

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION: THE MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE

BY

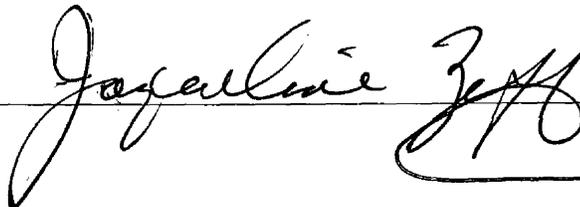
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## PREFACE

On May 1, 2006, thousands, if not millions, of people marched in defense of immigrant's rights. In a coordinated effort among mostly Hispanic immigrants and their supporters, rallies occurred in many of the major cities in the United States such as Chicago, Los Angeles and Dallas. The event, aptly called "A Day without Immigrants," was organized to boycott American commerce. Immigrants were truant from work and school. The immigrants, many of whom were likely in the United States illegally, protested proposed legislation promoting the strict reform of current immigration laws. They protested being treated like "criminals" when, in fact, they had committed a crime when they entered the United States without authorization.

Major news media, before and after the May 2006 rally, focused its attention on the issue of illegal immigration. The majority of media interest dealt specifically with illegal Mexican immigration. This attention was certainly understandable insofar as it was estimated that Mexicans make up 56 percent of the undocumented population in the

United States.<sup>1</sup> Yet, public outcry soon became tainted with xenophobic undertones as politicians warned of the "invasion and conquest of America"<sup>2</sup> and prime-time news anchors warned that the "U.S. government refuses to defend American workers and their families here at home"<sup>3</sup> against the steady influx of illegal Mexican immigrants. Letters sent to the editors at Time Magazine in May 2006 typified public sentiment and further demonstrated the divisive nature of the topic. These letter writers argued against "punishing people for seeking a better a life" while others argued against "offering citizenship to those who have broken the law or are unwilling to assimilate."<sup>4</sup> In addition, the opinions of American citizens regarding illegal Mexican immigration can be found on a daily basis in just about every United States media source.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel, *Estimates of the Size and Characteristics of the Undocumented Population* (Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick J. Buchanan, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> "Lou Dobbs Tonight," (June 29, 2006), CNN (2006).

<sup>4</sup> "Immigration Divides the Nation," *Time*, May 1, 2006, Volume 167; Issue 18.

The Mexican perspective, on the other hand, is not as readily available nor is it as generally known in the United States. This paper does not reflect the "official" Mexican government position, nor the Mexican politicians' position. Instead, it is meant to characterize the perspective of the typical Mexican laborer, a laborer with minimal education, a laborer who has been exposed to rampant corruption, and finally, a laborer willing to leave his homeland in order to enter a country illegally in search of a job.

The education system in Mexico is comprised of the following levels: preschool, mandatory primary education (grades 1-9), upper secondary education (grades 10-12), and university level education. The Ministry of Education (Secretaria de Educacion Publica), under the auspices of the Mexican government, regulates and oversees the entire education system. Although Mexico decentralized the basic education system to its 31 states and one Federal District in 1992, the Ministry of Education remains the primary decision maker.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Santibanez, Lucrecia, Georges Vernez and Paula Razquin, *Education in Mexico: Challenges and Opportunities* (Rand Corporation, Education, 2005), DB-480-HF.

The research indicates that in 2003 the average Mexican citizen completed 7.9 years of academic education, which was up from 6.8 years a decade earlier.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the average Mexican immigrant has anywhere between a fifth grade to seventh grade education, which is likely comparable to a third or fourth grade level in the United States. The Mexican government has done little in the way of providing a quality education for its citizens. Vocational training is virtually non-existent.<sup>7</sup> It is the least educated, untrained Mexican immigrant who is compelled to cross the border because jobs for those willing to work in unskilled positions are readily available in the United States. Likewise, it is this same, essentially illiterate, immigrant who justifies his illegal migration into the United States.

Seemingly corrupt government leaders have troubled Mexico for years; from General Santa Ana's clandestine addendum to the Velasco treaty agreement during the Mexican American War, to the suspicion of fraud and theft by Carlos

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> United States Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *US-Mexico Trade: Pulling Together or Pulling Apart* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1992), 101-103.

Salinas de Gortari, the President of Mexico from 1988 to 1994. Moreover, the government ownership of the major oil, gasoline and utility companies in Mexico have created a questionable relationship. The main oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), controls crude oil and gasoline prices. In May 2006, the average price per gallon of gasoline in Mexico City was \$2.25.<sup>8</sup> Although this may seem low in comparison to the United States gasoline prices, placed in perspective, Mexico's average daily wage is approximately \$4.00.

The electric and natural gas companies, Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE) and Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LFC), are also owned and regulated by the government. In addition, Telefonos de Mexico (Telmex), one of the largest companies in Mexico, provides all the local and long-distance telecommunication services throughout Mexico. Telmex operated as a government-owned utility until the early 1990s. The current owner of Telmex, Carlos Slim Helu, a Mexican citizen, is ranked by Forbes Magazine as the

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<sup>8</sup> Christian Zappone, *Gas Prices, around the world sampling*, CNN-Money.com, [http://money.cnn.com/2006/06/09/news/economy/global\\_gas/index.htm?cnn=yes/](http://money.cnn.com/2006/06/09/news/economy/global_gas/index.htm?cnn=yes/) (accessed February 2007).

third richest man in the world and the richest man in Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

The Mexican government, then, is perceived as the "have" in a country filled with "have-nots." This perception has contributed to internal conflict within Mexico. This is evidenced by the violence and conflict that has been raging in Mexican States, such as Chiapas. In Chiapas, the citizens have carried on a war against the Mexican government for years. In the United States Senate Resolution 128, submitted to the United States Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Patrick Leahy remarked: "half the people in Chiapas have no faith in the political process."<sup>10</sup>

Widespread corruption in Mexico has developed into a social problem. Bribes have become an accepted way of life for most Mexicans or rather, for those who can afford it. There are numerous examples of official misconduct. Carmen Martinez, a homeowner in Mexico City, waited three years to be issued telephone service. A neighbor recommended

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<sup>9</sup> Luisa Kroll and Alison Fass, "The World's Billionaires," *Forbes*, March 8, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Senator Patrick Leahy, "Senate Concurrent Resolution 128," in *held in Washington D.C., October 9, 1998*.

offering the telephone company official a "tip." Although "tipping" to obtain telephone service was against Mrs. Martinez' principles, three years was a long time without a telephone, particularly with family members living in the United States. Ultimately, a \$500.00 tip, in United States currency, expedited issuance of the long overdue telephone service.<sup>11</sup>

The average Mexican citizen has very little trust for his government or its representatives. As observed by Monsignor Diego Monroy Ponce, Rector of the Basilica de Santa Maria de Guadalupe in Mexico City, the largest Roman Catholic Church in Mexico, where millions of Mexican's pay homage each year, the Law of God regulates behavior more than laws made and enforced by the Mexican government.<sup>12</sup> Complaints against those assigned to protect and serve the public are extensive. Corruption and abuse by Mexican law enforcement agencies is well known. During a 2005 vacation in Acapulco, Mexico, a family was approached by Mexican Federal Police who claimed the family, driving a rental car, had disregarded a stop sign. The Federal Police, with

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<sup>11</sup> Carmen Martinez, interview by author, October 10, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Monsignor Diego Monroy Ponce, interview by author, December 12, 2005.

weapons brandished, requested immediate payment for the violation.<sup>13</sup> The family complied and paid a violation "fee" of two thousand pesos which is approximately two hundred dollars in United States currency. There are some journalists who have characterized Mexico's law enforcement as a "for profit business."<sup>14</sup> In general, Mexicans fear the police more than crime itself and therefore do not even report crimes to the police.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, in a country where the police are the criminals, laws are perceived as having little or no value. Consequently, the Mexican migrant contemplating entering the United States is not concerned with the consequences of breaking laws but instead, is driven by the need to survive and to provide life's basic necessities for himself and his family. As Dr. Julian Samora opined in *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story*:

It is not difficult to comprehend the poverty-induced desperation which will compel a man to endure whatever hardship and humiliation in order

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<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, interview by author, June 20, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Wasow, "Greasing Palms: Corruption in Mexico," *The Globalist*, June 27, 1995. <http://www.theglobalist.com/storyid.aspx?StoryId=4640/> (accessed March 3, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> "Delinquen mas en el SSP," *Reforma*, July 5 2001.

to obtain a few pesos for the sheer survival of his family and himself.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, by seeking and obtaining employment in the United States, the migrant is able to send money home to their families in Mexico; money that could not have otherwise been earned in their own country. The amount of these remittances wired to Mexico from the United States has increased steadily over the past five years. Mexico's Central Bank estimates that \$23 billion dollars were sent to Mexico from the United States in 2006.<sup>17</sup> According to a comprehensive study prepared by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, the majority of these remittances went to Mexico's poor,<sup>18</sup> the same demographic group as the illegal Mexican laborers. Unfortunately, the money being sent home does little to repair the harm done from the disruption of family life. Children are being left in the care of relatives. Despite

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<sup>16</sup> Julian Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 95.

<sup>17</sup> Dianne Solis and Laurence Iliff, "\$23 Billion sent to Mexico in '06," *Dallas Morning News*, January 31 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Pablo Fajnzylner and J. Humberto Lopez, *Close to Home: The Development Impact of Remittances in Latin America* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank), 6, The World Bank.

all their good intentions, the Mexican migrant, by leaving his family to work in another country, is creating another problem yet to be fully researched.

In many households, regardless of ethnicity, family lore and history is passed down from generation to generation. Mexican households are no exception. At most gatherings, grandparents and older family members, tell and retell stories of life in Mexico before and after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mexico's long-standing relationship with the United States is often the topic of conversation. Specifically, family members talk about the Mexican-American War and the loss of land. They talk about fleeing with their respective families from Mexico to the United States during the Mexican Revolution. Former *braceros* tell of the back-breaking agricultural work on farms in the United States during the World Wars. Finally, there are those family members who talk of having entered the United States illegally to work for employers who are willing to hire laborers without the proper documents.

Generations of Mexican Americans grow up being exposed to this "Mexican perspective." These stories are recounted in folklore and family tales. Even among the most educated of these Mexican Americans, it can be difficult to distinguish between myth and reality. Therefore, while

presenting the Mexican viewpoint, every effort has been made to represent the historical facts in an accurate and complete manner. However, as quoted by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), "What is history but a fable agreed upon?"



