

Operation Wetback, 1954

At the height of the Bracero Program, when over 309,000 contracts were issued, the US government instituted a forced repatriation program that shared many of the insidious aspects of an earlier Depression-era repatriation. As fewer contracts were issued, the number of undocumented migrants from Mexico increased. In 1954, the INS began repatriating these undocumented workers under a program with the name "Operation Wetback."

Undocumented migration followed earlier recruitment patterns by labor contractors and stemmed from the regions of Mexico that sent the largest number of Braceros to the US. Although the US did not take an active stance against undocumented migration until 1986, Operation Wetback led to the eventual mass deportation of, according to the INS, 1.3 million Mexicans, who were mostly undocumented but also legal temporary migrants and US citizens of Mexican descent.

This chapter discusses the rise and role of undocumented labor, particularly in Texas, as a direct result of the phases, or bureaucratic shape-shifting, of a Bracero Program developed to serve the interests of US growers and looks at the operations and methods of repatriation and the impact of Operation Wetback on subsequent INS border enforcement policies. The Mexican government initially restricted Braceros from entering states known for racial or wage discrimination as evidenced in the blacklisting of Texas and its state government's response by forming the "Good Neighbor Commission." The El Paso Incident occurred when Texas growers demanded that the federal government meet their labor demands lest they take matters into their own hands. These actions laid the groundwork for Operation Wetback.

The Blacklisting of Texas: A Case in Confronting Racism

One of the provisions of the Bracero Program arrangement was the Mexican government's insistence that workers not be subject to discriminatory

Table 2.1: *Timeline of Operation Wetback*

Date	Event
August 1953	Attorney General Henry Brownell tours Southern California and decides illegal immigration is a "shocking and unsettling" issue.
May 1954	Brownell hires retired Lieutenant General Joseph Swing to head Immigration Service. His task is to plan and implement Operation Wetback; he hires two generals, Frank Partridge and Edwin Howard, as consultants.
May 11	At a dinner with international labor leaders, <i>Laredo Times</i> publisher William Allen is told that Brownell suggested "shooting illegals" as a method of deterrence.
June	Plans are unveiled to punish illegal immigrants, make them subject to mass deportation, and discourage employers from "knowingly" hiring illegal migrants.
June 9	California roundup and deportation begins.
June 10	<i>Phase One of AZ-CA Operation: Buslift</i> First Greyhound bus leaves El Centro, California for Nogales, Arizona, with detainees from the San Francisco regional detention center and roadblock inspection captures. A total of 28 buses with 1,008 migrants are shipped to Arizona for rail transport to Mexican interior.
June 17	<i>Phase Two of AZ-CA Operation: Sweeps</i> Agricultural regions of Arizona and Southern California are targets of sweeps. INS authorities find a great deal of grower willingness to help identify those without papers.
June 17- July 26	Special detail dispatched in Los Angeles, with assistance of local police, nets 4,403 people, 64 per cent of whom are located in non-agricultural jobs.
June 20	Sweeps continue in same fashion in Central Valley of California by setting up bases in Fresno and Sacramento.
June 24	Bills 3660 and 3661 are introduced in both houses of Congress to deter employers and smugglers from the illegal immigration racket. Neither bill passes.
July 3	First mobile task force deployed in McAllen, Texas, to set up roadblock inspections, inspect trains, and deter migrants from moving northward.
July 15	First day of full operations in Texas. Focus on Lower Rio Grande Valley.

