As the plight of the agrarian *campesinos* had not improved in Mexico, so too had the plight remained dire for Mexican migrant laborers in the United States. The fate of these two groups became more inextricably linked, and not coincidentally. Due to the lack of land reform, growing numbers of former *campesinos* swelled the migrant labor ranks.

In a trend to be repeated throughout the decades following the Mexican Revolution, the ambivalence of early post-revolutionary Mexican governments toward the marginal status of the rural poor and migrant was exacerbated by the self-serving actions of the United States and its business interests. Only seven

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[25] Fernando Saúl Alanis Enciso, "No Cuenten Conmigo: La Pólitica de Repatriación del Gobierno Mexicano y Sus Nacionales en Estados Unidos, 1910-1928," *Estudios Mexicanos* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 403.

[26] Ibid., 407.

years after passing the restrictive and xenophobic Immigration Act of 1917, the US government passed the Immigration Act of 1924. This immigration policy, enacted during a time of general prosperity in the United States, would completely shift course from its predecessor and make it easier for Mexican nationals to work in the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924 declared an immigrant born in Mexico was a "non-quota immigrant" and therefore not subject to restrictive immigration quotas placed on other foreign countries.[27] Buoyed by its success in the First World War, and eager to exploit its newfound political and economic position in the world, US agribusiness interests would once again focus their energy on obtaining cheap Mexican labor.

Finding little resistance from the post-revolutionary Mexican governments of the 1920s – who were arguably too distracted by political instability and internal strife – US agribusiness proceeded to entice disaffected Mexican migrants to work in US fields. Various grower reports on the farm labor situation in California soon echoed a similar sentiment: an abundance of Mexican labor led to a steady decline in wage rates.[28] Cheap Mexican labor paid dividends for US farmers, and the unchanged conditions in Mexico coupled with the unrealized social promises of the Revolution would keep these migrant laborers coming. Examining Mexican immigration during 1926-1927, Manuel Gamio concluded that the "emigration of Mexican laborers is directly caused by the low wages and unemployment in various parts of Mexico" and "indirectly by the political

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[27] U.S. Congress, House, *An Act to Limit the Immigration of Aliens Into the United States, and for Other Purposes,* 68th Cong., 1st sess., 1924, H.R. 7995, 155.

[28] Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (New York: Archon Books, 1935), 189.

instability of the country."[29] Only a decade after the Mexican Revolution ended, it appeared that its sweeping social project was slowly headed for failure.

It would take one of the most climactic events in modern history for the post-revolutionary Mexican state to begin making good on its promises to Mexico's agrarian poor and workers. The Great Depression would expose the harsh treatment and conditions Mexican migrant laborers experienced in the United States to its fullest extent. Where the migrant laborer had been welcomed with open and eager arms in the United States only a few years earlier, public and government opinion, compelled by the economic calamity of the Depression, would turn against him. The transitory existence that made Mexican labor extremely agreeable to US agribusiness would ultimately prove these workers' undoing. For, according to US growers, the "foremost advantage of [utilizing] Mexicans… was their deportability."[30] The 'Mexican Repatriation Program' thus began with the onset of the Great Depression and would last until 1940, leading to the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Mexican nationals and Mexican-American US citizens from the United States. This served as a blaring wake-up call to the Mexican state that the plight of the Mexican migrant laborer in US agribusiness could no longer be ignored.

The Great Depression would give millions of Americans the "taste of the suffering that Mexican immigrants had always experienced."[31] And Mexican immigrants would pay the price for Americans' suffering. By Mexican government estimates, from 1929 to 1937 nearly half a million Mexican nationals

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[29] Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930), 171.

[30] Reisler, 231.

[31] Ibid., 227.

were repatriated back to Mexico.[32] In November of 1931 alone nearly 21,000 Mexicans were forcibly deported back into Mexico.[33] The same migrants who had been cajoled to work in US fields during the Mexican Revolution, World War I, and the 1920s were now under attack by the very country that wooed them. Even Mexican immigrants who had settled in the United States and whose children were US citizens were forced from their homes and repatriated. Mexican laborers had always been an expendable resource for US agribusiness, one to be exploited and rejected at will, but the Mexican Repatriation Program revealed the callousness that permeated US treatment of Mexican immigrants.

While the Repatriation Program represented one of the most notorious instances of the recruitment and deportation cycles that had already become the norm in US-Mexican migrant relations by 1930, the expediency of this policy backfired on both the United States and Mexico with the coming of the Bracero Program in the 1940s. But, as the mid-1930s unfolded and witnessed tens of thousands of deportations every year, the Mexican government would finally take a stand for its rural and working poor, providing the first glimmer of hope for true reform shaped in the spirit of the Revolution.

From the outset of his election to the Mexican Presidency in 1934, Lázaro Cárdenas helped realize many of the social reforms promised by the Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917.[34] At long last, many peasants received land distributions that had been promised since the early days of the Revolution.

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[32] Abraham Hoffman, "Mexican Repatriation Statistics: Some Suggested Alternatives to Carey McWilliams," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (Oct. 1972): 399.

[33] Ibid.

[34] For more on Cárdenas's impact on the Mexican Revolution see Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Fernando Benítez, *Lázaro Cárdenas y la Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1977-1978).

Before Cárdenas, the Mexican state had done little to better the conditions of the agrarian poor and to promote land reform. From 1 December 1934 to 31 August 1940, however, Cárdenas would award 10,651 *ejido* communal land grants.[35] These grants benefitted 1,020,594 rural Mexicans through the redistribution of 18,352,275 hectares of land.[36] President Cárdenas, in unveiling the sweeping and radical agrarian policies of his Six Year Plan of 1934-1940, claimed that the rights to collectively work land were the "key to agricultural development and the social advance of the *campesino* population."[37] This collective land policy, according to Cárdenas, could only be achieved through the division of the large landholdings and through outlawing their future existence.[38] Cárdenas then set to work implementing the reform policies that would leave their mark on the Mexican state and mind for decades to come.

The presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas was a dynamic era in Mexico's history. This six-year-period witnessed many leftist reforms, such as the expropriation of the national railroads, the division of private lands into *ejidos*, petroleum strikes, the end of Supreme Court support for foreign companies who depressed workers wages, the cancellation of many government contracts, and the expropriation of the Mexican petroleum industry.[39] This was a far cry from the post-revolutionary Mexico Cárdenas first encountered when he entered office, which remained semi-feudal in areas, "controlled by large Mexican interests and US capital, with an

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[35] Lázaro Cárdenas, *Legado Revolucionario de Lázaro Cárdenas* (México, D.F.: B. Costa-Amic, 1971), 60.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 27.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Salvador Novo, *La Vida en México en el Período Presidencial de Lázaro Cárdenas* (México, D.F.: Empresas Editoriales S.A., 1964), 12.

indigenous population living in the fourteenth century and on the margins of reform… and a political scene still nostalgic for armed conflict."[40] Cárdenas had made it clear his administration would "put into practice fiscal policies aimed at obtaining just productivity from national properties, and… regulate ownership of the land."[41] Partly due to the agrarian reforms Cárdenas enacted, and partly due to the success of the US Mexican Repatriation Program, the first three years of Cárdenas' presidency saw a dramatic dip in the deportation of Mexican laborers from the United States. In 1937, only 8,037 Mexicans were deported from the United States back to Mexico, a fraction of 1931's 138, 519 deportations.[42]

Whether it was Cárdenas – or the Mexican Repatriation Program – that gave the rural poor a reason to stay put in Mexico is uncertain. What is certain is that over a million agrarian Mexicans received collective land, and laborers in other sectors of industry were granted new collective rights. Cárdenas was the first post-revolutionary Mexican president to argue that the key to providing a living for Mexico's rural poor was to give them the tools to be self-sufficient in the lifestyle they knew best, and not try to incorporate them into industrial jobs or the cities. This entailed respecting the *ejidal* economy and not trying to subordinate it to the needs or desires of the national economy. As will be seen, this lesson would go unheeded in following administrations. Speaking before the first national congress of the Mexican Workers Confederation, Cárdenas claimed it was imperative that the "farming classes are liberated from the pattern of land

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[40] Ibid., 11-12.

[41] Lázaro Cárdenas, "Exposición del Presidente de la República sobre la Reconstrucción Integral de los Territorios de Baja California y Quintana Roo, México, D.F., 28 Sept. 1936," in *Palabras y Documentos Publicos de Lázaro Cárdenas: Mensajes, Discursos, Declaraciones, Entrevistas y Otros Documentos, 1928-1940* vol. 1 (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1978), 216.

[42] Hoffman, 399.

exploitation, making the *ejido* the constitutional basis of an economy capable of amply satisfying the necessities of its population."[43] If *campesinos* and peasants could grow, eat, and sell their surplus food, the need to become migrant laborers would be greatly reduced.

Cárdenas also realized that the key to providing a living for Mexican workers lie in the ability to take collective action. But sometimes the workers' rights to collective action ran contrary to the administration's wishes. In a 28 July 1940 message to Mexican labor organizations, Cárdenas proclaimed:

> All workers of the land need to realize that the government of the Republic is extremely determined not to harm the interests of the working masses, as it is also their obligation to protect the economic stability of the industries that have been placed in their hands and to demand utter efficiency in public services.[44]

This call for cooperation between labor and the government evidences the rising power of workers' groups during the six years of Cárdenas's term. It shows that workers were given a sense of ownership of their role in the Mexican economy and society. For the first time since the republic's creation, the rural and working poor of Mexico had been given a seat at the table of Mexican policy and decision-making. But many problems remained, and, due to the presidential term limits present in the constitution, Cárdenas's dramatic six-year term was soon over.

By 1940, Mexico seemed poised on the edge of an era of true social reform. The policies enacted by Lázaro Cárdenas hinted at the progress that could be made toward creating a more just Mexican society. Not only that, but the reforms of the

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[43] Lázaro Cárdenas, "Discurso del Presidente de la República ante el Primer Congreso Nacional de la Confederación de Trabajadores de México, México, D.F., 24 Feb. 1938," *Palabras y Documentos Publicos de Lázaro Cárdenas,* 278.

[44] Lázaro Cárdenas, "Mensaje del Presidente de la República a los Organizaciones Obreras, Querétaro, 28 July 1940," *Palabras y Documentos Publicos de Lázaro Cárdenas,* 436.

Cárdenas era proved the social and agrarian promises of the Revolution had not been empty, but had merely required someone with the political will and desire to implement them. Unbeknownst to Cárdenas and rural Mexicans, however, the very success and victory of land reform in Mexico would prove a double-edged sword. As the rural poor's dietary habits and health improved due to increased income, the fertility rate boomed along with it. Mexico's rural population would double between 1940 and the 1960s, and most agrarian Mexicans were landless by the 1970s.[45] With the pace of social reform during Cárdenas's presidency and the promise of a new era in Mexico, it seemed nearly impossible that the 1970s would witness Mexico's rural poor in their most abysmal state ever. But, this is exactly what happened, and how it happened is the subject of the following chapters.

Finding answers to this abrupt reversal of fortune lie in the quarter century following the Cárdenas administration, during the era of the Bracero Program. Twenty-five years before Cárdenas, at the outset of the Mexican Revolution, Mexico's rural population found itself in abject poverty. Twenty-five years after the end of Cárdenas's term, nothing had changed. How could this be? The social and land reforms of the Cárdenas era did not prove lasting, but would "provide the ideological basis of a 'revolutionary' nationalism" that has permeated Mexican politics since.[46] However, this "revolutionary nationalism" would only influence political rhetoric, and not political action, in the years and decades following Cárdenas.

The rural farmers and laborers of Mexico, having tasted the fruits of reform inspired by the Mexican Revolution, would ultimately be failed by it. Spurred by

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[45] Hart, 372.

[46] Ibid., 376.

the migration patterns established to the north during the first decades of the twentieth century, many agrarian poor would become first-time migrant laborers or return to the circuit, eagerly accepting the chance to work in the United States seasonally or sporadically. And, the Mexican government, turning its attention toward modernization and urbanization at the beginning of World War II, would soon be confronted by a new bumper crop of rural poor. The migrant labor agreement known as the Bracero Program, born yet again of US involvement in war, would provide not only a pressure release valve for Mexico's modernization and industrialization campaign, but the means by which the Mexican revolutionary project's long and troubled attempts at achieving lasting agrarian and labor reform would ultimately fail. As will be seen, Mexico's rural poor, abandoned by the Revolution, would soon abandon hope of seeking redress from the Mexican state and set their sights permanently on the United States, helping create an immigration crisis of epic proportions in their desperation.

CHAPTER 2: THE REVOLUTION AND THE BRACERO PROGRAM: MEXICAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES, 1942-1964

[The Bracero Agreements] provide an opportunity to earn high wages, a noble adventure for our youth, and, above all, proof of our cooperation in the victory of our cause.[1]

Ezequiel Padilla, Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 1940-1945

The future appeared brighter for Mexico's agrarian and working poor after President Lázaro Cárdenas's land reforms in the 1930s redistributed huge tracts of land for *ejidos* and small farm landholdings. Greater global forces were at work, however, that would alter the reforms aggressively undertaken by the Cárdenas administration, ultimately helping derail and defeat Mexico's social revolutionary project. World War II would prove the catalyst for this abrupt collapse. Beginning with the presidency of Manuel Avila Camacho in 1940 through the end of the presidency of Adolfo López Mateos in 1964, successive Mexican administrations would turn their attention away from agrarian issues and focus on modernizing and industrializing the nation's urban areas and agricultural production. These policy shifts would primarily benefit resurgent private business and landholding interests, while overlooking small farmers and peasants. Unfortunately, these policies coincided with a surge in birth rates in the Mexican countryside prompted by Cárdenas's reforms. With the Mexican ranks of the landless and jobless growing steadily during and after World War II, US agricultural interests were able to realize their greatest (and most fateful) victory: securing a legalized flow of cheap Mexican labor virtually unimpeded for over twenty years.