Fig. 1 Gomez-Garcia Family Photo, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, 1911. In 1914, the Gomez-Garcia family fled from Mexico to the United States during the Mexican Revolution.

## CHAPTER I: NEIGHBORS

Ever since its formation, the United States has been the destination for migrating people searching for a better life. The United States was, and to some extent still is, perceived by the rest of the world as the land-of-plenty; a country with roads paved with gold and endless opportunities. This potential for economic security, and because of political persecution and overall dissatisfaction in their homeland, led many people to risk all they owned to travel to America. This exodus has been occurring for over 200 years. During its first 100 years, the United States was quite tolerant of immigration and had an open borders policy that allowed immigrants into the country without restriction. Consequently, the United States developed a system of immigration control by passing laws and establishing specific border patrol. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was one of the first of these laws that targeted a specific ethnic group and restricted their immigration into the United States. Anti-Chinese sentiment likely grew during the California gold rush when the Chinese migrated to the United States. Racial tensions intensified when the Chinese occupied jobs and created competition on the job market. The statute of 1882 suspended Chinese immigration for ten years and declared

the Chinese as ineligible for naturalization. Although initially intended to be a ten year policy, it was extended indefinitely, and subsequently made permanent in 1902. In 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act was rescinded. President Franklin D. Roosevelt made the following recommendation to Congress:

There is now pending before the Congress legislation to permit the immigration of Chinese people into this country and to allow Chinese residents here to become American citizens. I regard this legislation as important in the cause of winning the war and of establishing a secure peace. China is our ally. For many long years she stood alone in the fight against aggression. Today we fight at her side. She has continued her gallant struggle against very great odds.<sup>19</sup>

The ultimate goal of the legislative act was accomplished as the Chinese population in the United States declined dramatically. However, it is more significant to note the Chinese exclusion encouraged later legislative movements toward immigration restriction against other "undesirable" groups such as the Japanese, Middle Easterners, and Mexicans. Ironically, the shortage of Chinese laborers left a noticeable gap in the American unskilled workforce, a gap Mexicans were eager to fill.

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<sup>19</sup> "President Urges Congress Repeal Chinese Exclusion Act as War Aid," *New York Times*, October 12, 1943, Print <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/national/race/101243race-ra.html>. (Accessed December 12, 2006).

Despite the increasing restrictive immigration sentiment, immigrants found illegal means to enter the United States. These undocumented immigrants of today are not from Europe but rather from Latin American countries. Hispanics have been categorized as the newest wave of undocumented immigrants. Currently, the government uses the term "Hispanic" to describe the various ethnic and cultural minorities with ancestors across the Rio Grande and in the Caribbean archipelago. "Hispanic" is often used to define the entire Spanish-speaking group as a race and culture. The term "Latino" is fast becoming the norm, primarily because it emerged from within the Spanish-speaking groups. Officially, the terms are used interchangeably to reflect the new terminology in the standards issued by the Office of Management and Budget on October 30, 1997.<sup>20</sup> Ten years later, in 2007, the terminology standard remains unchanged.

According to the Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: 2005, published by the United States Department of Homeland Security, Mexico is the leading country of origin, with 6.2 million, or 56 percent, of the undocumented population in January 2005. Placed in perspective, approximately eleven million undocumented immigrants were residing in the United

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Management and Budget, *Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity; Notices* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), 1-10.

States in 2005. During this same period, undocumented immigrants accounted for 30 percent of the total foreign born population, legal permanent residents accounted for 28 percent and naturalized citizens accounted for 31 percent.

The post-September 11, 2001 discussion over the Mexican illegal immigration issue has become a political hotbed of activity. One political group favors the implementation of a "guest worker policy," while another favors more restrictive and law enforcement-based, immigration control. The purpose of this paper is neither to debate this topic nor find an all encompassing solution to illegal immigration. Rather, its purpose is to allow an opportunity to "walk in the shoes" of Mexican undocumented workers; to understand their rationale and motivation for coming to the United States. By learning about the people, their history, economic culture and politics, there will be an opportunity to gain insight as to how Mexican laborers view their neighbor on the North side of the Rio Grande River.

The migration patterns from Mexico into the United States are based, in part, on significant historical events between the two countries. Arguably, the Mexican-American

War (1846-1848) was the impetus for the controversial relationship. The war was fought over disagreements that had been building up for years. However, the westward expansion of America and the underlying views associated with the notion of Manifest Destiny have been acknowledged as the ultimate causes of the war.<sup>21</sup> In addition to Texas, the United States, as the victor, acquired from Mexico the regions known today as California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona and New Mexico, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. Mexico was separated from the United States by a border, an invisible boundary between two countries. Over half of Mexico's original territory was lost by war and thousands of Mexican inhabitants were displaced or forced to become citizens of the United States with no means to ensure their constitutional rights. Many of them discovered they had become second-class citizens and that American laws were not extended equally to them.<sup>22</sup> These actions created an

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Francaviglia and Douglas W. Richmond, eds., *Dueling Eagles: Reinterpreting the U.S. Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian U.P, 2000), 92-93; and Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> *Botiller v. Dominguez*, 130 U.S. 238, S.Ct 525 (1889) and *Barker v. Harvey*, 181 U.S. 481, 21 S.Ct 690 (1901).

undeniable link between these two countries. In reality, then, Mexicans have lived on a large portion of the land now referred to as the "United States" for centuries. The descendants of these displaced Mexicans are well aware of this and claim the land as rightfully, but not legally, theirs. In June 2002, Zogby International conducted a poll of approximately 800 Mexicans living in Mexico; 58 percent of the Mexican people interviewed believed the U.S. Southwest belongs to Mexico, and 57 percent believed that Mexicans have the right to enter the United States without U.S. permission.<sup>23</sup>

During the years after the Mexican War, thousands of Mexican workers and their families, immigrated to the United States and found themselves in areas that had just recently belonged to their native country. The incorporation of Mexican labor into the United States economy boosted commercial agriculture, the mining industry and railroad construction. This migration intensified with the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Thousands of able-bodied Mexicans, including men, women and children, were recruited to fight in the Revolution.<sup>24</sup> Those choosing to avoid the

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Zogby, *American Views of Mexico and Mexican Views of the U.S.*, (Zogby International, 2002), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Linda B. Hall and Don M. Coerver, *Revolution On The Border: The United States and Mexico 1910-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 130-131.

conflict either hid or left the country. During this tumultuous time, the number of Mexican citizens who opted to leave their country and migrate to the United States was recorded by immigration officials as 890,371.<sup>25</sup> The United States was in the midst of World War I (1914 to 1918) and during these years, Mexican workers found employment in agriculture, mining, railroad, restaurants and hotels.<sup>26</sup> This was due, in part, to the reduced availability of Chinese laborers restricted by the Chinese Exclusion Act.<sup>27</sup>

Not only during World War I but during World War II as well, it was easy for Mexican workers to emigrate to the United States because their services were needed. There was an abundance of available jobs not only in the Southwestern United States, but in the Midwestern States as well.<sup>28</sup> Throughout World War II (1939 to 1945), American men enlisted in the military and male laborers were scarce which prompted the United States to negotiate a formal labor agreement with Mexico. Therefore, one of the most significant contributions to the growth of the agricultural

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 126-127.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Griswold Del Castillo and Arnolde De Leon, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 59-61.

<sup>27</sup> David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), 223.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 223.

economy was the creation of the Bracero Program (1942 to 1964), a program by which millions of Mexican farm laborers came to work temporarily in the fields of the United States. Although the program was intended to be a short-term solution to the United States' labor shortage, Mexican workers deserted their rural communities from the interior of Mexico and traveled to the border cities seeking employment. *Braceros* were experienced farmers who came from agricultural regions of Mexico. These farmers were aware the program involved temporary, contract employment and not United States citizenship. It was the promise of better wages that enticed many farmers to leave their families and their villages or towns.<sup>29</sup>

The Bracero program mandated specific wages, working conditions, medical benefits, temporary housing and life insurance. These employer requirements were an added cost burden to the United States agricultural interests, which urged for the treaty's end. In addition, there was a growing concern that the Bracero program encouraged the illegal entry of Mexicans instead of deterring them.<sup>30</sup> In an effort to impede and deter illegal immigration, the United

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<sup>29</sup> Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (Irvine: Wadsworth, 1998), 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Juan Ramon Garcia, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 39-41.

States, in 1954, enacted Operation Wetback, a program by which law enforcement and military personnel were required to locate, detain and deport all Mexican illegal immigrants.

The Bracero program, under which more than four million Mexicans legally entered the United States to labor in the agricultural fields, ended in 1964. United States' labor unions and moral activists encouraged termination of the program.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the mechanization of farming equipment reduced the need for laborers. Many of the workers stayed in Mexico's border cities hoping the program would be reinstated and continued looking for jobs. The program was not reinstated and the labor migration from Mexico became criminalized by increasing the flow of undocumented immigrants into the United States.

Mexico's Maquiladora (assembly plant) program was originally created in the 1960s, in answer to the high unemployment of Bracero agricultural workers. These light manufacturing and assembly plants were built on Mexico's northern border and were run by United States companies, such as Zenith, Delphi and Honeywell. The products manufactured by the Maquiladora plants were routinely returned for sale in the markets of origin. The Maquiladora plants flourished in early 1980 when the Mexican peso

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<sup>31</sup> Griswold Del Castillo and Arnolde De Leon, *North to Aztlan*, 127-128.

dramatically decreased in value. This resulted in a competitive unskilled labor pool. Because of the proximity to the United States, the program grew rapidly. United States companies set up Maquiladora plants on the Mexican side of the border to profit from this cheap labor pool and to benefit from reduced operating costs. Wages in the Mexican Maquiladora plants could not compete with wages anywhere in the United States. Consequently, many of these unskilled Mexican workers illegally entered the United States in order to increase their earnings.