September 3	First deportation via sea. <i>SS Emancipation</i> and <i>SS Vera Cruz</i> eventually sail the 2,000-mile voyage from Port Isabel, Texas, to Veracruz, Mexico, 26 times, both ships carrying a total of 800 deportees per trip.
September 18	First airlift from Midwest begins. Deportees from Chicago are sent to Brownsville, Texas, followed by airlifts from Saint Louis, Kansas City, Memphis, and Dallas. After flight, most are shipped by sea to Veracruz.

treatment. Yet interpersonal and structural racism reached such a fevered pitch in Texas that the Mexican government refused to allow Braceros to go to work there from 1942 to 1947. Texan-style Jim Crow segregation was visibly apparent in public establishments where signs declared "No Dogs Negroes Mexicans" and "We Serve White's [sic] Only, No Spanish or Mexicans" (see Foley 1997). The US railroad industry quickly attempted to circumvent the Texas blacklisting by contracting Braceros outside of the state and then transferring them to work on the tracks in the Texan towns of Monahans and Midland (McCain 1981, 58). The discrimination against these workers was detailed to a representative of the Mexican Foreign Office in September 1943. The Braceros in question contended that they were denied entrance to public places of entertainment, were not permitted to sit at tables in refreshment parlors or to purchase items there except by using the service entrance, and could not patronize barbershops or other places of service except in areas almost inaccessible to them. On the matter of unequal treatment, they complained that they were given straw mattresses while Americans had cotton ones; they had no first-aid kits; they had inadequate bathing facilities and sanitation, as well as overcrowded conditions; and they were charged \$1.00 every two weeks for lodgings, a fee that the employer refused to show on payroll slips (McCain 1981, 59). As a result of these complaints, the Mexican government used an expansive definition of racial discrimination to bar the use of contracted workers in Texas by both the railroad and agricultural industries:

The Mexican government also tended to view discrimination in economic as well as social terms, as connected with jobs and wages as well as schools, restaurants, and barbershops. In other words, its definition included the treatment of Mexicans as farm laborers. Because of the proximity of cheap labor in Mexico, discriminatory hiring practices of American labor and industry that

restricted Mexicans to field work, and the workers' lack of non-agricultural skills, parts of Texas had long remained among the lowest farm wage areas in the country. (Scruggs 1962, 124)

Texan growers began to formally request contract labor from the Mexican government as early as 1943, although they strenuously objected to US and Mexican government interference and wanted a program similar to the first Bracero Program that operated during World War I. When the blacklisting continued beyond 1943, growers encouraged undocumented laborers to migrate to Texas through the same type of direct recruitment strategies that were implemented during that war.

Aware of the need to take action to improve a situation made more acute by acts of discrimination against Mexican Americans in uniform and visiting Mexican dignitaries, Texan Governor Coke Stevenson induced the state legislature to pass the so-called Caucasian Race resolution, which he approved on May 6, 1943. The resolution affirmed the right of all Caucasians within the state to equal treatment in public places of business and amusement and denounced racial discrimination as "violating the good neighbor policy of our state." Doubtless, this manifesto of good intentions added to the surprise that greeted the Mexican announcement that Braceros would still not be allowed to go to Texas (Scruggs 1979, 88). As University of Texas historian Neil Foley notes, "This clever resolution was intended to convince Mexico that discrimination against Caucasians would not be tolerated in Texas, the assumption being that Mexicans were, of course, members of the Caucasian race, which they were only in some legal, pseudo-scientific, and ethnographical sense; but practically no Texans regarded Mexicans, particularly Bracero farmworkers, as white" (Foley 1997, 206). The resolution kept the system of racial discrimination against Blacks intact. Its intentions were not to promote racial equality of treatment and the eradication of racist beliefs. Rather, it was meant to ensure that Anglo¹ growers in Texas would have access to the labor they desired. The resolution stated:

Our neighbors to the South were cooperating to stamp out Nazism and preserve democracy and to assist the national policy of hemispherical solidarity, the state of Texas resolves that all persons of the Caucasian Race... are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of all public places or business or amusement. Whoever denied to any

person these privileges shall be considered as violating the good neighbor policy of our State. (Texas Caucasian Race Resolution 1943, as paraphrased in Foley 1997, 206)

How ironic that in the effort to link the common agendas of Texas and Mexico in the eradication of the Nazi threat, the state promoted an agenda of equality for *Caucasians only* in terms of access to public space. The law disregarded economic inequalities among racial groups, as well as the continued intolerance toward Blacks.