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[1] Quoted in Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (San Jose: McNally and Loftin, 1964), 48.

The winds of change were evident long before President Cárdenas spent his last day in office. War industrialization and production during World War II had helped bring the United States out of the Great Depression, the same Depression that witnessed Mexican migrant laborers repatriated *en masse* in the 1930s due to job scarcity. In Mexico, however, popular patriotic fervor over the nationalization of natural resources and land reform ran high in the final years of the decade, and seemingly obscured the recent abuses and forced repatriation of Mexican laborers in the United States. In a speech before the National Assembly of the Mexican Revolutionary Party (PRM) in November 1939, newly-nominated presidential candidate Manuel Avila Camacho – in a hallmark of his Party's rhetoric for decades to follow – paid homage to the Revolution that was being implemented and the people it sought to serve, declaring

> [t]he Mexican Revolution has resulted in gains that no one can erase from the national conscience. Now we pick up the banner of the *campesinos*, workers, soldiers and the great popular masses of the Republic…, ennobled by the tireless action and patriotism of President Cárdenas…, who deserve not only the gratitude of the PRM and the nation, but an eminent place of honor in the history of the Republic.[2]

Only a few statements later, however, Avila Camacho reveals what the new focus of the PRM and his administration would be in 1940. According to the candidate, the Revolution had provided political liberation, Cárdenas had provided social liberation, now the country would strive for "economic liberation."[3] Eager to take advantage of a boom in exports and trade precipitated by the war, the PRM would turn its political sights on increasing industrialization, mechanization, and production at the outset of the new decade.

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[2] Manuel Avila Camacho, "Discurso Pronunciado, el Dia 3 de Noviembre de 1939," in *Segundo Plan Sexeñal* (México, D.F.: Partido Revolucionario Institucional Comisión Nacional Editorial, 1976), 59.

[3] Ibid., 60.

For the majority of rural poor who swelled the ranks of the Mexican migrant labor force at the beginning of the 1940s, the only economy that concerned them was the micro-economy surrounding the subsistence and surplus agricultural production of the *ejidos* or small farms. While President Cárdenas had once avowed that the *ejido* was the constitutional basis of a just Mexican economy, Candidate Avila Camacho, in a foreshadowing of where the Mexican revolutionary project was destined, claimed

> [t]he revolutionary movement, from its beginning and at every important moment in its development, has fought to foster… the economic independence of the Nation…. The mechanization of industry and agriculture, a fundamental part of economic progress, demands new monetary investments targeting the exploitation of natural resources, and [Mexicans]… will reap their gains on the perfection of production technology.[4]

The mechanization of agriculture was viewed as a reliable way to develop the larger Mexican economy while benefiting the nation's small farmers. Candidate Avila Camacho, however, failed to outline how the *ejidos* and small landholders would acquire the tools of industry, or be taught the technical expertise to utilize these tools, or benefit from irrigation development. In these areas, private landholders and businessmen would soon gain a clear advantage.

When Manuel Avila Camacho was elected president in 1940, the economic situation in Mexico was dire. The economy was deteriorating, the rising inflation that had begun during Cárdenas's term was worsening, and economic sanctions imposed on Mexico by the United States following the expropriation of the oil industry were threatening the nation's stability.[5] The stark reality that the Avila

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[4] Ibid., 5-6.

[5] Luis Bernal Tavares, *Vicente Lombardo Toledano y Miguel Alemán: Una Bifurcación en La Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994), 89.

Camacho administration faced only hastened the implementation of the economic policies the president had trumpeted during his candidacy. The mounting political pressures compelled the new administration to enact agricultural policies based on the "rapid rise in production… of export products and basic foodstuffs."[6] The full strength of the *ejidos*, small landholdings, and natural resources were directed toward growing profit-generating and staple crops. Thus began the decades-long subversion of the internal Mexican economy to the external Mexican economy. Agriculture, which had historically fueled the Mexican economy, fast became an "adjunct of industrialization" during the 1940s.[7] The national economy boomed thanks in part to the agricultural shift from staple food production to support of "agribusiness processors, retailers, and intermediaries, whether at the international or the national level."[8] For the agrarian poor, the reinvigorated profitability of land and the agro-economic shift in focus away from their own subsistence methods and markets would soon prove their downfall, and hasten their divorce from the land many had only acquired in recent years.

The Avila Camacho administration, while gearing its economy toward exports of natural resources and foodstuffs, also turned its attention to the other benefits war provided. Eager to quell tensions over oil expropriation and the resulting economic sanctions, and realizing the potential benefits of closer (and more equal) collaboration, the administration embarked on a strategy of using wartime cooperation with the United States to industrialize Mexico.[9] This boom in

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[6] Luis Medina, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Periodo 1940-1952: Del Cardenismo al Avilacamachismo* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1978), 231.

[7] Steven E. Sanderson, *The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture: International Structure and the Politics of Rural Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 39.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Michael Miller, *Red, White, and Green: The Maturing of Mexicanidad, 1940-1946* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1998), 29.

wartime exports and the lessons learned through a close partnership with the United States would give the Mexican state its first taste of the rewards gained from increased production and industrialization. This would mark the beginning of what economists call the 'Mexican Miracle,' the period from 1940 to 1970 characterized by relative social peace as well as impressive (if not illusory) economic growth.[10] The sale of natural resources to the United States during World War II would give the administration its strongest economic footing of any post-revolutionary government.[11] And, the United States, preoccupied with war and insatiable in appetite for Mexico's natural resources and exports, would soon set its sights on one of Mexico's greatest natural resources: its manpower.

On 18 April 1942, US President Franklin Roosevelt took a fateful step that would eventually result in the creation of a migrant labor agreement known as the Bracero Program. His Executive Order 9139, titled 'Establishing the War Manpower Commission,' called for the formation of a commission comprising a myriad of US government agencies, including the Departments of War, Navy, Agriculture, Labor, and various war-related boards. The commission's task was to "estimate the requirements of manpower for industry; review all other estimates of needs for military, agricultural, and civilian manpower; and direct the several departments and agencies of the Government as to the proper allocation of available manpower."[12] With vast segments of the US labor force at war, and with

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[10] Sarah Babb, *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 75.

[11] Miller, 30.

[12] U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 9139, "Establishing the War Manpower Commission," (18 April 1942) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu /ws/?pid=16248 (accessed March 1, 2011).

US agribusiness clamoring for cheap Mexican migrant labor, the commission soon called for the implementation of a Mexican guest worker program.

While the United States began to set its sights on utilizing Mexican migrant labor, the Mexican government was crafting new legislation directly affecting the population that this migrant labor pool drew from: the peasants of the *ejidos* and *campesinos* of the small farms. The new Agrarian Code implemented by the Avila Camacho administration at the beginning of 1943 effectively only guaranteed government protection of *ejidos* contributing directly to the economic development of the state – and thus the war effort, war industrialization, and war production – but not to *ejidos* and small landholdings engaged in surplus and subsistence farming. The Agrarian Code declared that the "collective organization of *ejidos* remained only compulsory for those exploiting natural resources."[13] This new Agrarian Code would open the door for private and capitalist interests, both national and foreign, to illegally buy, lease, or cheat the agrarian poor out of their constitutionally protected land. Thus the assault on land and labor reforms enacted under Cárdenas began subtly but earnestly. Many of the revolutionary reforms were soon tested. The gears of change were in motion. One major question soon arose: What should be done with the increasing ranks of the landless and jobless?

On 4 August 1942 a migrant labor agreement that would come to be known as the Bracero Program was reached through an "exchange of notes" permitting the documented migration of Mexican laborers to work in both US agriculture and industry. This agreement would be revised months later to include provisions for proper housing, sanitation, consular protection, and bank transfer of wages.[14] The

[13] Medina, 243.

[14] "Agreement of August 4, 1942, for the Temporary Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers to the United States as Revised on April 26, 1943 by an Exchange of Notes Between the American

utilization of Mexican workers was based on the idea that men would apply with officials in their home areas, and if signed to a contract, migrate to the United States with full knowledge and consent of the Mexican government. The original bracero agreement references Article 29 of the Mexican Federal Labor Law as the overarching guide for this partnership. It states that

> [a]ll contracts entered into by Mexican workers for lending their services outside their country shall be made in writing, legalized by the municipal authorities of the locality where entered into and vised by the Consul of the country where their services are being used.[15]

The Mexican government, still stinging from the Mexican Repatriation Program of the 1930s and the abuses and exploitation experienced by its nationals in the past, would insist on protections in the agreement, especially protections covering transportation and expenses in the case of repatriation as mandated by the revolutionary Constitution of 1917. The most striking aspect of the agreement was that the Mexican state would negotiate contracts directly with US farmers, and not the US government.[16] Eventually, US agribusiness would exploit this pact, the Mexican government would prove unable or unwilling to rectify abuses, and the constitutional rights of Mexico's migrants would be violated time and again.

The sprint towards industrialization and increased production that birthed the bracero agreements was not met without its critics in Mexico. One Mexican author declared that the shift of focus away from the poor was the fault of the PRM's (recently renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) leadership: "Pompous idiots, like all idiots, smugly declare that the fundamental problem of

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Embassy at Mexico City and the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs," p.1, 3-4, www.farmworkers.org/bpaccord.html (accessed January 10, 2011).

[15] Ibid., 1.

[16] Ibid., 2.

Mexico is not moral but economic."[17] In February 1945 Mexican poet, writer and intellectual Salvador Novo stated, in a foreshadowing of Mexico's next economic experiment, "that in the unfounded hope to arrive at industrialization, we have created a boom in imported American products."[18] The imbalance of trade, according to Novo, was the result of Mexico's pragmatic approach to the United States, "one of the inadvertent – but important – problems of Good Neighbor policy, democracy, collaboration – and common sense."[19] Later scholars would view the policies of this era and the Bracero Program it spawned less favorably. The creation of the Bracero Program was seen not as sound policy but as a creation of the PRI, as "the bureaucratic machinery which the leaders of the PRI actively participated in was dedicated to 'hooking braceros' and due to [the PRI's] influence the *campesinos* were excited by the notion of heading north."[20] While the topic of migrant labor quickly revealed divisions within Mexico, the impact of migrant labor on the Mexican revolutionary project quickly revealed itself as well.

The opportunities and growth that World War II created was the first time one could "speak about the existence of a true national industrialization process" in Mexico.[21] But the vision of sustained post-war growth and industrialization which guided the Avila Camacho administration's policies on production and the rural poor proved deceptive. The end of the war would symbolize the end of

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[17] Taken from the journal *Novedades*, in Alfonso Taracena, *La Vida en México Bajo Avila Camacho* (Guerrero: Editorial Jus, 1976), 285.

[18] Salvador Novo, *La Vida en México en el Périodo Presidencial de Manuel Avila Camacho* (México, D.F.: Empresas Editoriales, S.A., 1965), 312.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Olga Pellicer de Brody and Esteban L. Mancilla, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Periodo 1952-1960: El Entendimiento con los Estados Unidos y La Gestación del Desarrollo Estabilizador* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1978), 63.

[21] Jose Luis Reyna and Raúl Trejo Delarbre, *De Adolfo Ruiz Cortines a Adolfo López Mateos* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veinteuno Editores, S.A., 1981), 9.

Mexico's momentous initial industrialization.[22] *Ejidal* agriculture – a fixture of Cárdenas's reforms and central to his 'just' Mexican economy, the only system keeping a large segment of the Mexican population from joblessness, landlessness, and starvation – soon lost favor to private agriculture as efforts to industrialize focused on lowering the price of agriculture products in the internal Mexican market.[23] Lowering the price of foodstuffs required increased mechanization, better technologies, and more irrigation – all tools that private businesses and landholders held in advantage over Mexico's rural poor due to their access to technical expertise and government support. The resulting fallout and increase in unskilled labor was already worrisome during Avila Camacho's six-year term.

According to Mexican sources, the Avila Camacho years of the Bracero Program saw 76,184 braceros contracted in 1943; in 1944 the number was 118,182, in 1945 the total was 104,487, and 26,214 were contracted in 1946.[24] These numbers do not take into account the large number of uncontracted, undocumented 'illegal' workers already swelling the ranks of the Mexican migrant labor force in the United States during this time. These same contemporary sources were also noting the renewed abuses suffered by the Mexican nationals. The anti-revolutionary character of the Bracero Program was documented through exploitative working conditions and wages in the US. These abuses, according to one Mexican author, involved "probable violations of sections II, III, V, VII, and IX of Article 123 of the Constitution."[25] Yet the Mexican state would not respond

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[22] Ibid., 10.

[23] Ibid., 12.

[24] Guillermo Martinez, "Los Braceros: Experiencias que Deben Aprovecharse," in Jorge Durand, ed., *Braceros: Las Miradas Mexicana y Estadounidense, Antología 1945-1964* (Zacatecas: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2007), 240.

[25] Ibid., 235.

to its critics' outcry, even after World War II had ended and US soldiers began to return home.

Contemporary Mexican sources also attempted to rationalize the reasons why these migrant laborers allowed themselves to be exploited and abused by the US government and agribusiness. One author stated

> [a]spirant braceros are not content people who can easily live without working. The workers who go to the Secretary of Labor and Social Security [for contracts] are poor people, who live day to day, who have been unable to save anything in the course of their lives and whose only reality is the necessity of work.[26]

Having known mostly deprivation and poverty before Cárdenas' reforms, Mexico's agrarian poor were no strangers to hard work. Unfortunately, they were also not strangers to abuse at home. This intimate knowledge of exploitation may have factored into their resignation with US conditions. The Revolution of 1910 had been prosecuted to rectify this dismal reality. But, by 1946, many Mexicans found themselves in a position they had always been: mired in poverty.