Economics play an important role in illegal immigration. Mexico's weak socio-economic structure along with severe inflation and unemployment literally push many Mexicans across the border. Mexico's agricultural producers, many of whom are small farmers, are saddled with debt and declining productivity and unable to maintain a thriving existence.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the weak wage structure in Mexico cannot even compare to even the minimum wages offered by most employers in the United States. Mexico's minimum daily salaries are set in three zones and are based on the country's main geographic regions. In 2006, the minimum daily wage in Zone A (comprising Mexico City, Baja California Sur, Acapulco, parts of Veracruz and major

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<sup>32</sup> "Mexican Agriculture: Stunted Growth," *Business Latin America*, December 25, 2006, 2006, [www.westlaw.com/](http://www.westlaw.com/) (accessed January 10, 2007).

cities along the United States border) was \$4.12, in Zone B (Monterrey, Guadalajara, Tampico, Altamira and some other medium-sized cities) it was \$4.00 and in the remaining rural areas of Zone C it was \$3.88.<sup>33</sup> In the United States, the federal minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour.<sup>34</sup> Low wages and a high cost of living make raising, and comfortably supporting a family in Mexico virtually impossible.

The North American Free Trade Agreement has done little to alleviate Mexico's economic woes. As concluded in a joint study conducted by two United States non-profit groups in 2004:

Mexico suffered many negative economic effects as a result of NAFTA. Sharp cuts in farm subsidy programs combined with the near-elimination of import restrictions on corn and other commodities resulted in dumped U.S. corn flooding the Mexican market, forcing over 1.3 million *campesinos* or peasant farmers whose livelihoods were based on small-scale farming off their land.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Human resources: Wages and fringe benefits," *Country Commerce Mexico*, no. 01 (September 2006), 1-2, [www.westlaw.com/](http://www.westlaw.com/) (accessed January 10, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> *U.S. Department of Labor*, January 1, 2007, 2007, "Minimum Wage Laws in the States-January 1, 2007," <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm#content/> (accessed January 10, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Gerson, Timi, and Raul Islas, Fiona Wright, Adalia Zelada, Karinne M. Hernandez and Audrey Ayao, *Another Americas is Possible: The Impact of NAFTA on the U.S. Latino Community and Lessons for Future Trade Agreements* (Washington D.C.: Labor Council for Latin American Advancement and Public Citizen), , 9013.

Moreover, the fact that the NAFTA agreement was negotiated under Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the president of Mexico from 1988 to December 1994, has only caused more discontent among Mexican citizens. Many Mexican citizens believe he won the presidential election through fraud.<sup>36</sup> Salinas is very unpopular in Mexico where he is blamed for "a decreased standard of living, economic difficulties, the rise of the drug trade and the massive corruption that occurred during his administration."<sup>37</sup> Many Mexicans blame NAFTA, passed under the Salinas regime, for Mexico's economic problems.

According to the provisions of NAFTA, products are assembled out of raw materials, a majority of which are imported from sources outside Mexico, and then exported to the United States. These companies pay wages that are considerably lower than in the United States, and are not taxed on their working capital. Despite corporate claims that the United States sponsored trade treaty would improve wages and conditions for Mexican workers, their wages have dropped and conditions have not improved.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, traveling into the United States to seek gainful, albeit illegal, employment provides the means to improve their

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<sup>36</sup> *Murder, Money & Mexico: The Rise and Fall of the Salinas Brothers*, Frontline (April, 1997), PBS .

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

circumstances. Travel through authorized channels is not a practical option because many Mexicans are distrustful of United States immigration officials, perceiving them as a sure route to deportation either for themselves or for undocumented family members already living in the United States. Many complain the requirements to obtain even a tourist visa to see relatives in the United States are too stringent. According to the Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan, non-profit, independent organization, the waiting list for some family visas are in excess of twenty years and only a small percentage of work visas are available for the low-skilled immigrant worker.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, many Mexican workers risk what little they have to illegally cross the border.

Mexico and the United States have led separate yet intertwined histories; histories that have created a legacy of obstacles between the two countries. It is a history fraught with territorial and labor disputes. Mexico has struggled to retain economic and political independence and over the years, has become complacent and seemingly unmotivated to improve its status quo. Mexico was, and

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<sup>39</sup> Marc C. Rosenblum, *"Comprehensive" Legislation vs. Fundamental Reform: The Limits of Current Immigration Proposals* (Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute), 7, Policy Brief #13.

likely still is, seen as a troublesome neighbor, a poverty-ridden country that could not provide jobs for its entire people but instead had to rely on the escape valve of immigration to the United States. From the Mexican perspective, the United States is the schoolyard bully who forces his rules on weaker nations. Mexicans have developed an underlying level of suspicion of whether they should embrace the United States and its policies or keep their distance out of wariness that Mexico might be betrayed at decisive moments. These sentiments have been around for years. In 1963, a Latin American Monograph series was published and sponsored by the University of Florida, summarizing the Mexican journalists' view of the United States:

United States-Mexican history sticks in the throat of the Mexican journalist. Like a Texan, but with far different reactions, he remembers the Alamo. He also remembers the United States marines in Veracruz, and the fact that the United States got nearly one-third of its continental territory from his country. He also remembers American troops invading his land during the Mexican War. He also remembers President Wilson's sending troops into his country to chase Pancho Villa in 1916-17. He will not forget these.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> John C. Merrill, "Gringo: The American as Seen by Mexican Journalists," *The Latin American Monograph Series*, no. 23 (March 1963).

Yet, Mexicans realize that the United States is able to offer a certain level of prosperity for those willing to work for it. Mexico claims over half their country was wrenched away, their labor pool drained during World War I and II, and economy exploited by the Maquiladora and NAFTA plans. In general, the Mexicans perceive that the United States has, in the past, taken an unfair advantage of its poor neighbor. Mexicans are well aware that the border between the two countries was set as a result of a war and ultimately, controlled by the victors. Yet, the pull from employment opportunities in the United States overrides those feelings of resentment. Ironically, they believe in the American dream of equal opportunity and freedom, and because these basic human rights are virtually unattainable in their country, they keep coming, by the thousands, to cross the border.



Fig. 2 Wedding Photo of Antonio Galan and Urbana Perez, Villaldama, Mexico, 1898. The Galan family lost over fifty acres of land in Texas as a result of the United States-Mexican War.

## CHAPTER II: THE WAR AND ITS TREATIES

Mexico's current relationship with the United States was shaped, in part, during the middle 1800s when expansionist thought and colonialism were at their peak. Expansionism generally refers to increasing the territory or the economic influence of a country while colonialism is commonly defined as one country's domination of another country or people.<sup>41</sup> Both are often accomplished through aggressive, military actions which result in control over a dependent area of people. Interestingly enough, white settlers who conquered nonwhite peoples often held the opinion that ethnic and cultural differences define some people as superior and others as inferior. In simplest terms, strong countries dominated weaker ones to promote their own national self-interest and often because of economic, religious or cultural reasons. Not surprisingly, the weaker country often its peoples harbor a deep-seated resentment toward the dominant country, a resentment that is often passed on from generation to generation. Such is the relationship between Mexico and the United States. For the past one hundred and fifty years, Mexicans

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<sup>41</sup> *Encarta World English Dictionary (North American Edition)*, 2007th ed., s.v. "Expansionism and Colonialism." <http://encarta.msn.com/>(accessed January 9, 2007).

have maintained a passionate anger at the outcome of the war between Mexico and United States. This anger is enhanced by a bitter feeling of injury. As noted in a 1935 Mexican history book:

To Mexico, the American invasion contains a terrible lesson. In this war we saw that right and justice count little in contests between one people and another, when material force, and organization, are wanting. A great portion of Mexico's territory was lost because she had been unable to administer and settle those regions, and handed them over to alien colonization. There is no principle nor law that can sanction spoliation. Only by force was it carried out, and only by force or adroit negotiation could it have been avoided.<sup>42</sup>

Mexico's borders spanned over more than one-third of the North American continent in the early 1800's.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Mexico and the United States were quite similar in land size and population. Specifically, in 1824, Mexico comprised 1.7 million square miles with a population of 6 million, while the United States spanned 1.8 million square miles with a population of 9.6 million.<sup>44</sup> A large portion of

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<sup>42</sup> Alfonso Teja Zabre, *Guide to the History of Mexico: A Modern Interpretation* (Mexico City: Press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1935), 302.

<sup>43</sup> Francaviglia and Richmond, eds., *Dueling Eagles*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 39.

Mexico's land encompassed valuable trading routes along the Pacific Ocean. As noted by Richard Francaviglia and Douglas Richmond, co-authors and history professors at the University of Texas at Arlington, Mexico seemed to be impeding the natural path of the United States' empire.<sup>45</sup> While the annexation of Texas was perceived as the immediate cause of the United States War with Mexico, Mexican historians have always viewed expansionism as its foundation.<sup>46</sup> The United States was led west because of economic challenges directly related to its rapid population growth. Additionally, Americans invoked a sense of moral duty and mission to spread democracy and American values through what was eventually characterized as Manifest Destiny. Mexico's expansive land holdings impeded America's journey west and more importantly, "Mexico stood in the way of the American dream of manifest destiny."<sup>47</sup>

America's colonialism was endorsed by its founding fathers; in 1801, Thomas Jefferson encouraged westward

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<sup>45</sup> Francaviglia and Richmond, eds., *Dueling Eagles*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Francaviglia and Richmond, eds., *Dueling Eagles*, 42; and Eisenhower, John S.D. *So Far from God: The US War with Mexico 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), xix.

<sup>47</sup> John S.D Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The US War with Mexico 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), xviii.

expansion by referring to a vast territory that would provide "room enough for our descendents to the thousandth and ten thousandth generation."<sup>48</sup> In 1823, the famous *Monroe Doctrine* was implemented by President James Monroe, demanding that all other nations keep their "hands off" Latin American nations, essentially claiming these countries for American colonization or as potential trading partners.<sup>49</sup> During his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt's *Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine* reinforced this objective when he justified American intervention throughout the Western Hemisphere.<sup>50</sup> As far as Americans were concerned, "Jefferson, Jackson, and Roosevelt all regarded their country's dominance of the region as ordained by nature."<sup>51</sup> As noted by historian John S.D. Eisenhower, "To the American people these lands were called the Great American Desert, only waiting to be filled by an expanding United States."<sup>52</sup> To the United States, war with Mexico was the natural course of action.

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>49</sup> Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 37-39.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-67.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 196.