The revolutionary victories under Cárdenas were already in retreat at the end of President Avila Camacho's term. The Bracero Program had started in 1942, funneling Mexican nationals – both legal and illegal – to work in US fields as the rural poor of the *ejidos* and small landholdings began losing their lands and livelihoods due to the industrialization efforts of the nation. Land redistribution slowed to a trickle, as half of the land requests submitted by the agrarian poor during Avila Camacho's first three years in office were rejected, and three million hectares of land were reclaimed for state use.[27] This acreage would not remain in

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[26] Jorge Durand, ed., *Braceros: Las Miradas Mexicana y Estadounidense, Antología 1945-1964* (Zacatecas: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2007), 183.

[27] Medina, 272.

state hands for long, though. Even as the promise of economic expansion began to decrease immediately after World War II, anti-revolutionary tactics increased. At the end of President Avila Camacho's term, those interest groups who clamored for the private use of land and natural resources continued to attack the *ejido* as "unproductive, disorganized, and technologically lacking" with the sole intention of creating the illusion of crisis in the *ejidal* system.[28] Segments of the *ejidal* system, however, had already proven successful by the 1940s. Furthermore, they had proven that they could co-exist alongside private development. For example, the productive Laguna cotton *ejido* of northern Mexico was financed in part by US cotton giant Anderson Clayton Company in exchange for a percentage of profits.[29] But large-scale agrarian capitalism had returned to Mexico with a vengeance, and the rural poor would be hardest hit.

If Manuel Avila Camacho's presidency symbolized a shift of political thought and action, then the election of Miguel Alemán in 1946 represented a sea change in the direction of the Revolution, at least in the eyes of more reform-minded and left-leaning Cárdenistas.[30] While President Avila Camacho's policies focused primarily on the mechanization and increased production in all aspects of agriculture, Alemán turned his administration's attention to the industrialization of the metropolitan areas and reducing Mexico's dependence on foreign imports, a dependence exacerbated by World War II. This course of action would prove critical as the rural poor, increasingly estranged from the land due to unscrupulous businessmen and governmental machinations, would ultimately abandon it,

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[28] Ibid., 273.

[29] Casey Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 16-17.

[30] Reyna and Delarbre, 36.

flooding these industrializing cities and the migrant labor ranks. The growing dilemma of what to do with this large, restive population of surplus labor after the war soon found an answer in the Bracero Program's post-war extension.

Fresh off his election, President Miguel Alemán adopted a new strategy for economic development. Expanding on policies implemented by the Avila Camacho administration, Alemán "directed government efforts and investments toward import-substitution and large-scale irrigation agriculture."[31] In building up a national industry for import-substitution, the Alemán administration was seeking to lessen its dependence on imports from the United States and Europe – as well as lessen the influence these nations held over Mexico politically and economically. In order to properly feed the creation and growth of burgeoning industries, what little government focus that remained on *ejidos* and small landholdings would now shift toward landholdings that had been extensively developed for irrigation and could mass produce foodstuffs – the type of landholdings increasingly held in private hands or wrested from *ejido* control by the state. Mexico's agrarian poor faced escalating pressure on their lands and livelihoods, as productive soil was coveted as the fuel for the new industries created in the cities.

The Alemán government's drive toward import-substitution encouraged policies promoting "rapid industrialization," while "fostering the growth of urban centers that increasingly attracted people from rural regions."[32] As a result, more workers were needed in Mexico's metropolitan areas to build the factories, and then work them. The landless, jobless, and unskilled *campesinos* that had been multiplying in the countryside heeded the call, abandoning their former lands and

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[31] Lourdes Arizpe, "The Rural Exodus in Mexico and Mexican Migration to the United States," *International Migration Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 629.

[32] Ibid., 629-30.

homes and putting pressure on the urban areas. Due to the rush toward import-substitution industrialization during Alemán's administration, plus the subsequent loss of land and jobs in the countryside and exodus to the cities, basic wages in 24 national industries fell 160 percent while the cost of living in Mexico City grew over 225 percent from 1939 to 1949.[33] There were far more people than jobs in the cities, there was no longer land for the *agraristas* to return to, and thousands upon thousands desperately required some form of sustenance for themselves and their families. The drive toward import-substitution industrialization, imposed often at odds with the Mexican social revolutionary project, demanded a pressure release valve. Economic development under Alemán would collapse if socioeconomic unrest were to erupt. A renewed labor agreement seemed to be the best solution. For Mexican politicians, migrant labor would have to temporarily trump social reform if economic progress was going to be achieved.

The post-war US government was, not surprisingly, amenable to the idea of a continuation of the bracero agreement in the late 1940s. In fact, a guest worker program between the two countries had never really terminated, even though the war ended in 1945. A report published by the US Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service in 1965 stated that while the original Bracero Program had terminated on 31 December 1947 (after "several extensions and amendments"), the US Immigration and Nationality Act had effectively continued the Mexican farm labor program until 1951, albeit in a "substantially altered form."[34] The only roadblock stopping the Alemán administration from renewing

[33] Reyna and Delarbre, 15.

[34] Robert McElroy and Earle Gavett, "Termination of the Bracero Program: Some Effects on Farm Labor and Migrant Housing Needs," *Agricultural Economic Report No. 77* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture - Economic Research Service, 1965), 6.

an official agreement was the need to sell the migrant labor policy to a skeptical Mexican public. Concerns over the Bracero Program's exploitation of nationals were already being voiced in areas of the Mexican media and government during the short life of the program. But, the Mexican state, desperate to develop its economy, turned increasingly to revolutionary rhetoric to shield its anti-revolutionary policies. President Alemán also found the United States a willing and active partner in making an official renewal of the Bracero Program more palatable for the Mexican people.

In June 1950 President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 10129, establishing the 'President's Commission on Migratory Labor.' The commission's stated objective was to inquire into the "social, economic, health, and educational conditions among migratory workers, both alien and domestic, in the United States."[35] The commission was tasked with identifying "problems created by the migration of workers, for temporary employment, into the United States, pursuant to the immigration laws or otherwise."[36] But, President Truman was also contending with a disgruntled public at home. Many returning GIs and workers displaced from industrial jobs were demanding action be taken to combat the illegal migration of Mexican labor. Therefore, the commission was given the task of identifying "whether sufficient numbers of local and migratory workers can be obtained from domestic sources to meet agricultural labor needs and, if not, the extent to which the temporary employment of foreign workers may be required to supplement the domestic labor supply."[37] This due diligence helped sell the

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[35] U.S. President Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 10129, "Establishing the President's Commission on Migratory Labor," (3 June 1950) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=78306 (accessed March 1, 2011).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

extension of the Bracero Program on both sides of the border. To prove that no stone was being left unturned in its investigation, the commission's mandate was extended an extra six months by Executive Order 10236, until 31 May 1951.[38] Almost immediately after this extension ended, the commission's findings would lead to the enacting of US Public Law 78.

Public Law 78, signed by President Truman on 13 July 1951, was an amendment to the Agricultural Act of 1949 "for the purpose of assisting in such production of agricultural commodities and products the Secretary of Agriculture deems necessary, by supplying agricultural workers from the Republic of Mexico."[39] Public Law 78 provided for the recruitment, transportation, and negotiation of contracts of Mexican nationals to work in American agribusiness. It also established the creation of US reception centers at points of entry on the border. Now the Korean War was being used to justify this version of the migrant labor agreements, with the same purported goal of combating agricultural worker shortages in regions of the United States. Section 503 of Public Law 78 stipulated that Mexican labor would be made available in areas deemed by the US Secretary of Labor to lack "sufficient domestic workers," where employment of Mexican nationals would not depress wages for domestic workers, and where reasonable efforts had been made to attract domestic workers.[40] This migrant labor agreement was set to expire on 31 December 1953.

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[38] U.S. President Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 10236, "Amendment of Executive Order No. 10129 of June 3, 1950, Establishing the President's Commission on Migratory Labor," (26 April 1951) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=78386 (accessed March 1, 2011).

[39] U.S. Congress, Senate, *An Act to Amend the Agricultural Act of 1949,* 82nd Cong., 1951, S. 984, 119.

[40] Ibid.

On the same day he signed Public Law 78, President Truman delivered a special message to the US Congress regarding the guest worker program and the issue of illegal immigration. Truman pointed to the deleterious effects of illegal immigration on US jobs and wages, and claimed, ironically, that the best recourse for illegal Mexican immigration in the United States was a legal guest worker program. The President declared

> [t]he presence of these illegal workers has a seriously depressing effect on wages and working conditions in farm areas throughout the southwest. The standards of living and job opportunities of American farm workers are under constant downward pressure. Thousands of our own citizens… are displaced from employment or forced to work under substandard conditions because of the competition of these illegal immigrants.[41]

Of Public Law 78's merits, President Truman would declare a month later that he was "glad that in passing this joint resolution the Congress has begun action on those measures which will aid in the development of a well-rounded program dealing with the immigration of Mexican farm workers."[42] Now, thanks to the active help of the US government, US agribusiness – under the pretext of the Korean War – would maintain their steady supply of cheap legal and often illegal Mexican labor. And, the Alemán administration, whose economic plan represented a dramatic reversal of the social revolutionary project, would continue its assault on the constitutional protections of Mexico's rural poor. Many Mexicans, landless and jobless, would turn to a bracero contract or illegal immigration to survive.

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[41] U.S. President Harry S. Truman, "Special Message to the Congress on the Employment of Agricultural Workers from Mexico," (13 July 1951) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13837 (accessed March 1, 2011).

[42] U.S. President Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill Relating to the Employment of Mexican Agricultural Workers," (16 August 1951) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13879 (accessed March 1, 2011).

Illegal immigration, from the beginning, had been under attack in the United States. Governments on both sides of the border, whose interests were ultimately served by it, continued to assail the issue publicly. The 1952 US Immigration and Nationality Act, otherwise known as Public Law 414, attempted to allay American fears over increasingly widespread illegal immigration from Mexico. Public Law 414 stated that "aliens seeking to enter the United States for the purpose of performing skilled or unskilled labor" were barred, along with aliens "who have been removed at Government expense in lieu of deportation."[43] This law was meant to target those Mexican laborers without a contract, but, in reality, possessing a bracero contract meant little to US farmers hungry for cheap labor. Illegal immigrants, in practice, were welcomed with open arms on the farms of the southwestern United States and around the country. Token pressure from the Mexican and US governments ensured that this issue would not fully be confronted. Illegal immigration, exacerbated by President Alemán's industrialization campaign, helped take social pressure off of his administration during an intense period of economic experimentation and growth, and would familiarize and legitimize the option of illegal immigration in the minds of Mexico's rural poor.

The year 1952 marked the end of the presidency of Miguel Alemán. Many decisions with irreversible consequences had been made on both sides of the border during his six-year term. Due to his policies some Mexican scholars view Miguel Alemán's presidency as the most economically transformative era ever witnessed in the Mexican countryside. They evidence this claim by saying the

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[43] U.S. Congress, House, *An Act to Revise the Laws Relating to Immigration, Naturalization, and Nationality; and for Other Purposes,* 82nd Cong., 1952, H.R. 13342, 183.

> increase in irrigation work, the international market for agricultural goods, and the greater capitalization in the open irrigation zones… allowed agricultural production to grow 71% between 1940 and 1950…. However, the *ejidal* holdings and small landholders… obtained very little similar increase.[44]

Mexico's increasingly industrialized agricultural economy realized tremendous gains, but not for the agrarian poor farming collectively in *ejidos* or individually on small farms. The economic and industrial boom that bypassed them and the land injustices many experienced had sent them flocking to Mexico's cities, or more often, to the fields of the United States.

The year 1952 witnessed a new presidential candidate arise in Mexico from a familiar political party and espousing familiar rhetoric. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, upon accepting the presidential candidacy on behalf of the PRI, seemed to acknowledge the difficulty and hardships the agrarian poor faced during the previous decade. In a stump speech he spoke to the inequalities caused by modernization and industrialization in Mexico, and how the Revolution had been sidetracked, saying

> [t]wo thirds of our population survive through agriculture and animal husbandry, and scarcely receive one-fifth of the national income…. The imperative fulfillment of the ideals of our Revolution urgently demand the application of immediate corrections, because when the majority of residents live in conditions blatantly unequal from other sectors of society, the social justice we seek has not been realized.[45]

In what must have seemed like hopeful words to the Mexican agrarian poor and migrant laborer, Ruiz Cortines vowed to fight to restore social justice to the Mexican economy. In echoes of Cárdenas twelve years earlier, he reiterated that

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[44] Olga Pellicer de Brody and Jose Luis Reyna, *Historia de la Revolucion Mexicana, Periodo 1952-1960: El Afianzamiento de la Estabilidad Politica* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1978), 32.

[45] Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, in Bernardo Ponce, ed., *Adolfo Ruiz Cortines: Ensayo para Una Biografia Politica* (México, D.F.: Biografias Gandesa, 1952), 202.

the "*ejido* and the small landholding is the economic basis of agricultural development in the Republic."[46] On the topic of private large landholdings and companies that had infested the Mexican countryside, however, Ruiz Cortines soon tipped his hand to his true beliefs.

Candidate Ruiz Cortines's words revealed that he would continue to expand the economic policies of his predecessors. So that his rhetoric would not be perceived to be anti-private property, Ruiz Cortines delicately tiptoed around the anti-revolutionary question of large private landholdings in Mexico. He stated that owning large tracts of property in Mexico "stops being an unjustified privilege when it is utilized in businesses that do not only benefit capitalists."[47] What Ruiz Cortines failed to do was explain what constituted a 'non-capitalist' business. The fact that the vast majority of interests acquiring private property in Mexico were capitalistic enterprises exposed the duplicity of the candidate's statements.

But socio-economic trouble was brewing for Mexico after Ruiz Cortines's election, problems he had inherited from previous administrations. The industrialization of agricultural production and rise in private land ownership had resulted in a move away from staple food production in Mexico, causing food shortages. In 1952 the government's battle to relieve food scarcity achieved some success as the production of corn, wheat, and beans increased, but not enough to meet the population's needs.[48] And, due to the lack of mechanization and irrigation available for *ejidos* and small landholders, the increase in harvest "benefitted little the great majority of small farmers who continued to be relegated

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, in León Méndez Berman, ed., *En Torno a Un Hombre: Ruiz Cortines; Una Nueva Filosofía del Mando* (México, D.F.: Ediciones "Aguilas," 1952), 19.

[48] Pellicer de Brody and Mancilla, 129.

to small parcels."[49] Facing food scarcity and continued injustice in their treatment and dealings with the Mexican government, more and more *campesinos* would be driven to migrate to the United States as braceros or illegal immigrants.

Tensions over illegal immigration would flare again on both sides of the border. Official, half-hearted measures were undertaken to curb the traffic. Mexico, for example, would agree to suspend the sale of train and bus tickets at strategic points on the border, and pledged to actively discourage the concentration of potential workers at the frontier; the United States, for its part, left open the possibility of sanctioning US employers who utilized illegal labor.[50] But, unofficially, both sides demanded the other take action. The US ambassador in Mexico claimed in August 1953 that Mexico had "asked that we pass a law making it illegal for anyone in our country to employ an illegal immigrant," since Mexico reasoned it could not constitutionally prevent its nationals from freely travelling inside Mexico to the border.[51] US Ambassador White, in turn, complained that the Mexican state wanted "to put the whole burden and onus of preventing the traffic on [the US]."[52] Empty measures, the refusal of either government to take responsibility, and propaganda like a 1953 farm labor ad campaign aimed at reassuring US workers that "employment of Mexican workers will not adversely affect the wages or working conditions of domestic farm

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Blanca Torres, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, 1940-1952: Hacia la Utopía Industrial* (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1984), 239.

[51] Quoted in Larry Manuel García y Griego, "The Bracero Policy Experiment: U.S.-Mexican Responses to Mexican Labor Migration, 1942-1955, Pt. 2" (Ph.d. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1988), 526.

[52] Ibid.

workers," helped to guarantee that illegal immigration would continue its growth unabated.[53]

The token attempts to prevent the flow of undocumented laborers did not work, and immigration figures reveal the magnitude of both countries' inaction. 885,587 apprehensions of illegal immigrants were documented in 1953 alone.[54] This perceived immigration emergency of 1953 would finally force the State, Justice, and Labor Departments of the US government, for the first time, to address the issue of illegal immigration and the administration of the Bracero Program in unison and approach it with one consistent plan.[55] In doing so, the US government's ensuing actions would result in yet another black eye for a Mexican administration espousing revolutionary doctrine but desperate to preserve the socio-economic benefits of the much-maligned Bracero Program.

The contradictory cycle of immigration in the United States reared its ugly head once again with the commencement of 'Operation Wetback' in 1954. Operation Wetback was a month-long immigration enforcement campaign initiated by the US Attorney General's office that saw the US Border Patrol team up with local law enforcement agencies in the southwest and west to "set up roadblocks, board trains, and cordon off neighborhoods" looking for undocumented workers to deport.[56] Although some Mexican politicians such as

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[53] "Mexican Workers for United States Agriculture," U.S. Government Farm Pamphlet Service, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953 in Collection of Centro Archives, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

[54] Philip Martin, "Mexican Workers and U.S. Agriculture: The Revolving Door," *International Migration Review* 36, no. 4 (Winter, 2002): 1129.

[55] García y Griego, "The Bracero Policy Experiment," 535.

[56] Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 54. The pejorative term 'wetback'derives from the stereotypical view of Mexican immigrants wading or swimming across the Rio Grande to cross into the United States illegally.

the Under Secretary of Foreign Relations José Gorostiza publically avowed that Mexico had "always combated the illegal exodus of braceros," Operation Wetback presented a real challenge for Mexico.[57] The Mexican government recognized that many of its nationals were working illegally in the United States. It also realized that if these nationals were deported, they would have no jobs, land, or opportunities to return to in Mexico. Some Mexican scholars argue that evidence from this controversial time suggests that, contrary to its rhetoric, the Ruiz Cortines administration "would have preferred the legalization of the wetbacks, not their massive repatriation."[58] But many Mexican nationals were repatriated in immigration sweeps, with 1,089,583 apprehensions in 1954 alone.[59] This callous deportation program would help set the tone for the Bracero Program's final decade.

In response to Operation Wetback, a contemporary Mexican scholar denounced the Bracero Program and its impact on illegal and legal migrants alike, lamenting that the "exodus en masse of our laborers during the war years created a terrible precedent. Nearly everyone who had gone [to the United States] under contract sought to return [to the US] and fomented a nomadic… mentality that is wreaking havoc during our times."[60] The United States, as has been witnessed time and again, self-servingly exacerbated this exodus. In January 1954, a few months before Operation Wetback, the United States had taken its heavy-handed approach of migrant labor issues to a whole new level. The United States instituted

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[57] Quoted in Pellicer de Brody and Mancilla, 75.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Martin, 1129.

[60] Pedro de Alba, "Siete Artículos Sobre El Problema de los Braceros" in Jorge Durand, ed., *Braceros: Las Miradas Mexicana y Estadounidense, Antología 1945-1964* (Zacatecas: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2007), 256.

the unilateral recruitment of Mexican migrants when negotiations with Mexico proved unfruitful.[61] With the Mexican government excluded from the table, the US government threatened to embark on a course of action blatantly undermining Mexico's sovereignty. The Bracero Program had helped create this monster. For a policy that was supposed to aid Mexico's march toward economic independence, migrant labor had become the Mexican state's Achilles' Heel.

The increased influence of the United States over Mexico in the 1950s can be seen in the words and actions of US President Dwight Eisenhower. After the strong-arm unilateral tactics of January 1954 forced Mexico to return to the bargaining table, President Eisenhower issued a signing statement on 16 March titled, ironically, 'Providing for Protection of Mexican Migrant Labor.' In it he voiced his approval of a new Migrant Labor Agreement with Mexico signed into law a week before. Eisenhower alluded to the US' heavy-handed methods, writing,

> [w]henever United States employment is at such a level that Mexican workers are needed to supplement the United States labor force… we of course welcome their valuable assistance to our farming community if they will cross the border legally…. The present law… enables the Secretary of Labor to perform these functions of protecting and placing migrant workers which are so important to both United States and Mexican interests, *at any time these services may be required*.[62] [emphasis added]

That President Eisenhower and the United States were so emboldened by Mexico's renewal of a migrant labor agreement that it would commence the harassment and deportations of its nationals only a few months later with Operation Wetback speaks to the power imbalance between the neighboring

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[61] Peter Kirstein, *Anglo Over Bracero: A History of the Mexican Worker in the United States from Roosevelt to Nixon* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 103.

[62] U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill Providing for Protection of Mexican Migrant Labor," (16 March 1954) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10183 (accessed February 2, 2011).

countries. And, that the Mexican government would prolong this exploitative relationship while facing public pressure at home and pending action from the United States speaks to the failing socioeconomic policies of Ruiz Cortines and previous Mexican administrations.

It must now be noted that Mexico, while subject to tremendous pressure by a much more economically, politically, and militarily powerful state, ultimately controlled the destiny of the Bracero Program. Mexico decided when the Program began, when the Program would be renewed, and when it would end. The state had multiple chances to discontinue it and address illegal immigration, but the social revolutionary project was already irreparably damaged, and the Ruiz Cortines administration was in no position to honor the promises of social reform made by the Revolution and partially fulfilled by Cárdenas. Bracero scholar Larry Garcia y Griego articulates this failure aptly:

> Ruiz Cortines's decision to return to the negotiating table reflected a conviction, widely held in Mexico City, that the alternative to a bilateral program was unthinkable. Had that not been the case… the bracero program might have ended then and there, instead of continuing for another ten years.[63]

After 1954, legal braceros and undocumented workers would keep flooding into the United States for another decade, further deepening the failure of the Revolution and inflaming illegal immigration tensions. As has been shown, these migrant laborers were not only victims of bad policies, but of a lack of political will in Mexico.

This lack of political will is evidenced in an intimate glimpse of the two nations' leaders in a private meeting at the White House. The conversation between Presidents Eisenhower and Ruiz Cortines would be recorded in a 27

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[63] García y Griego, "The Bracero Policy Experiment," 760.

March 1956 Memorandum of a Conversation.[64] Eisenhower is recorded praising the Mexican premier for his economic advances. Ruiz Cortines responds that the Mexican people were driven by a "burning desire" for progress. President Ruiz Cortines then expressed his concern to President Eisenhower about a problem which hindered his country's economic development: the population increase of nearly 3% per year, amounting to nearly 900,000 people a year. Ruiz Cortines, without explicitly acknowledging or recognizing the connection between the two issues, then voiced his dismay at the flood of illegal migrants being enticed into the United States. His dismay was not directed at the Mexican state's inability to provide for the undocumented workers; on the contrary, it was centered on the issue of the border entry stations "no longer demanding that the laborers entering the United States show their work contract," a mere formality. President Eisenhower ended their conversation by promising President Ruiz Cortines that he would "look into" this matter. In their conversation, neither President addressed solutions to the root causes of illegal immigrant on both sides of the border.

The preceding conversation is important since 1956 marked the apex of Mexican participation in the Bracero Program. The number of imported Mexican workers reached its peak in 1956 when 445,197 laborers were legally contracted to work in US agriculture.[65] Complaints from both sides of the border regarding harsh treatment by US farmers only grew along with the number of braceros. US growers proved impervious to the complaints. Due to a history of governmental non-interference in farm labor relations in the United States, US growers were

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[64] U.S. Presidential Document, "Memorandum of a Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Volume VI, American Republics: Multilateral; Mexico; Caribbean, Document 221* (27 March 1956) http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-1957v06/d221 (accessed January 11, 2011).

[65] McElroy and Gavett, 7.

used to handling their employee relations themselves.[66] This led to widespread abuses and exploitation – of wages, living conditions, and rights – the very ills Mexico's Constitution of 1917 had sought to rectify at home and abroad.[67] Therefore, not only was the agrarian reform agenda of the Revolution under attack during the Bracero Program, but worker protections enshrined in the Constitution were being ignored. As its economic policies turned more of its agrarian and working poor into migrants, Mexico continued to fail this population as well.

For their part, US farm and labor agencies, tasked with the oversight of farm labor camps and operations where braceros were utilized, denied that Mexican nationals' constitutional rights were being violated, but not on the grounds one might expect. In one case, an investigation into serious allegations made by local television and newspaper reports on bracero abuses dismissed the accusation that braceros' rights were being violated because the rights guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution "are not applicable in the United States."[68] When braceros complained that they were forced to perform labor that was not part of the original contract, much of it outside the pay grade or much more difficult or dangerous than agreed on, the investigation simply found "many activities other than harvest work are permissible under Public Law 78."[69] But allegations of

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[66] Kirstein, 103.

[67] Barbara Schmitter Heisler, "The Bracero Program and Mexican Migration to the United States," *Journal of the West* 47, no.3 (Summer 2008): 68. "American employers… systematically violated the conditions of the agreement…." Wages "often did not meet the required 30 cent minimum…. [H]ousing provided by growers was inadequate and substandard…. Food was of poor quality…. Health services were poor or nonexistent…."

[68] U.S. Department of Labor, *A Report on 'Strangers in Our Fields' by Region X, Regional Office, Bureau of Employment Security, with attached memorandum, from H.R. Zamora to A. J. Norton regarding televised news report on Mexican National Labor Program* (August 1956) National Archives, Pacific Region RG 174 [accessed online].

[69] Ibid., 6.

wage abuses – involving the alteration of time slips, lowering of contracted wages, firing before payday, and surprise fees for room and board – are simply dismissed with a disingenuous anecdote. The US Department of Labor investigator concluded that "perhaps the best measurement of earnings is in the happy faces of hundreds of braceros being repatriated at the end of their contracts."[70] But repatriation was not the end of the story. Many of these braceros would return home to nothing, and it would not be long before they returned to the United States either legally or illegally. Mexico's economic development had passed them by. If Mexico would not take steps to provide for its migrant laborers, then these migrants would provide for themselves.

In 1957 President Ruiz Cortines had one year left in his six-year term. Much had transpired in Mexico during the fifteen years since the commencement of the Bracero Program. Starting with the Avila Camacho administration, efforts at modernization, industrialization of agriculture and the mechanization of production had evolved into import-substitution industrialization and urbanization under the Alemán administration. The Ruiz Cortines administration's continued expansion of private agriculture had all but destined the agrarian poor to becoming nomadic laborers often within Mexico but more commonly to the United States. It is during this period when a level and insightful assessment was published on the socioeconomic and political situation in Mexico. This US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) authored by the CIA, titled 'The Outlook for Mexico,' provided a frank glimpse of the Mexican state stripped of the revolutionary rhetoric of the ruling PRI party and co-opted intelligentsia. The NIE exposed the failings of the social revolutionary project that were already self-evident to outsiders a mere

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[70] Ibid., 7.

seventeen years after the end of Lázaro Cárdenas's term. It is helpful to examine a substantial portion of this NIE in its own words, as it provides insight into the deterioration of Mexico's social revolution.

After the abuses and exploitation at the hands of US agribusiness during the Bracero Program, and the heavy-handed tactics of the US government in its handling of bracero agreements, it is no surprise that the NIE first identified the program's continuation as a potential cause of conflict:

> While Mexico will remain generally cooperative with the US, there are certain sources of irritation between the two countries. The most important of these arrive out of… the migration of Mexican agricultural laborers for temporary employment in the US.[71]

The NIE then detailed the pace and progress of social reform in Mexico in the twentieth century. While written to give the reader (the upper echelons of US government) a feel for the current socio-economic situation in Mexico, it also served to sum up what was already acknowledged in 1957, that many social reform promises of the Revolution had been realized during the Cárdenas administration:

> Erratic progress was made toward reform until the administration of Lazaro Cardenas in 1934, when the impulse of the revolution reached its peak. Cardenas made the first extensive effort to implement socioeconomic reforms embodied in the 1917 Constitution…. Considerable progress was made in agrarian reform as many large estates were broken up into small individual farms and communal or collective holdings. Urban labor, organized under official auspices, gained substantial increases in material benefits and political power.[72]

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[71] U.S. Document, "National Intelligence Estimate," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Volume VI, American Republics: Multilateral; Mexico; Caribbean, Document 245* sec. 6c, (13 August 1957) http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v06/d245#fnl (accessed January 10, 2011).