In his *Memoirs*, Ulysses S. Grant referred to the Mexican War as "the most unjust war ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation..."<sup>53</sup> The Mexican War (1846-1848) was fought between the United States and Mexico over disagreements that had been building up for years. Despite its initial open policy toward immigration, Mexico was becoming increasingly wary of the steady influx of Americans into their northern border region because the Americans seemed to have no interest in conforming to the Mexican culture.<sup>54</sup> Texas was of particular interest to the American frontiersmen. Mexico encouraged American immigration but mandated that the Americans colonialists became Mexican citizens who observed all Mexican laws, including no slavery, and converted to Catholicism.<sup>55</sup> Thousands of Americans emigrated to Texas, many without obtaining proper authorization from the Mexican government. In his acclaimed book of observations of American life

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<sup>53</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Jenkins & McCowan, 1894), 37.

<sup>54</sup> Manuel G. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 58-70.

<sup>55</sup> Julian Samora and Patricia Vandell Simon, *A History of Mexican American People* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 81.

during this era, French author, Alexis De Tocqueville, noted the following:

Daily, little by little, the inhabitants of the United States are infiltrating into Texas, acquiring land there, and though submitting to the country's laws, establishing there the empire of their language and mores. The province of Texas is still under Mexican rule, but soon there will, so to say, be no more Mexicans there.<sup>56</sup>

Tocqueville further recognizes that "The same sort of thing happens in every place where the Anglo-Americans come into contact with populations of a different origin."<sup>57</sup> The United States, then, was perceived as a conqueror, an observation that was not lost on the people of Mexico.

Tension was mounting between the Texas settlers and the Mexican government which led the Mexican government to implement stricter control over the settlers.<sup>58</sup> By 1830, Americans outnumbered Mexicans approximately six to one and Mexico banned further immigration from the United States.<sup>59</sup> In 1835, "Texans," both American and Mexican settlers, revolted against the Mexican government and several

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<sup>56</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1966), 409-410.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>59</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 70-71.

significant battles ensued. In the Battle of San Jacinto (May 1836), General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana was captured and, as part of the negotiated treaty, officially called the Treaty of Velasco, General Santa Ana agreed to return his troops to Mexico, cease all fighting, release all prisoners and comply with the irrevocable treaty. In return, General Santa Ana would be released and returned to Vera Cruz as soon as possible.<sup>60</sup> The second part of the treaty, although not made public, was more significant. General Santa Anna agreed to endorse Texas' independence and to accept the Rio Grande River as the boundary between Mexico and Texas. Texans established the Republic of Texas in 1836, but Mexico refused to recognize Texas' independence.<sup>61</sup> The Mexican government claimed the Treaty of Velasco was signed under duress because General Santa Ana was held captive at the time.<sup>62</sup> The Mexican government warned the United States that if Texas was admitted to the Union, Mexico would break off diplomatic relations with the United States. President James K. Polk allowed Texas

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<sup>60</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 11-12.

<sup>61</sup> Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 74.

admission to the Union and forced the war on Mexico. Texas was made a state in 1845, and Mexico broke off relations with the United States.<sup>63</sup> It is likely that the dispute could have been settled by peaceful means but for the notion of Manifest Destiny. There are those historians who argue "...the self-righteous aggressiveness of land-seeking North Americans aroused Mexican suspicion and hostility."<sup>64</sup> American expansion into Mexico in the mid 1800's was not confined to Texas as Americans began to penetrate into Mexican territory all along its northern border.<sup>65</sup>

The war officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty was signed on February 2, 1848, at the village of Guadalupe Hidalgo, near Mexico City. The Mexicans learned sometime later that the treaty they had reviewed and signed was not the same treaty ratified by the United States and several important paragraphs were either modified or deleted without

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 17-26.

<sup>64</sup> John Edward Weems, *To Conquer A Peace: The War Between the United States and Mexico* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 3.

<sup>65</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 71.

consultation.<sup>66</sup> Through this treaty, subtitled the "Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic," the United States acquired from Mexico the regions of California, Nevada, and Utah, most of Arizona and New Mexico, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.<sup>67</sup> Mexico was left with an arid and mountainous terrain while the United States gained agriculturally fertile land.<sup>68</sup> The treaty recognized the Texas border at the Rio Bravo (Grande) River,<sup>69</sup> protection for the property and civil rights of Mexican nationals living within the new border,<sup>70</sup> and compulsory arbitration of future disputes between the two countries.<sup>71</sup> In his personal diaries, President James K. Polk summed up the treaty's impact: "...there will be added to the United States an immense empire, the value of which

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 52-55.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-199.

<sup>68</sup> Weems, *To Conquer A Peace*, 269.

<sup>69</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 187-188.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

twenty years hence it would be difficult to calculate."<sup>72</sup> From the Mexican perspective, they had lost over one million square miles of territory, the value of which was immense.

Although the United States paid Mexico \$15 million for this territory, known as the Mexican Cession, the sale of their land to another country was a tremendous blow to Mexican pride.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the Mexican Cession made undesirable outcasts out of Mexicans who lived on the land before it was owned by the United States. These people, with a different set of religious and cultural values, involuntarily became Americans, but paradoxically, were often not accepted as legitimate Americans. Mexican Americans were treated not only as lesser citizens, but as lesser humans; as early as 1850, less than one year after "becoming American," Mexican Americans were lynched by whites jealous of the Mexican successes during the gold rush.<sup>74</sup> Mexican Americans, though not black, were not considered white, and were stereotyped as "lazy" and

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<sup>72</sup> James K. Polk, *Polk: The Diary of a President 1845-1949*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1929), 313.

<sup>73</sup> Weems, *To Conquer A Peace*, 43.

<sup>74</sup> J.Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 45.

"shiftless."<sup>75</sup> The general perception of Mexicans was "they loved gambling, drinking, smoking, midday siestas and cockfighting on Sundays. Certainly they were not people with whom many Americans could develop much empathy."<sup>76</sup>

When the war ended there were thousands of Mexicans living in the conquered territory, from California to Texas. When the United States Senate ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and upon recommendation from President James K. Polk, it opted to delete Article X which had guaranteed the protection of Mexican land grants.<sup>77</sup> The Mexicans had the option to remain in the newly acquired United States or return to Mexico. If they stayed, they could choose Mexican or United States citizenship. If they did not declare their choice, after a year they would automatically be citizens of the United States.<sup>78</sup> For those choosing to stay in the United States, many of them discovered they had become second-class citizens and that American laws were not extended equally to them. After the war, Mexicans claimed that greedy and unscrupulous traders,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>76</sup> Weems, *To Conquer A Peace*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

lawyers and government representatives "stole" the lands away from those who had opted to stay. In the United States Supreme Court case, *Botiller v. Dominguez* (130 U.S. 238, 1889), the Dominguez family was given title to a tract of land near the Los Angeles area in 1834. A California law enacted in 1851 required landowners with Mexican land titles to present their deeds to state officials for confirmation or risk forfeiture. However, in a later case disputing the validity of the California law, the California state court ruled that such forfeitures should be considered illegal and the long standing Mexican land titles were upheld even if the owners had not brought them forward. After the Homestead Acts were passed in the 1860s, Brigido Botiller laid claim to sections of the Dominguez family ranch. The case was brought before the California State Court which upheld the Dominguez title to the land. Botiller appealed the judgment to the United States Supreme Court where it was overturned. In its opinion, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the 1851 legislation that interpreted the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and required presentation of Mexican land deeds to California officials for confirmation. The Dominguez family lost their claim and their land was forfeited. Due in part to language and cultural barriers, many others lost the rights to their own

land through similar legal battles.<sup>79</sup> Mexicans from California to New Mexico lost their property and their rights and thus became outsiders in their native land. The treaty may have symbolized the end of the war but it also "...established a pattern of inequality between the two countries, and this lopsided relationship has influenced Mexican and American relations ever since."<sup>80</sup> Mexicans feared that the United States planned to conquer all of Mexico, "piece by piece."<sup>81</sup>

Initially, the Mexicans expected the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to be more than just a bill of sale. The treaty was intended to protect the lands, culture, religion, and civil rights of those wartime residents who had been Mexican citizens, including their descendants.<sup>82</sup> Specifically, Article VIII recognized and guaranteed the preservation of Mexican property and Article IX referenced the social and civil rights of the newly declared Mexican American citizens. In reality, however, and as noted by

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 87-107.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>81</sup> Weems, *To Conquer A Peace*, 111 and 268.

<sup>82</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 189-190.

author, Gloria Anzaldua, the treaty "...created a new U.S. minority: American citizens of Mexican descent."<sup>83</sup>

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo remains as a central contract that governs relations between the United States and Mexico. Dr. Julian Samora, author and sociologist, indicates "...the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo contained the seeds of bitterness."<sup>84</sup> It was supposed to guarantee Mexicans and their descendants certain political rights and territorial rights. It also established how Mexican Americans would be perceived in the United States: as a conquered people. In the postwar climate after 1848, hostility, discrimination, and violence against Mexicans spread throughout the Southwest. After the Mexican American War, Mexican Americans in the southern border states began to lose their land to Americans and even though the rate of loss varied from state to state, the general trend was consistent everywhere. Mexican Americans lost their land holdings through the United States' controlled legal

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<sup>83</sup> Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>84</sup> Samora and Simon, *A History of Mexican American People*, 99.

authority.<sup>85</sup> Mexican citizens lamented the loss of their land and developed an increased distrust and dislike of the Americans, feelings that lingered through the years.

Tensions along the borders intensified as Mexico was faced with the "unequal power relationship."<sup>86</sup> Boundary disputes along the Southern border, between El Paso and San Diego, led to the negotiation of yet another treaty.<sup>87</sup> In 1853, Mexico suffered another wound to its pride with the ratification of the Treaty of Mesilla, or as it is more commonly referred to; the Gadsden Treaty. The Mexican government had accumulated a significant debt and was on the verge of becoming bankrupt. Fearful of losing his political power if the country went bankrupt, Antonio de Lopez Santa Ana, the President of Mexico, agreed to sell 29,142,00 square miles of its northern territory to the United States for \$10,000,000.00 dollars.<sup>88</sup> Journalists later remarked that "For many in Mexico, the Gadsden

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<sup>85</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 60-61.

<sup>86</sup> Oscar J. Martinez, ed., *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), xiii.