[72] Ibid., sec. 9.

After this statement, the most damning indictment of the Mexican government's failed implementation of the Revolution would come in the following paragraph. To the NIE authors, their words were simply a picture of the intelligence community's assessment of the current socio-economic and political situation in Mexico. These 'feet on the ground,' so to speak, revealed what people outside Mexico seemed to know – and what many Mexicans themselves knew from perception or personal experience – but what Mexican political leaders refused to acknowledge: the social revolution was failing. It states:

> Although all Mexican political leaders feel compelled to profess adherence to the 'Mexican Revolution,' the aggressive and combative phases of the revolution ended with Cardenas' term in 1940. Revolutionary ideals are still loudly proclaimed, but the pace of social welfare programs has been slowed in order to expand the industrial plant, to increase production, and to check inflation. The government and certain business interests have encouraged domestic, and, to some extent, foreign capital to enter industrial and commercial enterprises. Mexicans have become increasingly receptive to US policies designed to reduce tensions between the two countries....[73]

In simpler terms, the NIE claimed that as post-Cárdenas Mexican political leaders paid lip service to the Revolution's ideals, their socioeconomic policies revealed they were moving further away from its social agenda as the years progressed.

As the economic policies of post-Cárdenas administrations helped fuel the rise and continuance of the Bracero Program and rampant illegal immigration to the United States, the ultimate irony of economic development in Mexico during this era is clear – braceros and illegal immigrants, in sending their earnings home in the form of remittances, were quickly becoming the backbone of fragile Mexican economic development.[74] Forced to emigrate due to their country's all-

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[73] Ibid., sec. 10.

[74] From 1955 to 1961 alone, bracero remittances had become the fourth largest segment of income in the Mexican economy. Howard Campbell, "Bracero Migration and the Mexican Economy, 1951-1964" (Ph.D. diss., The American University, 1972), 212. By 2005, migrant remittances were the second

consuming focus on growing the economy, Mexican migrant laborers served to bolster it at the same time. The NIE states:

> The migration of Mexican laborers to the US has injured national pride, and has led to Mexican complaints of maltreatment of the workers by US employers and officials…. The dollar remittances of the braceros have become an important factor in Mexico's current balance of payments and the government is unlikely to press for substantial alteration to the [migrant labor] agreement.[75]

The vision of Mexico set forth by this NIE, therefore, is one of a country that has forsaken social reform and has become increasingly dependent on the US labor market as a pressure release valve for workers uprooted by economic growth policies. Also, as these economic policies exhibited varying levels of efficacy, the Mexican state was relying more and more on the remittances that these migrant laborers, both legal and illegal, returned to the country. Therefore, the depressed socio-economic position of the agrarian poor and migrant laborer toward the end of the 1950s had never been more crucial to maintaining Mexico's status quo.

The land situation in Mexico only worsened as President Ruiz Cortines completed the final year of his term. In order to "maintain 'tranquility' in the countryside" and gain the confidence of agricultural employers, the Ruiz Cortines administration allowed the seizure of *ejido* lands and small landholdings to occur beginning in 1958.[76] Mexican scholars argue that these land grabs were allowed to achieve the desired "climate of confidence" that agricultural businessmen demanded.[77] The power of domestic and foreign capital and business had grown

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largest source of foreign income for Mexico behind oil revenues. Fernando Romero, *Hyper-Border: The Contemporary U.S.-Mexico Border and Its Future* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 104.

[75] "National Intelligence Estimate," sec. 32a.

[76] Pellicer de Brody and Reyna, 123.

[77] Ibid.

exponentially since Cárdenas' term. By the end of Ruiz Cortines's presidency, the restrictions against large private landholdings explicitly outlined in the Constitution of 1917 had been subverted. And, as the Bracero Program entered its final years, the rights of agrarian poor continued to be subverted as well.

A measure of relief for the agrarian poor seemed in sight with the election of Adolfo López Mateos to the presidency in 1958. The Secretary of Labor in the previous administration, López Mateos enacted 'The Regulation for the Planning, Control, and Administering of the Investments of the Ejidal Communal Funds' a few months into his presidency. Once again, revolutionary rhetoric was utilized to legitimize a policy move. The symbolic purpose of this act was to reflect the "strength and valor of the agrarian ideals that compelled a large human contingent of the armed struggle initiated in 1910."[78] But the stated purpose of this act, extremely ambitious if not impossible given the circumstances, was to "radically correct, in all aspects, the situation prevalent in the countryside" and "gain… the prosperity of the *campesino* class."[79] A return to Cárdenas-style reforms seemed possible as the new President sought to allay growing social and economic fears. But only a few months would pass before the agrarian poor saw that the López Mateos administration would preserve the status quo in the Mexican countryside.

Five months after issuing the new *ejidal* pronouncements, President López Mateos delivered his annual report to the Mexican Congress. Before this speech, inflation concerns had gripped the Mexican economy. As a result, in September 1959 he declared that Mexico's economic situation as of December 1958 had

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[78] Adolfo López Mateos, "Reglamento Para la Planeación, Control y Vigilancia de las Inversiones de los Fondos Comunes Ejidales, 15 April 1959," in Fernando Zertuche Muñoz, ed., *Historia de la Acción Pública: Adolfo López Mateos 1958-1964, I – Las Ideas* (México, D.F.: Fondo para La Historia de las Ideas Revolucionarias en México, 1978), 195.

[79] Ibid.

made it necessary for his administration to "resort to measures normalizing the privatization of production, investments, and commerce…. Above everything we had to reestablish confidence in the value of our currency."[80] Notwithstanding the revolutionary Constitution of 1917's restrictions against private land ownership, these economic policies further depressed the *ejidal* economy but worked in the short term for the Mexican economy as a whole. In October 1959, with economic crisis adverted, President López Mateos and US President Dwight Eisenhower issued a joint statement saying, "With respect to the economic problems that absorb public opinion in Mexico, the two presidents satisfactorily took notice of the recent invigoration of the Mexican economy."[81] Large private landholdings were now viewed as key to Mexico's economic solvency, and they continued to grow and thrive at the expense of the *ejidos* and small farms, subsidized in part by migrant labor remittances from the United States.

President López Mateos, seemingly aware of the disconnect fostered for years by the anti-revolutionary actions of his and past administrations, was keen to restate his government's commitment to revolutionary social reform. He declared in standard PRI rhetoric:

> When in days past I publically reiterated the conviction that agrarian reform has elevated the people's dignity… it was because these words are firmly supported and coincide with the acts of the Executive…. The diversity of the problems confronting the betterment of the *campesino*… demonstrates the unmistakable purpose the Executive embraces regarding rural welfare….[82]

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[80] Adolfo López Mateos, *Seis Informes de Gobierno* (México, D.F.: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1964), 24.

[81] "Declaracion Conjunta Formulada por el Presidente Adolfo López Mateos y el Presidente de los Estados Unidos de Norteamerica D. Eisenhower, 12 Oct. 1959," in Zertuche Muñoz, *Historia de la Acción Pública,* 357.

[82] López Mateos, *Seis Informes*, 35.

Yet, at the close of the year in which he spoke these words, 437,643 contracted braceros had been admitted into the United States, the third highest yearly total in the Program's twenty-two year existence, and countless undocumented workers had entered the United States illegally as well.[83] Poor rural Mexicans, despite the rhetoric and propaganda from the new administration, remained alienated from the land and desperate for work.

In his September report to Congress in 1960, President López Mateos declared "the immediate goals of the agrarian program are to continue the distribution of legally available lands, until the *Reforma Agraria* is completed."[84] The president took this idea one step further, claiming that the "handing over of land is not an end unto itself, it is a means of doing justice for the *campesinos*, and so that justice is realized, it is necessary to give them – along with land – credit, technology, schools, roads, and a market for their products."[85] Working hard to counter López Mateos's populist rhetoric, US proponents of the Bracero Program engaged in their own propaganda, stating that the migrant labor agreements provided braceros with many of the rural development benefits the López Mateos administration claimed they could receive at home. US Secretary of Labor James Mitchell argued that braceros gained "a considerable practical knowledge of modern farming equipment, technological information which is later turned to use in the crop yield management of Mexico's farms, and substantial acquaintance with… living in a highly industrialized society."[86] With the true ideals of the

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[83] Martin, 1129.

[84] López Mateos, *Seis Informes*, 109.

[85] Adolfo López Mateos, "Discurso en el Banquete de los Miembros de la Vieja Guardia Agrarista, 19 Oct. 1960," in Zertuche Muñoz, 238.

[86] Quoted in Gilbert Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 104.

Revolution blurred by reality, leaders on both sides of the border turned more to exaggerated myth-making and rhetoric to influence the migrant mind.

When it came to the PRI, myth-making did not only pertain to the Revolution itself. President López Mateos work hard to bolster the image of the noble Mexican *campesino*. As the Revolution fast became an idea that only existed in the minds of Mexico's people and in the words of Mexico's politicians, López Mateos avowed that the "value of the Mexican *campesinos* has been known for a long time, what they have achieved throughout Mexican history and the agrarian revolution, how they have spent their days ennobling their work and enriching their fatherland."[87] But, the fact of the matter was that a large segment of Mexican *campesinos* had been spending their energy and lives enriching US fields since before the Revolution of 1910. Now, the Bracero Program was attracting to the United States thousands of the people who López Mateos lionized as the salt of the earth. The decades-old cycle of migrant labor exploitation on both sides of the border seemed unbreakable. But, surprisingly, the Americans would be first to voice major reservations about the Bracero Program as the 1960s dawned and a new US president was elected.

On 4 October 1961 President John F. Kennedy issued a strongly-worded signing statement attached to the latest bill governing the recruitment of Mexican migrant laborers. For the first time a US president spoke out earnestly against the debilitating impact of Mexican migrant labor on the wages and livelihood of US workers. In a nod to the unions that helped elect him, Kennedy declared that "studies of the operation of the Mexican labor program have clearly established that it is adversely affecting the wages, working conditions and employment

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[87] López Mateos in Zertuche Muñoz, 238.

opportunities of our own agricultural workers, large numbers of whom are unemployed or under-employed."[88] Nevertheless, with the influence of US agribusiness still strong, and the importance of jobs and remittances to the Mexican economy still vital, the Bracero Program in 1961 was under no serious threat of immediate discontinuation. But the political will to sustain US farming interests to the detriment of the US workforce was waning. Kennedy stated

> I am aware, however, that some Mexican workers will still be needed next year, in some areas, to supplement our agricultural labor force. I am also aware of the serious impact in Mexico if many thousands of workers employed in this country were summarily deprived of this much-needed employment. These considerations impel me to sign H.R. 2010 despite its shortcomings.[89]

While the Bracero Program lived to see another day, the end was near for the two-decade old migrant labor program. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations had enabled and encouraged successive Mexican administrations to forsake social reform and, in the process, derail the Mexican Revolution. But at the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the treatment of braceros that had been tolerated by the American people for decades would no longer stand. Kennedy avowed "the adverse effect of the Mexican farm labor program as it has operated in recent years on the wage and employment conditions of domestic workers is dear and is cumulative in its impact. We cannot afford to disregard it. We do not condone it."[90]

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[88] U.S. President John F. Kennedy, "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill Governing Recruitment of Mexican Agricultural Workers," (4 Oct. 1961) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8368 (accessed March 5, 2011).

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

While President Kennedy was distancing his administration from the migrant labor agreements, President López Mateos worked hard to portray the United States as an active partner in the improvement of Mexico's laboring class in hopes of bolstering weak support for renewed migrant labor agreements at home. With the Bracero Program losing support in the United States, López Mateos employed revolutionary rhetoric to legitimize its continuation in the face of mounting criticism. He claimed that both Mexico and the United States were "fundamentally united in maintaining the liberty and dignity of man, values the revolutionary ancestors of both countries had fought for."[91] But his rosy declarations were in direct conflict with the reality braceros faced in the United States during this time. The United States, in actuality, had been an ambivalent, if not neglectful, partner in protecting Mexican migrant laborers.

Grievances filed against bracero employers reveal many US farmers continued to take advantage of their workers' unprotected status and desperation. One claim filed in 1963 against a California grower found evidence of payroll falsification, failure to maintain accurate records of hours worked, and the assignment of labor that was not contracted.[92] These incidents occurred in a year when, according to a US government report, the number of Mexican nationals contracted to work legally in the United States was 186,865; domestic migrant laborers numbered around 386,000.[93] The report makes no mention or reference to the number of illegal Mexican migrant laborers. The reality in US fields, therefore,

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[91] "Declaracion Conjunta Formulada por el Presidente Adolfo Lopez Mateos y el Presidente de los Estados Unidos John F. Kennedy, 29 June 1962," in Zertuche Muñoz, 388.

[92] U.S. Department of Labor, *Joint determination/finding of facts in the matter of Imperial Valley Farmers' Association and R.T. Englund, et al,* 01/28/1963," National Archives, Pacific Region, RG 174 [accessed online], 9.

[93] McElroy and Gavett, 12.

continued to indict the US government and be at odds with PRI propaganda. When it came to migrant labor, rhetoric, unlike jobs, was never is short supply.