<sup>87</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, 55-59.

<sup>88</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 91-92.

Purchase...was the last battle of a humiliating war."<sup>89</sup> Thousands of Mexican residents were affected. This land would later become the southern half of New Mexico and Arizona. The land was abundant with silver and copper mines and its flat land was ideal for future construction of the major cross-country railroad.<sup>90</sup> The United States had accomplished its objective to secure land that would accommodate a railway route to the Pacific.<sup>91</sup> This railroad would later become an integral contributor to the wealth of the United States because it opened up trade routes.

The Treaty of Velasco, the Mexican War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gadsden Treaty were pivotal in creating the current relationship between the two countries. This era not only gave emphasis to the relationship between the Mexican government and the United States, but also the relationship the Mexican government had with its own people. The political leaders during this

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<sup>89</sup> Ignacio Ibarra, "Land sale still thorn to Mexico," *Arizona Daily Star*, February 12 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 38-43.

<sup>91</sup> Manuel Ceballos-Ramirez and Oscar J. Martinez, *Myths, Misdeeds, and Misunderstandings: The Roots of Conflict in U.S.-Mexican Relations*, ed. Jaime E. Rodriguez and Kathryn Vincent (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1997), 138-139.

time were concerned with satisfying their egos and rewarding the wealthy class while the working class was ignored. According to the Federal Census, in the 1870s, Mexican laborers were approximately fifty percent of the workforce but shared in only ten percent of the country's wealth.<sup>92</sup> Yet, Mexicans were taught in school and in the home that part of their country was violently taken away by the United States. Edgar Ivan Cortes Romero, a 22 year old college student living in Mexico City, is able to recount, with little effort, a list of humiliations suffered by Mexico at the hands of the United States.<sup>93</sup> The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is at the top of the list.

As a result of the war, the United States positioned itself as a world leader and military power.<sup>94</sup> In addition to their new world status, the United States gained a substantial amount of territory that was abundant in natural resources, such as fertile soil, forestry and

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<sup>92</sup> Arnoldo De Leon and Kenneth L. Stewart, *Tejanos and the Numbers Game: A Socio-Historical Interpretation from the Federal Censuses, 1850-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 42-43.

<sup>93</sup> Edgar Ivan Cortes Romero, interview by author, December 11, 2006.

<sup>94</sup> Francaviglia and Richmond, eds., *Dueling Eagles*, 171.

plentiful water sources, which ultimately contributed to its agricultural and industrial growth. Gold was discovered in California in 1848. Mexico, in contrast, was left with an arid and mountainous terrain. Mexico has yet to reconcile with this loss and instead, continues to harbor a sense of resentment toward the United States. There is a recent movement of radical Mexicans who are lobbying for the Southwest United States to be returned to Mexico. This movement is called the "Reconquista" movement.<sup>95</sup> Although the odds of success are slim, the movement, in a distorted sense, offers hope to a group of people who are seeking resolution to what they perceive as a past injustice.

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<sup>95</sup> Presidential Immigration Summit, "Lou Dobbs Tonight," interview by Lou Dobbs (March 31, 2006), *CNN* (2006).



Fig. 3 Rita Galan with her two grandchildren, Herlinda Galan and Aurora Galan, Villaldama, Mexico, 1916. The Galan family fled to the United States in 1920.

### CHAPTER III: REVOLUTION, IMMIGRATION AND THE BRACEROS

Mexico's wounds were healing from its war with the United States when internal conflict tore the country apart. From 1910-1920, a nationwide rebellion launched a revolution and violence, chaos and famine spread throughout the country. For many unskilled workers, the escape routes led north and thus started the informal integration of Mexican labor into the United States' economy. At the same time the revolution was unfolding in Mexico, the United States found itself in the midst of World War I (1914 to 1918), and because American laborers were scarce, labor was temporarily imported from Mexico. In simplest terms, the United States needed labor and Mexico supplied it. Later, near the end of World War II (1939 to 1945), a formal labor agreement was established between Mexico and the United States. The Bracero program recognized a distinctive migratory pattern between the two countries. Research confirms a "circular migration pattern" of unauthorized migrants between Mexico and the United States.<sup>96</sup> This

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<sup>96</sup> Jennifer Van Hook, Frank D. Bean and Jeffrey Passel, "Unauthorized Migrants Living in the United States: A Mid-

circular pattern involves working in the United States while maintaining significant social and family ties in Mexico.

In summary, the consequence of wars in Mexico and involving the United States created and reinforced the labor relationship between the neighboring countries. It was during this era that the migration of Mexicans across the border increased significantly. The first year the Bracero program was implemented, 52,000 Mexican laborers were working in agricultural fields and on the railroad and it is estimated by 1950, approximately 450,000 Mexicans passed through one of three authorized recruitment centers annually.<sup>97</sup>

Porfirio Diaz ruled Mexico from 1876 to 1911. By all accounts, Diaz was a ruthless dictator who often resorted to strong-arm politics.<sup>98</sup> Mexican history has not looked favorably on his reign as "he and his friends grew rich

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Decade Portrait," *Migration Information Source* (September 2005).

<sup>97</sup> Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 203-04.

<sup>98</sup> Linda B. Hall and Don M. Coerver, *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico 1910-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 18-19.

while the poor of Mexico became poorer."<sup>99</sup> In an effort to modernize Mexico, Diaz solicited foreign investment from Europe and the United States. Diaz wanted to develop the mining, railroad, petroleum, and agricultural industries.<sup>100</sup> These foreign companies came to Mexico and quickly started controlling many of its major industries. The United States soon became the primary foreign investor in Mexico.<sup>101</sup> These United States investors included John D. Rockefeller, John Pierpont (J.P.) Morgan and William Randolph Hearst.<sup>102</sup> As observed by Walter H. Page, U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain from 1913-18:

The opening up of Mexican oil resources was perhaps the most typical of these achievements, as it was certainly the most adventurous. Americans had created this, perhaps the greatest of Mexican industries, and in 1913, these Americans owned nearly 80 percent of Mexican oil.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Samora and Simon, *A History of Mexican American People*, 122.

<sup>100</sup> Hall and Coerver, *Revolution On The Border*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> J.Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 52.

<sup>103</sup> Burton J. Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1922), 179, E-book.

The small farmers suffered the most from this venture when their property was claimed by the Mexican government, which, in turn, gave the land to these foreign companies. Wealthy Mexican families, on the other hand, were rewarded by the government and were allowed to expand their land holdings. Many of the small, rural farmers ended up working for minimal pay on what had previously been their own lands. At that time, it was estimated that five million rural Mexicans, approximately 98 percent, had lost their land rights which created a mobile labor force for future capitalist developments.<sup>104</sup> The lure of job opportunities in the north was immense. Additionally, a strong economy in the United States and the demand for cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labor was like a magnet, pulling the immigrants northward.

In 1910, several interest groups within Mexico united to overthrow the Diaz regime. In general, their dissatisfaction focused on the United States involvement in the economy and consequently, anti-American opinions re-emerged. Mexicans became concerned when American investments increased by millions of dollars under Diaz.

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<sup>104</sup> Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (Irvine: Wadsworth, 1998), viii.

These investments were both direct and indirect. "American interests controlled 78 percent of the mining industry and 58 percent of the growing petroleum industry. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States continued its role as dominant trading partner, accounting for approximately 60 percent of Mexico's exports and imports."<sup>105</sup> These revolutionaries were inspired to rise up against Diaz in order to return Mexico to its people. Emiliano Zapata and Doroteo Arango, also known as Pancho Villa, were agrarian reform leaders in the revolution.<sup>106</sup> More importantly, they were seen as leaders of the peasants.<sup>107</sup> However, they were provincial leaders and "neither had interests common to all Mexicans; neither could forge a national revolutionary movement."<sup>108</sup> Although fighting for a common goal, Zapata and Villa were not successful in their attempts to return the country to its people. In the fictional narrative "Eyes of Zapata," author Sandra Cisneros, writing about the toll the war has taken

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<sup>105</sup> Hall and Coerver, *Revolution On The Border: The United States and Mexico 1910-1920*, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Samora and Simon, *A History of Mexican American People*, 125-128.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 123-124.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 124.

on Zapata's wife, captures the sentiment of the Mexican people when she writes: "Seasons of war, a little half-peace now and then, and then war and war again. Running up the hills when the *federales* come, coming back down when they've gone."<sup>109</sup> Mexico was in turmoil, town and villages were pillaged and it was the farmers and other rural agricultural workers who suffered a dramatic reduction in their standard of living. Therefore, they came by the thousands, on foot, on horseback, in wagons, and by train, migrating into the frontier cities of the Southwestern United States.

Mexicans migrated to the United States for many reasons; there were those who did not want to fight in the revolution, others were concerned about the unsteady economic situation, and there were those who feared the violence and chaos that were spreading through the country. The United States not only provided a safe haven but it also provided employment opportunities with the growth of commercial agriculture, transportation, railroad, mining, lumbering, steel mills and canneries. By 1920, more than a

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<sup>109</sup> Bryce Milligan, Mary Guerrero Milligan and Angela de Hoyos, comps., *Daughters of the Fifth Sun* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1995), 165.

million Mexicans had crossed the border in search of safety, freedom, food, and jobs.<sup>110</sup>

This population movement, which has continued to the present day, had permanent consequences, setting the future patterns that such migrations would follow by establishing large Mexican communities that served as support networks for newcomers.<sup>111</sup>

To be sure, this era marked the beginning of the enormous flow of Mexicans to the United States. Dr. Julian Samora, in his book on the history of Mexico, estimates ten percent of Mexico's population emigrated to the United States during this period.<sup>112</sup> Of more significance, this era marked the beginning of the demand for unskilled laborers in the United States.

Problems developed with Mexican migration to the United States when the Immigration Act of 1917 was enacted. This new law imposed an English literacy test and a monetary "head tax."<sup>113</sup> Mexicans, not understanding the new regulations or fearful of exclusion, began to immigrate illegally into the United States. The Mexicans, desperate

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<sup>110</sup> Hall and Coerver, *Revolution On The Border: The United States and Mexico 1910-1920*, 133.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>112</sup> Samora and Simon, *A History of Mexican American People*, 130.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-33.

for money, food and badly needed jobs, deliberately ignored the United States immigration laws. Consequently, an underground smuggling industry was created to the help Mexicans cross the border.<sup>114</sup> Although the illegal immigration caused bad sentiments between the neighboring countries, when the United States entered into World War I, the demand for labor increased. The wartime economy provided new opportunities for Mexican laborers when many American-born laborers had enlisted. The United States Department of Labor loosened immigration restrictions for Mexican workers only, who were then actively recruited by the government.<sup>115</sup>

The railroads brought the Mexicans...in the early spring. The migrants would work on the railroads...until it was time for the crops to be harvested. After the harvest, they would return to the railroads and complete the work there<sup>116</sup>

Mexican laborers were crossing the border, legally and illegally. In 1924, the Immigration Quota Act was enacted and the United States Bureau of Immigration established the Border Patrol. Although the Immigration Quota Act focused

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 134-35.

on European and Asian migrants and placed no restrictions on immigration within the hemisphere, the Border Patrol controlled casual migration across the United States-Mexico border. The promise of higher paying jobs in the mines, on the railroads and in agriculture lured Mexicans to the border throughout the 1920s. Those attempting to enter the United States legally had to pay fees for visas, pass medical examinations, demonstrate literacy in the English language and convince border officials that they were not likely to rely on public assistance. Mexicans laborers, having very little money for "fees" and unable to read or write in their own language much less in the English language, perceived illegal entry as a "better" option.

The incorporation of Mexican labor into the United States had a direct impact on commercial agriculture, the mining industry, light industry and the railroad. Most of these jobs could be found in the Southwest, however, when jobs became scarce, the Mexican immigrants headed north to the Midwest and western sections of the United States.

The onset of World War II contributed to the increased migration. During this period, it was easy for the Mexican workers to experience seemingly unrestricted travel into the United States because they were considered a necessary commodity. World War II created a need for migrant laborers

and consequently, a labor agreement with Mexico was sought. The Bracero Program brought more than four million Mexican laborers to work legally in the United States at a time when American soldiers began leaving for war.<sup>117</sup> These *bracero* contract workers helped to convert the agricultural fields of America into the most productive in the world.<sup>118</sup> Mexican farmers were eager to leave their impoverished country to work as agricultural laborers under a United States government sponsored program.

The Bracero program first began in August 1942 and officially ended in December 1964.<sup>119</sup> The first phase of the program was a direct result of World War II. The country was in desperate need of farm and industrial laborers. Thousands of Mexicans abandoned their rural communities and headed north to work as *braceros*. They stopped working their land and growing food for their families with the illusion that they would be able to earn a substantial amount of money on the other side of the border. The Bracero Program was aimed at easing the labor shortage in

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<sup>117</sup> Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), X.

<sup>118</sup> M. González, *Mexicanos*, 170-72.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37

the United States. The work contracts were made between individual employers and the *bracero*.<sup>120</sup> Some *braceros* went back at the end of the year; others stayed over until the following year. Oftentimes, the same people came back year after year to work in the same region and often for the same employer. The program established a vital link to the agricultural labor from Mexico. However, civil rights organizations in Mexico and the United States criticized the treatment of *bracero* workers and created dissatisfaction from both sides of the border.<sup>121</sup> When the first phase of the program ended in 1947, illegal migration to the United States increased sharply because, in part, of agribusiness which became dependant on the Mexican labor class for the planting, harvesting, and distribution of crops.<sup>122</sup> American employers, dependent on the Mexican laborers, encouraged the illegal migration. In October 1948, in what history remembers as the "El Paso Incident," pressure from American employers compelled the U.S. Immigration officials to "open" the border in El Paso,

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<sup>120</sup> Craig, *The Bracero Program* , 43-44

<sup>121</sup> Richard Griswold Del Castillo and Arnoldo De Leon, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 90-91.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

Texas, in order to allow thousands of eager *bracero* workers to cross the border into the waiting trucks of the American farmers.<sup>123</sup> Mexican officials were angry with the incident as it violated the labor agreement between the two countries that banned *bracero* labor in Texas because of past mistreatment of Mexican laborers.<sup>124</sup> Mexico also noted what they regarded as an "open complicity between those charged with enforcing the immigration laws and the growers."<sup>125</sup> The Mexican people, on the other hand, recognized the power of the U.S. employers to recruit laborers without regard to their immigration status.

The second phase of the *bracero* program was much more ambitious. It was instituted under Public Law 78 and lasted from 1951 to 1964. During that time, most *braceros* again worked in agricultural fields. Despite poor working conditions, the Mexicans continued to migrate to the United States.<sup>126</sup> Independent farmers associations and the "farm

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<sup>123</sup> "North of the Border," *Time Magazine*, November 1, 1948.<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,804818,00.html>

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 77.

<sup>126</sup> Manuel G. Gonzales and Cynthia M. Gonzales, eds., *En Aquel Entonces: Readings in Mexican-American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 169-71.

Bureau" controlled the *bracero* contracts and it was Mexico's responsibility to recruit the laborers.<sup>127</sup> The contracts were in English and the *braceros* would sign them without understanding their full rights and conditions of employment. When the contracts expired, the *braceros* were required to turn in their permits and return to Mexico. The recruitment of contract workers through the Bracero Program also "stimulated a huge increase in the number of undocumented migrants who poured into the United States seeking work."<sup>128</sup> Many of the undocumented migrants often worked for growers who also employed *braceros*. The Bracero Program, through which more than four million Mexicans entered the United States to labor in the agricultural fields, ended in 1964. The Bracero Program's legacy has lasted far longer.

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<sup>127</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 172-74.

<sup>128</sup> David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 142.

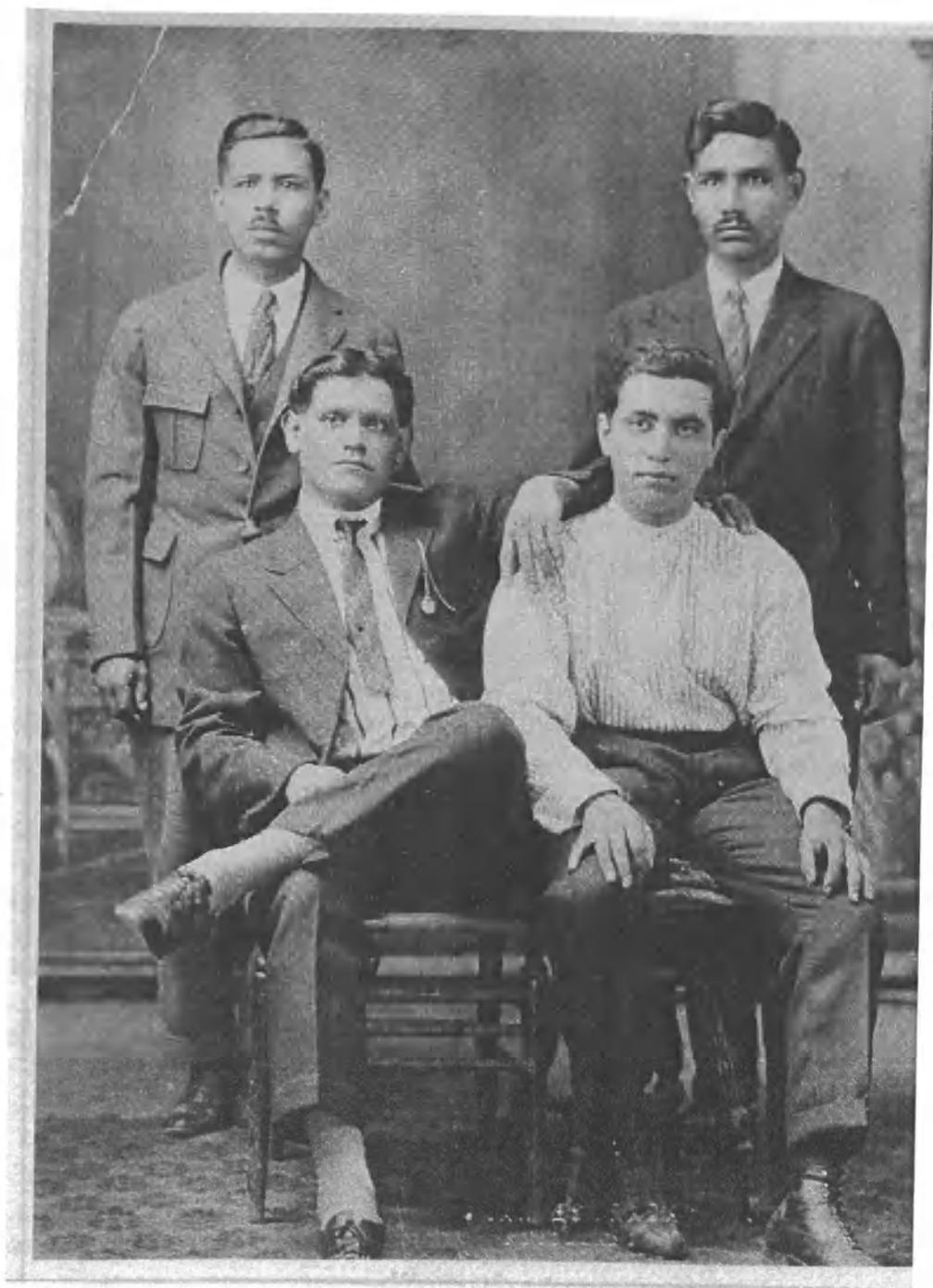


Fig. 4 Jose Martinez, his brother, Rudolfo Martinez and unidentified cousins (seated). The Martinez' cousins left Patzcuaro, Michoacan, Mexico to become braceros in Nebraska. Photo circa 1946.

From 1942 to 1964, the Bracero program linked a persistent flow of documented and undocumented laborers from Mexico to the United States. As noted by historians Richard Griswold Del Castillo and Arnolde De Leon,

The Bracero Program itself encouraged illegal immigration. The program raised the expectations of millions of Mexico's poor campesinos (farmworkers), causing them to abandon their homes in hope of becoming a bracero. Many more applied than could be accepted, and ultimately the determined agricultural migrant decided to cross illegally.<sup>129</sup>

Undoubtedly, the Bracero program created immediate economic benefits to migrants and their families; however, the greatest economic benefit went to the employers who hired them. Flexible economies and labor markets soon become accustomed to the availability of unskilled workers. Mexicans were eager to leave their homeland to earn far more than they would if they stayed in their country. The United States was eager to employ them. The Bracero program employed approximately 4.8 million Mexican Nationals during its twenty-plus years in existence. Mexico's northern cities and towns grew dramatically as laborers traveled from inner Mexico with expectations of earning a living in

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<sup>129</sup> Griswold Del Castillo and Arnolde De Leon, *North to Aztlan*, 105.

the United States.<sup>130</sup> This northern migration trend would later impact the entire border region in the United States and Mexico.