Twenty years after President Avila Camacho's administration first began large scale efforts to industrialize Mexico, the reality of Mexican life remained largely unchanged. President López Mateos would report to Congress in September 1963 that "Mexico is, and needs to continue being for some years, a fundamentally agricultural country, until its systems are excelled and synced with the speed of industrialization."[94] While admitting to the centrality of land in Mexico, the president continued private and corporate inroads on rural land. In fact, for all the injustices suffered by Mexico's agrarian population to date at the hands of the state, President López Mateos would go one step further. In an assault on the subsistence agriculture practiced by *ejidos* and small farms, he declared that solution to the agrarian problem lie in "the decrease of the costs of production to favor the consumer and compete in the agricultural world markets."[95] This decrease could only be achieved through bigger and more mechanized farms, and these farms were increasingly found in the hands of private domestic and foreign capital. Free enterprise, according to the president, was the answer to Mexico's social woes.

Despite enacting blatantly anti-revolutionary land policies and easements during his tenure, and perpetuating blatantly anti-revolutionary labor policies like the Bracero Program, President López Mateos would stick to his revolutionary script, steadfastly maintaining that

> [m]y government… continues to enforce… the agrarian ideals of the Mexican Revolution, therefore sustaining the profound conviction that social

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[94] López Mateos, *Seis Informes*, 375.

[95] Ibid.

> justice, peace, and progress in the Mexican countryside is only possible when the *campesinos* are in complete possession of arable lands, and are provided with the tools to make them productive.[96]

However, López Mateos's true feelings toward Mexico's agrarian poor and migrant laborers would be revealed in an intimate conversation with US President Lyndon Johnson on 21 February 1964. And, unlike his public statements, his disregard for the plight of Mexico's poor would shine through in his private words.

In a 'Memorandum of a Conversation,' President Lyndon Johnson is recorded discussing the Bracero Program with President López Mateos. Knowing the bracero agreement was not going to outlast 1964, Johnson asked López Mateos his opinion of the bracero "question," since he recognized that the braceros "represented a sizeable source of foreign exchange for Mexico."[97] President López Mateos claimed that the issue of Mexican braceros in the United States was simply a matter of "mutual convenience." As for the issue of illegal immigration, López Mateos callously stated that the "only ones hurt by these illegal crossings would be American workers whose wages would be depressed." As for the delicate issue of what would be done with returning braceros, President López Mateos is heard understating that the Mexican government "would have to undertake a public works program to provide employment for the braceros." He told President Johnson that he might "start a large settlement program in the southeastern part of Mexico, although the necessary financial resources were not available." He ended his conversation with Johnson by stating that the bracero issue "would undoubtedly be a priority matter for the next Administration." The next day

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[96] Ibid., 378.

[97] U.S. Presidential Document, "Memorandum of Conversation," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968: Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico, Document 346* (21 February 1964) http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-1968v31/d346 (accessed January 10, 2011).

President López Mateos reaffirmed "his purpose of continuing the policy of promoting economic development at rates greater than the population growth rate within a framework of monetary stability…."[98] What he did not reveal was that this policy was predicated on a continuation of a migrant labor agreement.

In his final report to Congress in September 1964, López Mateos praised the gains Mexico's agrarian poor had realized during his tenure. But, tellingly, the gains he chose to highlight were not economic or social, but personal. He said, "looking back on the developments of the past six years, what is most satisfying is to discover the new spirit of responsibility and cooperation that has been instilled in the *campesinos*…. An active revolutionary conscience has replaced passivity in the rural areas."[99] This statement belied the true reality of revolutionary reform in Mexico in 1964. Social propaganda had replaced social progress. Rhetoric had replaced the Revolution. The countryside had been changed forever. The rural poor were alienated from the land. Nearly every region of Mexico had been impacted by migrant labor, both legal and illegal. Migrant labor had been the only constant during the unfolding of the 'Mexican Miracle.' The agrarian poor had become dependent on immigration to the United States, and by the end of the 1960s, so too had the Mexican government.

The Bracero Program officially ended on 31 December 1964. But Mexican migration to the United States had not. The true impact and legacy of this policy would become clearer in the decade following the Bracero Program's termination, as illegal immigration in the United States exploded and Mexico's leadership was

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[98] U.S. Presidential Document, "Joint Statement following Discussions With the President of Mexico at Palm Springs, California," (22 February 1964) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26080 (accessed March 26, 2011).

[99] López Mateos, *Seis Informes*, 476.

finally confronted with the inescapable reality of the past thirty years: the social ideals of the Mexican Revolution had been sacrificed on the altar of economic progress.

CHAPTER 3: A REVOLUTION DEFEATED, A 'MIRACLE' DEBUNKED: MEXICAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES, 1964-1974

> *I think the illegal aliens issue started in '64, after the end of the Bracero law, and it went on for 10 years and then you know they just got everywhere, and now we've got illegal aliens everywhere.*[1]
>
> Richard Cull, Jr. in 1986, US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Press Office, 1962-1975

The choices facing many of Mexico's rural and jobless poor after the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 were simple: either migrate illegally to the United States for work, or stay in Mexico and face starvation and want. Due to both a quarter century of government neglect in the name of economic progress and assaults on the land rights promised to the agrarian masses by the Mexican Revolution and enshrined in the Constitution of 1917, many of Mexico's rural majority found themselves mired in poverty and deprivation by 1970. The outwardly dynamic Mexican economy had provided the republic's leadership with no pressing reasons to alter its social and economic course, as the pace of development since 1940 had continued to defy logic and critics. This 'Mexican Miracle,' however, would ultimately prove a façade, and once debunked, expose the extreme crisis in the Mexican countryside to the world.

The situation in Mexico by the end of the 1960s was bleak. Agricultural growth could no longer support rural population increases, staple grains had to be imported, and migrants continued to flood Mexico's cities and US fields.[2] The industrialization campaign undertaken by Mexico, which had resulted in the

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[1] Richard Cull, Jr., "Oral History Interview with Richard Cull, Jr.," interview by Niel M. Johnson (5 May 1986), http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/cullr.htm (accessed March 31, 2011).

[2] Lourdes Arizpe, "The Rural Exodus in Mexico and Mexican Migration to the United States," *International Migration Review* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 629.

privatization and corporatization of land and natural resources, plus the shift of the rural population to urban centers and US fields, had continued unabated. The Revolutionary rhetoric justifying these measures intensified after the end of the Bracero Program, as the reliance on US agribusiness to sustain Mexican migrants and support the Mexican economy became more engrained and irreversible. The time to remedy the manifest social ills created and exacerbated by the bracero era was in the years immediately following 1964. But, as will be seen, the decade following 1964 would not result in a rectification of the social revolutionary project. The Revolution had been defeated through the Bracero Program. Now, the developments of the decade following the Bracero Program would banish the Revolution into idealized myth and memory forever.

When the Bracero Program terminated at the end of 1964, it was against the true wishes of the Mexican government. The US government had bowed to internal labor pressures, not to a desire to see the betterment of the Mexican migrant, when officially ending the guest worker program. Mexico, for its part, continued to blame the controversy and negative publicity surrounding past labor agreements on undocumented workers, and not the inherent injustices of the Bracero Program itself. As one scholar succinctly states, what really concerned the Mexican government was "losing the export of 200,000 unemployed rural citizens and their remittances."[3] With the pressure release valve that was the Bracero Program now shut, and the dollars that had flowed back into Mexico cut off, a desperate Mexican state had no choice but to turn a blind eye toward illegal immigration in order to sustain its economic development. As a result, in the immediate years following the termination of the Bracero Program, illegal

[3] Gilbert Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor? Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 147.

immigration trends that had started and risen during the decades of the migrant labor agreements would explode into crisis. For example, in 1963 the INS arrested around 90,000 undocumented Mexican workers; by 1969-1970, that number had risen dramatically to 300,000.[4] The migration of huge swaths of the Mexican population, its magnitude once obscured by the benefit of law and ambivalence on both sides of the border, could now be viewed with sobering clarity.

While the immigration crisis in the United States was taking a new turn in 1964, the rhetoric of Mexico's ruling party remained the same. PRI presidential candidate Gustavo Díaz Ordaz proclaimed that "the progress of Mexico demands, as a fundamental premise, the firm and unfailing continuation of the *Reforma Agraria*, without deviation or lapses."[5] The processes of reform, however, had been effectively abandoned in the years before this speech. What agrarian reform now meant to Díaz Ordaz, after decades of economic policy that subverted it, was less about ensuring protection for collective *ejidos* and small farms and more about individual progress and the greater glory of the *patria*. He declared that

> [t]he agrarian objective of the Revolution is not the distribution of land – this is merely the means – but rather, through the improvement of the lives of those who till our soil, the attainment of the political, social, and economic stability of the entire nation.[6]

Candidate Díaz Ordaz would reiterate that the "economic development of Mexico must have social justice as its substance and goal."[7] Yet the promise of social progress was one made time and again by the last four PRI presidents, to no avail.

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[4] Ibid., 148.

[5] Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, *A Political Notebook,* trans. Luis Quintanilla (México, D.F.: Imprinta Nueva Mundo, S.A., 1964), 31.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 51.

According to Candidate Díaz Ordaz, the Revolution was not only alive but thriving. He claimed that the "constructive stage of the Mexican Revolution… is now underway" and that "[w]e men of the Revolution are determined to plan the economic development of Mexico as a way to hasten it and as means of achieving its fundamental goals of fortifying national independence [and] of extending social wellbeing…."[8] The economy's development, which had impinged on the constitutional rights and protections of the poor and their land, was now seen as key to the social revolutionary project and to democracy itself. Díaz Ordaz proclaimed that the "mission of economic democracy is to procure social justice, to permanently avoid there being exploiters and exploited…."[9] Democratic principles, however, would not be a hallmark of a Díaz Ordaz presidency. His administration would deal a heavy hand to anything – or anyone – obstructing the path of economic progress.

While proclaiming loyalty to the Revolution and social justice, the Díaz Ordaz administration sought an easy outlet for the unemployed labor force in the countryside. Many US politicians were eager to find a solution, too, and although the Bracero Program had ended in 1964, 1965 would witness the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The Hart-Cellar Act, as it was also known, provided vague new conditions for skilled and unskilled immigrant labor to enter the United States. The Act excluded immigrants unless

> the Secretary of Labor has determined… (A) there are not sufficient workers in the United States who are able, willing, qualified, and available at the time… and at the place to which the alien is destined to perform such skilled or unskilled labor, and (B) the employment of such aliens will not adversely

[8] Ibid., 32.

[9] Ibid., 33.

> affect the wages and working conditions of the workers in the United States similarly employed.[10]

Due to the purposeful ambiguity of the wording of the law, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 would once again open the door for renewed migrant labor agreements. US agribusiness' insatiable demand for Mexican labor, coupled with the Mexican government's desperate need for a labor release valve, were powerful motivators moving both countries closer to a new Bracero Program.

While interests on both sides of the border worked to restore a migrant labor agreement, President Díaz Ordaz declared prophetically that the "country that has methods to create wealth and does not include just mechanisms to share it, is planting the seeds of oppression."[11] The Mexican people would experience a taste of oppression in the years leading up to 1968, as Mexico spent millions to prepare for the summer Olympics, further exacerbating injustices in the countryside and the strain on its people. The relative peace of the Mexican Miracle era would soon be disrupted, as increasing student-led protests would culminate in bloodshed due to the heavy-handed tactics of Díaz Ordaz's administration.

Needing to increase revenues to support his economic policies and Olympic aspirations, Díaz Ordaz continued to privatize large swaths of *ejido* lands and small landholdings in pursuit of increased production. Just as the president praised the *Reforma Agraria* in one sentence, he denounced the perceived inefficiencies of communal and small landholdings in the other. He claimed that, in order to achieve national progress, "[n]o one has the right to leave one hectare uncultivated, to chop down one tree without full justification, nor use one cubic

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[10] U.S. Congress, House, *An Act to Amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, and for Other Purposes,* 89th Cong., 1965, H.R. 2580, 917.

[11] Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, in Jose Cabrera Parra, *Díaz Ordaz y El 68* (México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, S.A., 1980), 50.

meter of water without yield."[12] Since many of Mexico's *ejidos* and small landholdings grew subsistence crops and were rain-watered, Diaz Ordaz was implicitly extolling the benefits of large corporatized landholdings as key to Mexico's continued economic development.

While Díaz Ordaz's rhetoric often betrayed his thought and actions, even he did not mince words about the historical importance of land to Mexicans. His reiteration of the integrality of land to the *agrarista* makes the treatment of the rural poor and migrant laborer by his administration even more unsettling. Díaz Ordaz declared that "[t]here is no desire more passionate and eternal of the Mexican public than to own a piece of land…. The drama of the land has existed forever and remains, from colonial times to the present, the most vital in Mexican History."[13] However, he offered a caveat on the limits of revolutionary largesse. The president reiterates, yet again, that the land's full potential must not be held down by the perceived inadequacies of the people who depend on it. He stated that "we cannot attempt to resolve, at the expense of the soil, all the problems of the men who are born in the countryside."[14] Díaz Ordaz avowed that, now, "nobody can set back the situation of the land to the age before the *Reforma Agraria*."[15] But the tremendous erosion of agrarian rights during the prior thirty years had proven Mexico was fulfilling that once-unthinkable scenario.

Despite all the revolutionary and agrarian rhetoric President Díaz Ordaz used on the campaign trail and bully pulpit, his administration's verbal

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[12] Ibid., 53.

[13] Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, in Roberto Amoros, ed., *Ideas Politicas del Presidente Gustavo Díaz Ordaz*, 2d ed. (México, D.F.: Partido Revolucionario Institucional, 1966), 239-40.

[14] Ibid., 247.