During the Bracero Program's existence, the Attorney General of the United States, Herbert Brownell, in reaction to increased public anxiety, became concerned about the illegal flow of Mexican labor into the country.<sup>131</sup> Illegal border-jumpers, referred to as "wetbacks," were seen as a "menace to the working community in the United States, that they posed a danger to the social, political, and economic stability of the country..."<sup>132</sup> American society was in an uproar and the anger was focused on a newly identified enemy; the illegal Mexican laborer. The United States government was under pressure to stop illegal immigration. Consequently, in 1954, in the midst of the Bracero program, a repatriation program was implemented by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to remove illegal Mexican immigrants from the country. The commissioner of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service,

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<sup>130</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 176.

<sup>131</sup> Griswold Del Castillo and Arnolde De Leon, *North to Aztlan*, 105.

<sup>132</sup> Garcia, *Operation Wetback*, 150-151.

Joseph May Swing, a former General in the United States Army, spearheaded the program. This quasi-military repatriation program went by the code name of Operation Wetback. Unfortunately, Mexicans, in general, ultimately became the focus as "Mexican-looking" citizens were often detained and questioned by immigrant officials. In some cases, illegal immigrants were deported along with their American-born children. As a result, an antagonistic relationship developed between the Mexicans and Caucasian Americans. As summarized by author, Juan Ramon Garcia:

"Operation Wetback" further strained the relationship between the Mexican American community and the host society. The Mexican American community was affected because the campaign was aimed at only one racial group, which meant that the burden of proving one's citizenship fell totally upon the people of Mexican descent. Those unable to present such proof were arrested and returned to Mexico. The result was that family and kinship ties were disrupted and an atmosphere of fear and hostility was engendered.<sup>133</sup>

Consequently, Mexicans were treated as an undesirable, underclass minority. Joyce Santana-Frias, a young mother living during this era, recalls segregated bathrooms and drinking fountains; one for "Whites only" and another

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 230-231.

designated for "Mexicans only."<sup>134</sup> This discrimination also existed in neighborhoods and schools.<sup>135</sup> While living in San Antonio, Texas, the Santana-Frias children were designated to an "all Mexican" school. Consequently, the Santana-Frias family relocated to Michigan where the racial tension between Mexicans and Caucasians was less evident.

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<sup>134</sup> Joyce Santana-Frias, interview by author, September 29, 2007

<sup>135</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos*, 165 and 181.

## CHAPTER IV: THE BORDER INDUSTRIALIZATION PROGRAM

When the Bracero Program ended in 1964, the thousands of Mexicans who had been crossing the border to work every year were unemployed and seemingly stranded in the Mexican border towns. These towns were significantly underdeveloped and ill-prepared for a population increase of such proportion. As a result, Northern Mexico suffered an employment crisis of its own. In an effort to combat the growing unemployment along the border, the Mexican government developed the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). In 1965, less than one year after the Bracero Program ended, the BIP, or what is more commonly referred to as the Maquiladora <sup>136</sup> program, was created. Under the provisions of the program, foreign investors were allowed a majority ownership of manufacturing and assembly plants along the United States-Mexico border.<sup>137</sup> The BIP provided these investors access to a competitive wage structure and

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<sup>136</sup> The literal translation of "Maquiladora" is "assembled by machine." The terms "maquiladora" and "maquila" are often used interchangeably.

<sup>137</sup> Norman Caulfield, *Mexican Workers and the State: From Porfiriato to NAFTA* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1998), 126.

comparatively unregulated conditions in Mexico without traditional trade barriers. These companies were also exempt from local taxation. Corporations from the United States were, and still are, the primary participants in this program. In fact, many of the factories have twin operations on the United States side, creating a bi-national program.<sup>138</sup> These light manufacturing and assembly plants were built on Mexico's northern border and were run by United States companies such as Zenith, Delphi and Honeywell. Essentially, the Twin Plant concept allowed a company to operate two plants, one in Mexico to accommodate the labor-intensive work, and one in the United States to house the capital-intensive work. These maquiladoras operate virtually unrestricted and were able to import parts and supplies from the United States or other countries, and then export the finished product. Duties were assessed only on value added. It was seen as a golden business opportunity for the foreign maquiladora owners especially since the Mexican worker was paid, in most cases, less than \$.50 an hour.<sup>139</sup> By setting up factories in

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<sup>138</sup> Martinez, ed., *Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* xvii

<sup>139</sup> Pablo Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 255.

Mexico, literally within a mile from the United States-Mexico border, these businesses were able to ignore United States labor and environmental laws to ensure a profitable venture.<sup>140</sup>

With the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, maquiladora plants took on increased importance. Mexico allowed the construction of maquiladoras within its interior States as well as along the border. The creation of NAFTA was another step in the intended development of Mexico. NAFTA was similar to the BIP, but its benefits were extended to Canada, and it is an internationally recognized agreement. On its face, NAFTA was intended to increase the number of Mexicans employed as well as the dollar amount of goods produced. Although Mexico had an abundant supply of labor, it lacked the job base, especially in the manufacturing area, necessary to gainfully employ these workers. United States automakers have established a solid factory base in Mexico. In a recent article in the Detroit Free Press, it was estimated that automotive production in Mexico is expected, in 2007,

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<sup>140</sup> J.Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 234.

to exceed two million vehicles, a record high.<sup>141</sup> The "big three" automakers, General Motors, Daimler/Chrysler and Ford Motor Company, have invested billions of dollars into their Mexican factories. The standard auto industry hourly wage in Mexico is \$3.50, compared to a minimum of \$27.00 per hour in the United States.<sup>142</sup> Low operating costs combined with low wages equals a significant profit margin for the automakers.

The BIP and its sister program, NAFTA, were touted by both the United States and Mexican governments, as the Mexican worker's salvation. Carlos Salinas, the President of Mexico during NAFTA negotiations, enlisted the aid of analysts from various research organizations such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Heritage Foundation, the Hudson Institute, the Institute for International Economics, and the Brookings Institute, to sell his plan to the Mexican people.<sup>143</sup> It was also argued that illegal immigration across the border would be

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<sup>141</sup> Elisabeth Malkin, "Detroit, Far South," *Detroit Free Press*, July 21 2006.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Jesus Velasco, "Reading Mexico, Understanding the United States: American Transnational Intellectuals in the 1920's and 1990's," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (September 1999): 641-667.

reduced if jobs were available in the interior of Mexico.<sup>144</sup> Despite the political rhetoric from the Mexican government that the program would provide employment opportunities for the unemployed, unskilled worker, it was the Mexican citizens and potential workers who ultimately benefited the least. Mexican farmers were displaced when their lands were sold to large companies who used modern technologies to replace traditional methods of farming.<sup>145</sup>

The United States was the primary business participant in the program and was able to access cheap labor without having to negotiate with American labor unions, who had been the major opponents of the Bracero program.<sup>146</sup> The Mexican government claimed the major goal of the program was to provide employment opportunities specifically to the displaced *bracero* workers and others living along the northern Mexican border which, in turn, would lessen the

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<sup>144</sup> Martinez, ed., *Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*: Bill Lenderking, "The U.S.-Mexican Border and NAFTA: Problem or Paradigm?" 196.

<sup>145</sup> Martinez, ed., *Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*: Bill Lenderking, "The U.S.-Mexican Border and NAFTA: Problem or Paradigm?" 193.

<sup>146</sup> Arthur F. Corwin, ed., *Immigrants-and Immigrants: Perspectives on Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 265.

flow of undocumented immigration.<sup>147</sup> Yet, females were the ones more likely to find jobs in the maquiladora rather than the *braceros*, who were predominantly male.<sup>148</sup> Women were actively recruited from rural Mexico because men were considered "more difficult to control."<sup>149</sup> Contrary to assurances that returning *braceros* would find jobs in factories near the border, it is doubtful that the thousands of unemployed *braceros*, who were almost entirely male, found work in the mostly female-employing maquiladoras. Consequently, the *braceros* and other unemployed laborers continued their trek north, entering illegally into the United States.<sup>150</sup>

The greatest mass migration from Mexico to the United States began in the 1960s and has steadily increased to the present.<sup>151</sup> The following chart was made from data obtained from the Pew Hispanic Center and represents estimates of

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<sup>147</sup> Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 234.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-35.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>151</sup> M. González, *Mexicanos*, 224-25.

the unauthorized Mexican migrant population increases in the United States:<sup>152</sup>

Table 1: Unauthorized Mexican Migrants in the United States from 1960 through 2005.

Year	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005
	576,000	760,000	2,000,000	4,298,000	9,065,000	10,600,000

As was observed previously with the termination of the formal Bracero program, the United States agribusinesses were used to having a continuous supply of cheap labor and had difficulty adapting to paying the higher wages demanded by American laborers. The large farm owners were used to paying low wages to those who would not complain because of a fear of deportation. Therefore, jobs were almost guaranteed for the undocumented Mexican workers entering into the United States illegally. The agribusinesses were dependent upon these workers, and arguably, are still dependent on the immigrant labor that comes north every year, whether illegal or legal.

Mexico's population increased from 36 million in 1960 to 66 million in 1980.<sup>153</sup> In addition, the number of its

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<sup>152</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics* (Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center).

residents living in extreme poverty grew rapidly.<sup>154</sup> Seen as a potential employment prospect, albeit a low-paying prospect, Mexican workers living in the southern portion of the country, traveled north to the border towns. For those lucky enough to find work in the maquiladoras, there was virtually no room left in the city and thousands of Mexicans were forced to construct make-shift housing on the outskirts of town, often referred to as "shanty-towns." These Mexican border towns were not equipped to deal with the rapid industrial development and their public services were unable to keep up with the daily arrival of thousands of people searching for jobs. The existing wastewater treatment, drinking water supply and solid waste disposal facilities were overwhelmed and unable to meet the needs of the growing population. While these basic utilities were functioning at sub-standard levels in the border cities, they are virtually non-existent in the "colonias" outside of town.