[15] Ibid., 243.

commitment to agrarian reform and the wellbeing of the rural poor did not match practice. Nearing the final full year of his presidency, Díaz Ordaz lobbied for a renewal of a migrant labor agreement with the United States. He would meet with the US ambassador's office in Mexico City to discuss the possibility of a new agreement being reached. The US Ambassador's message to President Richard Nixon relayed the callousness of Díaz Ordaz's attitude toward the desperate plight of migrant laborers in the United States. The telegram paints a portrait of a Mexican president who believed a

> new agreement covering "bracero" problem was needed. [Díaz Ordaz] said US labor unions had objected to [the braceros'] presence because they accepted lower wages. He had no objection whatever to having [braceros] paid going wage and letting employer simply select the best worker. He was convinced that under these circumstances Mexican workers would prove to be excellent and highly productive. He placed new agreement on "bracero" problem as one of top priorities to be solved by his administration before it turned over power in December, 1970.[16]

Therefore, instead of sympathizing with the past abuses of migrant laborers and attempting to remedy the causes, the Mexican premier desperately tried to renew Mexico's commitment to their emigration. The disconnect apparent in the Mexican leader's words and actions represented the vacuum of true revolutionary ideals in Mexican politics and the enormous economic stakes on the line in continuing legal and illegal immigration.

While quietly pushing for a new migrant labor agreement behind closed doors toward the end of 1969, President Díaz Ordaz published a new Federal Labor Law in 1970. Faced with large segments of the Mexican population

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[16] U.S. Presidential Document, "Telegram 4958 from the Embassy in Mexico to the Department of State, September 9, 1969," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976: Volume E-10, Documents on American Republics, 1969-1972, Document 437* http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d437 (accessed January 10, 2011).

migrating north to the United States, it designated many rights for these Mexican nationals, rights more symbolic than practical as they were difficult to enforce in a foreign country with little oversight. It labeled as ‘rights’ some rights the Mexican state could not provide *campesinos* itself, such as “the right to the services provided by foreigners by the social security and welfare institutions of the country in which such services shall be rendered.”[17] What it represented, though, was a transparent attempt to soften the criticism of the Mexican government’s seemingly callous and uncaring attitude toward the wellbeing of their own nationals outside the republic.

Just as Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s days were becoming numbered, the PRI’s new candidate for the presidency began hitting the campaign trail. And, just like the previous five administrations before him, candidate Luis Echeverría made the Revolution, social reform, and the economy his major talking points on the campaign trail. But brewing economic trouble would draw his attention not to the quality of life in rural Mexico, but to the quantity of people. He stated that

> in our country there remain contrasting injustices…. We need to protect the popular victories now that there are nearly four times more Mexicans than there were represented in the Constitutional Convention of 1917…. Although the progress obtained is considerable, with the lowering of the mortality rate and the rise in the quality of life, it has brought, paradoxically, the formation of new challenges.[18]

Candidate Echeverría, though espousing standard PRI campaign rhetoric, can at least be heard acknowledging the difficulties that have plagued the *Reforma Agraria* since its inception with Cárdenas. He proclaimed that “the ideals of

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[17] Ley Federal de Trabajo, art. 28, sec. I, clause C, http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/125.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011).

[18] Luis Echeverría, in Carlos Sierra, *Luis Echeverría: Raiz y Dinamica de Su Pensamiento* (México, D.F.: Editorial Tenoch, S.A., 1969), 109.

Zapata have only been partially completed; the reign of prosperity still remains to be seen, even after the soil has been redistributed.… We believe that the surest foundation for the progress of Mexico is the progress of the countryside."[19] And, as proof of the words he spoke, thousands and thousands of undocumented workers continued to pour into the United States each year.

In a speech in Querétaro, Candidate Echeverría acknowledged the anti-revolutionary economic policies that were now engrained in Mexican politics. He noted that the "federal and state governments have authorized easements and financial incentives to private interests for the creation of industries…."[20] Somewhat unintentionally, Echeverría gives the impression that this was the PRI's socio-economic goal all along. He stated that "[o]ur party has been able to realize its historic destiny. Irrefutable proof of this is the constructive action of those revolutionary regimes that have come to power; each one of them has risen to meet the proper challenges of their respective times."[21] While the PRI did not believe its destiny was to forsake the ideals of the Revolution, one thing was sure: previous Mexican administrations had done just that, and the new president would face a myriad of socio-economic and political problems.

Luis Echeverría was elected president of Mexico in 1970. The nation he inherited was in a bleak state after decades of industrialization and shaky economic development at the expense of the rural and working classes and the countryside. In fact, the only position more bleak than that of the economy was that of Mexico's agrarian poor. Years of land injustices and legal and illegal

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[19] Luis Echeverría, *Ideario Luis Echeverría* vol. 1 (México, D.F.: Partido Revolucionario Institucional, 1970), 40.

[20] Luis Echeverría, *Camino y Voces: Discursos* (México, D.F.: Editorial Impresas Casas, 1970), 61-62.

[21] Ibid., 64.

immigration to the United States had taken their toll. At the end of Cárdenas's term, 65 percent of Mexico's population lived in the countryside; by 1970, less than 50 percent remained.[22] In 1960, over half a million Mexicans were unemployed; that number would rise to over two and half million by 1970, a 487 percent increase.[23] Furthermore, Mexico's urban centers, "strong magnets of immigration," were unable to absorb the "great army of unemployed."[24] How this situation developed within a protectionist and nationalistic economy such as Mexico's seems hard to fathom. But, as the "successes" of the past thirty years were examined, it was Mexico's very adherence to nationalization and industrialization programs that had exacerbated joblessness and immigration.

While the nationalization of industries starting with Cárdenas's administration had provided a boon to the state in nationalistic terms, the economic benefit had been short lived. In fact, the nationalization and subsequent privatization of land during the Mexican Miracle had "created large irrigation districts for the production of foodstuffs" which had "contributed to the policies that allow[ed] low salaries for both rural and urban workers."[25] The prices of goods were kept artificially low, so wages were low as well. One scholar argues that the "impulse toward industrialization at all costs created a large industrial capacity that was underutilized and consequently resulted in high unemployment…. During the 1960s the economy grew at a rapid pace, but by the

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[22] Richard Krooth, *Mexico, NAFTA and the Hardships of Progress* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 189.

[23] Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría,* trans. Dan Cothran (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1991), 21.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 25.

1970s the effects of industrialization had become practically the opposite."[26] The bitter irony of import-substitution industrialization during the 1950s and 1960s was that it had created an industry for consumer goods that the average Mexican could not afford to buy. The rural masses, failed by the social revolutionary project, lacked the funds to purchase the goods subsidized by their poverty. And, interestingly, it was during this time that one of the architects of the Mexican Miracle would reflect on the situation Mexicans now found themselves in.

In 1970, former President Miguel Alemán was asked what he thought were Mexico's most pressing current issues. His answer spoke both to the neglected opportunities of the past 60 years and to the tired revolutionary rhetoric of the PRI. Alemán claimed that "the most important [immediate problem in Mexico] is the problem of the countryside."[27] He declared, even 30 years after the start of the industrialization of the cities and mechanization of agriculture, that

> [t]he most important problems for us have been of production. We need to return to the problem of the soil, make sure the land produces bountifully, not simply to provide better conditions for the *campesino* than in the past, not only for the farmer to be self-sufficient as well, but that they produce for everyone…. Of course, there exists a big business and capitalist elite, who enjoy better conditions in life; precisely because of this, the function of the Mexican state has been to procure natural resources… with the goal of achieving a major equilibrium so that the majority realize the benefits of investment and the benefits of production.[28]

While Alemán admitted to the imbalance of quality of life in Mexico, he does not reflect on the decisions that created the need to import staple foods, or how a business and capitalist elite came to exist in post-revolutionary Mexico. Defiantly,

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[26] Ibid., 26.

[27] Miguel Alemán Valdes, *Miguel Alemán Contesta* (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 1975), 37.

[28] Ibid., 29.

though, he qualified these statements by claiming that the "peasantry, for its part, has not been left behind in obtaining the benefits of the Revolution, material or political…. The campesinos and workers have received all of the benefits, all of the programs were created fundamentally for bettering their condition collectively and individually."[29] The contradiction of his statements reflected both the institutionalized disconnect between reality and rhetoric exhibited by the PRI, and the propaganda increasingly disillusioning the Mexican public and migrant.

Inflation, a problem faced by most Mexican administrations since Cárdenas, would now become the scourge of the Mexican economy and President Luis Echeverría's administration during the 1970s. And, the failure of the previous Díaz Ordaz regime to negotiate a new migrant labor agreement with the United States only exacerbated the internal stresses the Mexican economy experienced. With segments of state industry nationalized, wages kept artificially low, and demand high, the price of household basics would erupt. Whereas in 1971 a ton of beans could be purchased with 1,750 pesos, the price had exploded to 6,000 pesos by 1974.[30] Internal prices for goods increased 48 percent in 1971, 80 percent in 1972, 73 percent in 1973, and 44 percent in 1974.[31] These staggering increases in inflation went hand-in-hand with the staggering increases in illegal immigration.

The scope of the economic crisis faced by the Echeverría administration was matched only by the scope of the immigration crisis that continued to grow in the United States. Now the threat of rural discontent was as real as it had ever been in the more than 30 years since the Avila Camacho administration. This would lead a desperate President Echeverría to reach out to US President Richard Nixon.

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[29] Ibid., 33.

[30] Schmidt, 59.

[31] Ibid., 63.

Nixon, knowing that the United States held all the cards when it came to Mexican migrant labor agreements, would not provide any firm answers. Their meeting on illegal immigration would be reported in a joint communiqué:

> With regard to the question of migratory Mexican workers, the two Presidents discussed the economic, social and political factors that produce this problem and agreed it was desirable for each government to undertake immediately a study of this question with a view to finding a mutually satisfactory solution.[32]

For Mexico, however, there was no satisfactory solution to the question of migratory Mexican workers other than continued migrant labor agreements. The economic environment fostered in Mexico at the expense of the rural poor now depended more than ever on this very population to support it. At no other time had Mexico been more reliant on the remittances of migrant laborers than at this point in its history. The legacy of Mexico's industrialization experiment and of peso devaluation would ultimately lead to Mexico becoming the second largest remittance recipient in the world by 2005.[33] With Mexico's economy on bad footing, the only dependable source of income was migrant dollars. By 1974, illegal immigration had become a crisis for the United States, and a necessity for Mexico.

In the decade after the termination of the Bracero Program, many of the paradoxes and problems of the Mexican Miracle seemed to manifest themselves conspicuously. As Samuel Schmidt states, the "years between 1940 and 1970 demonstrated a miraculous situation of constant deterioration, notwithstanding (or

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[32] U.S. Presidential Document, "Joint Communiqué, Following Discussions With President Echeverria of Mexico," (17 June 1972) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3468 (accessed March 26, 2011).

[33] India was the largest recipient of remittances in the world in 2005. Ernesto López-Córdova, "Globalization, Migration, and Development: The Role of Mexican Migrant Remittances," *Economía* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 218.

perhaps because of) the high degree of state intervention in the economy."[34] The inherent weaknesses of the Mexican economy were exacerbated during the decades of modernization and import-substitution industrialization, due in part, by the commitment of the Mexican business classes to skimming economic surpluses from peasants and *campesinos* instead of treating them as consumers and "giving them purchase power."[35] It was the inability of Mexico's political and economic elites to see beyond the promised riches of economic growth and their engrained perceptions of the rural poor that doomed Mexico's economic development from the very start.

President Echeverría, besieged by economic and social crises of his and previous administrations' making, would allow himself a surprisingly candid and introspective moment at a joint news conference with President Nixon in Arizona in October 1974. When asked by a reporter about the impact of the Bracero Program on Mexican migration to the United States, Echeverría admitted, without the usual PRI rhetoric and aplomb, that

> [w]hat happened at that time was that, attracted by this agreement that we had with the United States, the migrant workers, or the would-be migrant workers, would come to the border cities of the United States. And then it happened that they did not receive a contract, and then they stayed at the border city and increased the number of the population or else they went illegally into the United States. Now, with the policy of self-criticism that at present prevails in Mexico, we have reviewed this matter, and we have come to realize and accept that the responsibility belongs to Mexico. In Mexico, we need to increase the sources of employment. We need to send more resources out into the countryside. We need to organize the farmers in a better way. We need to keep them within the land.[36]

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[34] Schmidt, 37.

[35] Ibid.

[36] U.S. Presidential Document, "News Conference of the President and President Echeverria of Mexico in Tubac, Arizona," (21 Oct. 1974) *The American Presidency Project* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4497 (accessed March 31, 2011).

Keeping people "within the land." That was the promise of the Mexican Revolution 60 years earlier. But much had changed in the decades since the first demands for reform were made. The *Reforma Agraria*, much altered in the past 30 years, was irretrievably broken. Mexican migration routes to the United States were irreversibly solidified. Economic progress in Mexico had faltered. The ideals of the Mexican Revolution now existed in political rhetoric only. Revolutionary myths now replaced revolutionary action. The Revolution was no longer a revolution. The Revolution was dead.

CONCLUSION

For Lázaro Cárdenas, when reflecting on the dismal state of Mexico's countryside and rural poor, any examination of what went wrong during the momentous eras of the Bracero Program and the Mexican Miracle starts and ends with the land:

> The concentration of wealth in Mexico was certainly not a goal of the Mexican Revolution…. This is due, according to those in the countryside, to a new land monopoly, involving the water and the personal lending of modern landholders and so-called small property owners. This was spurred, in effect, by the counterrevolutionary reforms introduced in… the agrarian laws in 1946, which amplified the boundaries of the so-called small agricultural properties and granted large land owners improper freedoms, and – taking advantage of protections from recourse – these favored property owners fraudulently bought or leased *ejido* lands, authentic small properties and landholdings, perpetuating the capitalist system of rural exploitation based on the strength of *ejido* labor or other workers, thus creating a new rural proletariat that lives in poverty, without protection of labor laws and lacking organization in syndicates like those which existed when the *Reforma Agraria* was first implemented.[1]

The picture a dispirited Cárdenas paints could fittingly describe the plight of the agrarian poor during the Porfiriato, or on the eve of the Mexican Revolution. But President Cárdenas was not describing the situation in the countryside as he saw it in 1910, he was describing the situation in the *campo* in 1970. Gone from his tale are the oligarchic elites and *latifundias* of Porfirio Díaz's day, replaced with the capitalist elites and corporatized landholdings of his contemporary age. While those in power had changed in name and appearance, one thing had remained constant over that sixty year period: land remained the fount of wealth in Mexico, and those who depended on it most remained incredibly poor and marginalized.

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[1] Lázaro Cárdenas, *Legado Revolucionario de Lázaro Cárdenas* (México, D.F.: B. Costa-Amic, 1971), 23-24.

How had the Mexican countryside come to this? The Revolution's legacy was supposed to spread social justice, enact land reform, and forever answer the 'agrarian question' in Mexico. Countless people had lost their lives during the Revolution, the majority of the soldiers fighting for the betterment of their lives, their families, their land, and a more equitable share of the nation's wealth.

But it did not happen.

As this thesis has shown, the success of the reforms championed by the Mexican Revolution and enshrined in the Constitution of 1917 were already in jeopardy immediately after major hostilities ceased. Infighting among political rivals, the settling of old scores, the jockeying for position in a new, post-revolutionary Mexico, and the undue influence of old and new elites helped sidetrack the Revolution for years. During this time, many of the rural poor continued to do what they had done since the turn of the century to survive: migrate to the United States for low-paying and exploitative jobs. With the advent of the Great Depression in 1929, Mexican migrants found themselves no longer welcome and under attack by a US government and public in a frenzy over jobs. The mass repatriation of Mexican nationals and worldwide economic depression would provide fertile ground for Lázaro Cárdenas to enact land reform and nationalize many of Mexico's industries. Finally, some measure of land and labor reform was being achieved. While the *Reforma Agraria* was a work in progress, it gave hope to the rural masses that the promises of the Revolution would be kept.

But as soon as social progress was being made in Mexico through land and workers rights reform, World War II presented the tantalizing possibility of economic development through technological progress to a country still largely agricultural and undeveloped. With a measure of political reform achieved during the Revolution, the Mexican political leadership understandably sought to realize

economic reform and independence, especially from the United States. But as the Avila Camacho administration in 1940 embarked on policies of technological and economic development, shifting away from the social policies of the Cárdenas administration, Mexico only managed to further ensnare itself in the grasp of US political and economic influence. As Richard Krooth observes, the "quest for freedom and technical progress are the two standard bearers of Mexican history that have brought the nation both independence and subjugation."[2] Soon, Mexican efforts to increase and mechanize production would pay off for the economy and business interests, to the detriment of the agrarian poor who now saw their communal lands and small farms threatened. Whether they had never enjoyed the fruits of the unfinished reform of Cárdenas, or were newly displaced by the mechanization and industrialization sweeping the countryside, large populations of unemployed and landless rural workers posed a threat to the Mexican government's policies.

The creation of the Bracero Program in 1942 was not an accidental occurrence. US manpower shortages during World War II were used as the primary rationale to legalize the flow of cheap Mexican labor to US fields and industry, but that was not the main catalyst for its creation. When it was first implemented, the Bracero Program represented, for a brief period in time, a pure convergence of interests on the part of the United States and Mexico. US agribusiness coveted cheap Mexican labor, and the Mexican state needed jobs to appease its alienated, unemployed, and growing agrarian masses while it embarked on its technological and economic program. This convergence of interests did not last long, though, as Mexico's economic trials and tribulations

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[2] Richard Krooth, *Mexico, NAFTA and the Hardships of Progress* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 186.

and continuing assaults on *ejido* and small farm land further made it dependent on both the United States as a labor pressure release valve, and – especially in the waning days of the Mexican Miracle during the 1970s – a source of much needed cash flow generated by migrant remittances.

And so a vicious cycle had been created, whereby the same system of labor appeasement that had allowed for an era of relatively peaceful economic growth, prosperity, and independence in Mexico in actuality furthered the nation's economic dependence on foreign entities and irreparably strained social relations within Mexico. One US scholar sums up this sentiment by saying

> [i]n the name of anointed progress, Mexico and its people were significantly degraded in the following half-century [after Cardenas]. This was… the result of dubious government measures promising advances in the economic realm, measures that imposed extreme environmental stress and mass privation, impoverishing most Mexicans….[3]

The social ideals of the Revolution, it appeared, had been forsaken in vain. From 1940 to 1970, the plight of the rural poor had worsened, illegal immigration had exploded, economic progress was not what it had once seemed, and dependence on the United States for food imports and labor exports had never been greater.

When viewed on a larger scale, braceros and their undocumented counterparts found themselves on the front lines of another revolution, only this time it was a demographic, cultural, and socio-economic revolution dawning in the second half of the twentieth century. They were unwitting pawns on the chessboard of an emerging global economy. As Mexico began to exhibit a more laissez-faire attitude toward its economy, its leadership exhibited a laissez-faire attitude toward migration, utilizing "a policy following a demographic interest in

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[3] Ibid., 187.

releasing the pressures of rapid population growth."[4] With the increase in globalization and illegal immigration, Mexico began reaping staggering financial benefits from the migrant laborers it could not employ at home. In the seven year period from 1955 to 1961 alone, bracero remittances had become the fourth largest segment of income in the Mexican economy.[5] And, in the decades following the 1960s, remittances evolved into a top source of foreign income for Mexico, topping $20 billion in 2005 – second only to oil revenues.[6] Unfortunately, though, these US dollars have not been able to buy solutions to Mexico's social problems and economic ills, as, according to one recent scholar, the "Mexican government has consistently been unable to meet the labor needs of its citizens, and in response hundreds of thousands… leave each year."[7] And that, perhaps, is the greatest irony of the Bracero Program's legacy. The very marginalized position that Mexico's rural poor inhabited then, the same position forcing Mexicans to work illegally in the United States today, continues to prop up a state that has constantly failed them for 100 years.

Who, therefore, is responsible for the plight of Mexico's rural poor? While popular opinion in the United States often (and incorrectly) attaches blame for the migrant's plight on the migrant himself, and scholarly opinion most often (correctly) places the majority of responsibility for continued illegal immigration on the United States, some scholars see through the obvious and expose Mexico's

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[4] David Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages Its Migration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 36.

[5] Howard Campbell, "Bracero Migration and the Mexican Economy, 1951-1964" (Ph.D. diss., The American University, 1972), 212.

[6] Fernando Romero, *Hyper-Border: The Contemporary U.S.-Mexico Border and Its Future* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 104.

[7] Ibid., 101.

economic and political elites as those culpable for rampant illegal immigration and the failure of the Mexican Revolution. Critics of the Bracero Program like Ernesto Galarza blamed the immigration crises of the resulting decades in part on Mexican economic and business elites' collaboration with US economic domination by actively promoting migration.[8] Other scholars blame these political elites for turning the Revolution into myth and inaction, such as the PRI who "manipulated the dominated classes with revolutionary imagery while it associated with the dominant economic classes to carry out lucrative deals."[9]

Not all of Mexico's elites contributed to the Revolution's failure, however. There were those men and women who embraced the social justice ideals of the Revolution and believed, in word *and* thought, that the true measure of a nation is how it treats it most marginalized citizens. For Mexicans like these

> emigration symbolized failure: the failure of the Revolution to provide social justice, the failure of agrarian reform to provide everyone with an adequate parcel of land, the failure of the growing economy to absorb the labor force, the failure of Mexico, as a nation, to provide an attractive place for her children to stay.[10]

But these elites failed to be heard. The voices of those who believed the solution to Mexico's 'agrarian question' could only be achieved by action and not rhetoric would see their message lost in the cacophony of 'progress' that swept Mexico.

The Mexican Revolution died during the years of the Bracero Program. The Program was never intended to kill a revolution, but it was recklessly and (at first) unintentionally utilized as a means to achieve this end. As the years went by after the program's termination, with no legitimate attempt being made to rectify the

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[8] Gonzalez, 11.

[9] Schmidt, 32.

[10] Larry García y Griego, "The Bracero Policy Experiment: U.S.-Mexican Responses to Mexican Labor Migration, 1942-1955" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1988), 103.

multiple and serious failures of the revolutionary project within Mexico, and with the hemorrhaging of migrant poor continuing virtually unabated, it was safe to declare that the Revolution had failed. But to some thinkers, especially those in Mexico, the Revolution had expired much earlier than 1964. In 1950 José Colín, political analyst for the Mexican newspaper *Excélsior*, was already musing on the death of the Mexican Revolution. He wrote

> I am in agreement… that many of the goals of the Revolution of 1910 remain to be achieved and that many of the conquests delineated in the laws have been invalidated. This only goes to prove that the historical cycle known as the Mexican Revolution has definitely ended…. That we affirm that the Revolution of 1910 is a closed chapter of history does not mean that the revolutionary spirit – hope, progress, and promise – is not alive. On the contrary, now is when it begins to flourish.[11]

What José's commendable optimism betrays is a lack of knowledge of the events and actions of the resulting decades. But it is that very spirit that shows why true social reform in Mexico is not unattainable. Whether through strength of political will or strength of arms, the Mexican people have proven themselves capable of bringing about dramatic change.

And this brings the author to this thesis's concluding point. The Bracero Program is unique in that it not only represented the means that enabled the death of the Mexican Revolution, it also served to *prevent* revolution. Mexico's ability to escape these turbulent decades without large-scale civil strife owes much of its thanks to the Bracero Program and illegal immigration. Without this social pressure release valve, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, would have gone without jobs and sustenance during Mexico's era of industrialization. Thousands would have starved, and it is possible that thousands would have revolted. The fact

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[11] José Colín, "The Mexican Revolution: R.I.P.," in Stanley Ross, ed., *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?* 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 113-14.

that another revolution did not erupt speaks to the power, hope, and promise embodied in the Revolution of 1910. The Revolution continues to represent a dynamic force. For Mexico's social revolution was largely a bottom-up revolution. Mexico's poor took ownership of their fate, fought back against injustice, and won a place – though minimal – at the table of national discourse. This stands in stark contrast to other Latin American Revolutions during the twentieth century. Brazil and Argentina's "revolutions from above," for example, resulted in brutal and authoritarian military dictatorships.[12] The Mexican Revolution, however, has always been embraced by Mexico's poor as their own. The Revolution's legacy has been used to uplift, as in the case of the agrarian reform of the 1930s; and it has been used to oppress, its ideology manipulated and myth exaggerated for the gain of the political and economic elite. Today, it remains to be seen which Revolutionary spirit will win the ultimate battle for the hearts and minds of Mexico's agrarian and migrant poor.

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[12] H.W. Tobler, *La Revolución Mexicana: Transformación Social y Cambio Politico, 1876-1940* (México: Alianza Editorial, 1994), 672.

EPILOGUE: THE MEXICAN COUNTER-REVOLUTION?
GATT AND NAFTA

It is important to note that while the social project of the Mexican Revolution – which in many ways embodied the main essence of the Revolution – may have ended during the years of the Bracero Program, the Mexican state continued to verbalize its support for the agrarian ideals championed by revolutionary figures like Emiliano Zapata and post-revolutionary leaders like Lázaro Cárdenas into the 1980s and 1990s. Mere decades after the end of the Bracero Program and the inflation and debt crises of the mid-1970s, however, the Mexican government would embark on trade agreements that not only ran afoul of Revolutionary ideals, but stood in direct opposition to them. Mexico entered into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986 and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. GATT was born of collaboration between Mexico and the World Bank and ushered in a new era of trade liberalization and eliminated many trade requirements and controls.[1] NAFTA took the collaboration witnessed with GATT one step further, lowering protective tariffs and eliminating non-tariff barriers on goods imported from the United States and Canada.[2] While GATT signaled the beginning of Mexico's embrace of neoliberal and capitalist principles, it has been NAFTA's impact on Mexican land and labor that has had a chilling effect on the agrarian and migrant poor.

The results of NAFTA have been startling. Neoliberal economic policies have had three major effects on the Mexican peasant and small farmer today.

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[1] Sarah Babb, *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 181.

[2] Ibid., 182.

Firstly, the change in land tenure laws that coincided with NAFTA allowed the development of large scale agriculture on former *ejidos*, as the Mexican Congress altered the seemingly-hallowed Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution to allow the free sale of "once-inalienable communal lands."[3] Secondly, corn and beans, the nation's historical staple crops and those grown for subsistence and surplus by small farmers and peasants, were more likely to be replaced by non-traditional crops geared for the foreign market.[4] Lastly, and worse yet, one of the greatest effects of NAFTA has been the "reduced demand for labor on larger farms that are technologically oriented," leading to more "displaced agricultural workers."[5]

Therefore, if the Bracero Program is the grandfather of illegal immigration to the US, then NAFTA is its father. For not only have *ejidos* and small farmers continued to lose their lands to the corporatization and mechanization of agriculture – forcing them into Mexico's cities or more often into US fields – but even many Mexicans with land cannot survive on the soil anymore. Of the agrarian poor who have not lost their land and are still living on *ejidos* and small landholdings after 1994, subsistence farming has become more and more untenable, as pressures to raise income-producing crops and the costs (both financial and environmental) of producing these specialty crops have soared.[6]

The resulting continued exodus of Mexican migrant poor into the United States can no longer be blamed on the failure of the Revolution; it can be blamed

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[3] Samuel Schmidt, *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría,* trans. Dan Cothran (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1991), 176.

[4] Edgar Butler, James Pick, and W. James Hettrick, *Mexico and Mexico City in the World Economy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 254.

[5] Ibid.

[6] For the link between NAFTA and increased agrochemical use and environmental and health issues in the Mexican countryside, see Ann Aurelia López, *The Farmworkers' Journey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

on the culmination of decades of anti-agrarian, anti-rural, and anti-poor policies of the Mexican government. Due to these policies' detrimental impact on Mexico's countryside and its people, they may very well be viewed by future historians as Mexico's Counter-Revolution.

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