Living in extreme poverty and unable to support himself, the Mexican worker is aware he can earn ten times

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<sup>153</sup> Consejo Nacional De Poblacion, *Situacion Demografica de Mexico*, <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/1997.htm>.

<sup>154</sup> Chavez, *Shadowed Lives*, 30.

the salary he gets in the maquiladora, doing the same job in a factory across the border.<sup>155</sup> The maquiladora may create more jobs, but not necessarily living wages nor a higher quality of life and instead are viewed as sweatshops where employees toil long hours in repetitive tasks and are often exposed to toxic materials. Literally within miles of the border, the Mexican worker simply has to watch television or read the newspapers to know what the United States has to offer. In a 2005 research study conducted by Kathryn Kopinak, Senior Fellow with the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California-San Diego, employment in maquiladoras leads people to cross the border into the United States to work.<sup>156</sup> While maquiladora employment alone does not force the worker across the border, exposure to impoverished conditions, seemingly uncontrollable crime, illegal drug trafficking, widespread environmental damage and the squalor of border cities also contribute to massive migration to the United

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<sup>155</sup> J.Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 230.

<sup>156</sup> Kathryn Kopinak, "The Relationship Between Employment In Maquiladora Industries In Mexico And Labor Migration To The United States," *The Center For Comparative Immigration Studies*, August, 2005, [http://www.ccis-ucsd.org/PUBLICATIONS/working\\_papers.htm](http://www.ccis-ucsd.org/PUBLICATIONS/working_papers.htm). (accessed on June 24, 2006).

States. In general, the overall quality of life for the laborer in Mexico is poor.

The "borderlands" as it is often referred, is the frontier area between the United States and Mexico. The border cities that exist in this frontier area have developed into a distinctive subculture, a blending of the Mexican and the American way of life. Due in part to its transient culture, life and identity in the borderlands is complicated and conflicted. As noted by sociologist Pablo Vila, in his research of the identity construction of the El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico area, life on the border is difficult:

On the Mexican side of the border this is so because the American influence on Juarez' inhabitants is viewed negatively by many Mexicans from the interior, who claim Juarenses have become *agringados* (Americanized). On the American side of the border, although living near Mexico allows many Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans to be in touch with their heritage, the presence of Mexico is a constant reminder of the poverty and corruption many people identify with that country.<sup>157</sup>

Consequently, contradictions exist in just about every aspect of life on the border: economically, physically and culturally. Historically, conflict and interdependence have

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<sup>157</sup> Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders*: 4.

been deeply embedded in the experience of those living on both sides of the border. In particular, the experience of the Mexicans and Mexican Americans is mixed with hopefulness and desperation. Norma E. Cantu, English professor at Laredo State University, characterizes this emotional conflict in her essay presented to the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies:

The pain and joy of the borderlands--perhaps no greater or lesser than the emotions stirred by living anywhere contradictions abound, cultures clash and meld, and life is lived on an edge--come from a wound that will not heal and yet is forever healing. These lands have always been here; the river of people has flowed for centuries. It is only the designation "border" that is relatively new, and along with the term comes the life one lives in this "in-between world" that makes us the "other," the marginalized...<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Norma E. Cantu, *Living on the Border: A Wound that Will Not Heal* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Center for Folklife Programs and Culteral Studies, 1993).

## CHAPTER V: UNWELCOME NEIGHBORS

Although migrants from other countries have, for hundreds of years, immigrated into the United States, it can be argued that migrants from Mexico have been viewed as the most problematic. On any given day, in any U.S. city, in any newspaper, television news show, internet posting or email, opinions and or facts regarding illegal immigrants from Mexico can be found. Geographic proximity has undoubtedly bolstered this relationship, which can be characterized as symbiotic. The history of the United States and Mexico, from the Mexican-American War to the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, has established a relationship both governments have become dependent. These countries share a history shaped by war, surges of mass immigration and recurrent efforts of deportation.

The westward movement of Americans in the early 1800s and the notion of Manifest Destiny created an antagonistic relationship with Mexico that eventually led to the Mexican-American War. Mexico impeded the course of the United States' expanding empire and a war between the neighboring countries established a border that was, and

still is, controlled by the victors. Despite assurances by the United States, as documented in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans and their descendants have not maintained many political or territorial rights. Instead, Mexican Americans were perceived in the United States as a conquered people. Mexicans were forced to become outsiders in their native land. Since the end of the Mexican-American war, Mexicans, living in the United States and Mexico, have maintained a passionate anger at the outcome and have yet to reconcile with their loss and instead, continue to harbor a sense of resentment toward the United States. This anger is enhanced by a bitter feeling of injury. These long-standing emotions have fueled illegal migration between the two countries.

Approximately fifty years after the war ended with the United States, internal conflict within Mexico lead many of its citizens to revolt against its government. As an alternative to fighting, a large number of Mexican citizens in the bordering cities opted to leave their country and migrate to the United States in an effort to obtain refuge across the border. The United States was in the midst of World War I and during these years, Mexican immigrants sought, and found, employment in the agricultural and industrial service areas. It is estimated that more than

one million Mexicans migrated into the United States between 1900 and 1930.<sup>159</sup> Mexican workers migrating to the United States encountered very little opposition as their services were needed. The United States not only provided a safe haven but it also provided numerous employment opportunities. This era marked the beginning of the enormous flow of Mexicans to the United States. Of more significance, this era marked the beginning of the demand for unskilled laborers in the United States.

The Bracero Program brought millions of Mexican farm laborers to work in the agricultural fields of the United States beginning in World War II. This resulted in an influx of Mexican workers from the interior of their country to its border cities seeking employment. Mexicans eagerly left their villages and towns to earn wages significantly higher than offered in their country. This migration was detrimental to the social and commercial structure of the villages and towns. With much of the workforce gone, these towns had no cyclical source of revenue and often, Mexican farming communities were literally abandoned. Yet, the economic benefit to the United States employers was significant because their

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<sup>159</sup> J.Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 77.

profit margin increased. Flexible economies and labor markets soon become accustomed to the availability of unskilled workers.

The Bracero program established a vital link to the agricultural labor from Mexico. When the first phase of the program ended in 1947, illegal migration to the United States increased because the agribusinesses had become dependant on the Mexican labor class. The Bracero program employed millions of Mexican Nationals. When the Bracero Program ended in 1964, thousands of Mexicans laborers were unemployed and stranded in the Mexican border towns. Many of the workers stayed in the border cities hoping the program would be reinstated. The program was not reinstated and Mexicans chose to enter the United States illegally and in most cases, were able to work for the same businesses contracted during the Bracero program.

Mexico's Border Industrial Program was originally created in the 1960s in response to the high unemployment of Bracero agricultural workers. The BIP provided foreign investors access to a competitive wage structure and comparatively unregulated conditions in Mexico without traditional trade barriers. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was later created as a binding treaty of the BIP. Corporations from the United States are the major

participants in this program. These corporations have built factories in an industrial area less than ten miles within the Mexican border. It was seen as an ideal business opportunity for the American maquiladora owners since the Mexican worker is generally paid less than their American counterpart. Yet, wages in the Mexican maquiladora plants cannot compete with wages anywhere in the United States. Many Mexicans criticize what they perceive as the deception of those who negotiated NAFTA and express disapproval of the preferential treatment and exploitative practices of the United States corporations that have moved to Mexico to take advantage of the treaty's generous allowances. Despite claims that the NAFTA trade treaty would improve wages and conditions for Mexican workers, their wages have dropped and conditions have not improved. Therefore, many of these unskilled workers illegally enter the United States out of economic necessity.

Mexico and the United States share a geographic continent and the close proximity is a source of a never-ending series of problems. The border between the two countries represents the symbol of the great divide: a boundary separating two very distinctive social, economic and cultural communities. Other than the Native Americans, Mexicans are the oldest, yet considered the newest inhabitants of the southwest region of North America.

Mexico argues over half their country was wrenched away, their labor pool drained during World War I and II, and their economy exploited by the Maquiladora and NAFTA programs. In general, the Mexican sentiment is that the United States has taken an unfair advantage of its poor neighbor. Although there are those Mexican citizens who harbor this sense of resentment toward the United States, resentment is not what pushes them across the border. They risk their lives and the lives of their family to travel into the United States to seek gainful, albeit illegal, employment as the means to improve their economic circumstances. Migration from Mexico will continue until the Mexican economy can provide adequate job opportunities and a decent standard of living to the majority of its citizens. The lure of better wages in the United States and a way of life that offers greater economic security and personal opportunities fuels this migration. George J. Borjas, a professor of economics and public policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, who favors curbing illegal immigration, wrote the following in an editorial to the New York Times:

The U.S.-Mexico wage gap is among the largest between contiguous countries. A manufacturing worker in the United States earns four times the

salary of a Mexican factory worker and 30 times that of a Mexican agricultural worker.<sup>160</sup>

For the Mexican laborer, crossing the border to work, either legal or illegally, has developed into an accepted part of life and local culture, in some cases generations old. Undoubtedly, there is a demand for Mexican labor in the United States and the United States government has not aggressively pursued the employers who make the migratory flow so inviting. This flow has only increased over the years. According to the most recent Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2005, published by the United States Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, in the beginning of 2005, there were an estimated 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States, Mexico remained the leading country of origin, and the numbers continue to grow.

Given its complexity, it is unlikely that the Mexican immigration problem can be resolved in the near future. The immigration issue in the United States has intensified since September 11, 2001 and it is the Mexican undocumented

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<sup>160</sup> George J. Borjas, "Mexico's One-Way Remedy," *New York Times*, July 18 2000, sec. A.

immigrant who has become its scapegoat. The debate has intensified with a demand for more law enforcement to control the United States-Mexico border. Hopefully, the United States government will deal with the issue of undocumented immigrants in a manner that protects its citizens' interests and ensures fair and humane treatment for those Mexicans who have left their impoverished country in pursuit of a better quality of life.



Fig. 5 Antonio Galan, age 64 in photo. Photo taken in Rochester, Michigan, circa 1945. Proud naturalized citizen of the United States and great-grandfather of Lisa Martinez Fields.

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