Throughout World War II, Stevenson beseeched Mexican Foreign Labor Minister Ezequiel Padilla to permit the flow of recruited labor to his state. Drawing upon President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1933 inaugural address, which stated the US intention to pursue a policy of the "Good Neighbor" toward the citizens of Latin America, he created a Texas Good Neighbor Commission in September 1943 and promised that state law officials would deal severely with Texans who discriminated against Mexicans (Kirstein 1977, 54). The Commission would investigate charges of racial discrimination brought to its attention and promote a gradual education program for Anglo Texans about Latin America (Gutierrez 1995, 140-41). Texas became the focal point of the Good Neighbor policy "... due to the high percentage of Mexicans in its population, the correspondingly greater number of 'incidents,' and the application to Mexicans of many of the formal restrictions against Negroes throughout the state" (Scruggs 1962, 120). Mexican Foreign Minister Padilla stated that the Texas blacklist would continue because of the state's inability to solve its racist practices:

In many parts of Texas... Mexicans cannot attend public gatherings without being subject to vexations, complaints and protests. There are towns where my fellow countrymen are forced to live in separate districts. Just a week ago the daughter of a Mexican consul was refused service in a public establishment. The ban would not be lifted... until Texas had passed a law prohibiting such practices. A bill to this effect was introduced into the 1945 session of the Texas legislature but, needless to say, it did not pass. (McWilliams 1990 [1948], 242)

In response to the Good Neighbor policy, the Texas Good Neighbor Commission, and the Caucasian Race Resolution, people in Mexico developed their own organization, *Comité Mexicano Contra el Racismo* (Mexican

Committee Against Racism) to document racial discrimination practices in the United States in the areas of education, labor, and consumer establishments. The Committee's publication, *Fraternidad*, included a column entitled "Texas, ¿Buen Vecino?" ("Texas, Good Neighbor?"), which detailed incidents of discrimination against Mexicans in nearly 150 Texan communities. The Committee pressured US and Mexican state officials to deal with these racist practices.

In addition to *Fraternidad*, the Mexican popular press also documented the mistreatment of Mexicans residing in the US: "Hardly a day passed, [US] Ambassador Messersmith informed Washington in March 1944, that some bitter article about discrimination against Mexicans in the United States did not appear in the press of Mexico City" (Scruggs 1962, 121). In addition, the headlines of major newspapers in Mexico during 1942-47 consistently referred to the continuing significance and persistence of racism in Texas (Galarza 1956; McCain 1981).

The Texas situation clarifies how race was deployed in a power struggle to define the subordinate in ways that justified Mexicans' unequal and limited access to resources and social institutions. Anglo growers used race as a line of division within class blocs to ensure themselves a steady and cheap supply of Mexican immigrant labor. Hostile acts at the interpersonal level, documented by various sources, were bolstered by structural barriers to equality based on the demarcation of racial categories. The Caucasian Race Resolution and the Texas Good Neighbor Commission failed in their stated goals because their framers did not intend to promote social justice and anti-racist agendas. Quite simply, they represented attempts by the Texas state government to serve the interests of the most powerful in securing a cheap and controllable source of labor whose rights would always be in question and whose status could be easily amended to suit the needs of the employer. Texan and other Southwestern growers circumvented the safeguards put in place by the Mexican government by not contracting workers through the Bracero Program, with its rules and regulations, but by directly recruiting undocumented workers from Mexico. US state responses to these grower recruitment efforts are detailed below.

By 1948, a series of assurances by the Texas state government were secured before growers were finally allowed to import labor from Mexico. The Mexican government also blacklisted the states of Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming until the 1950s due to discriminatory practices there. The majority of docu-

mented cases were wage discrimination cases where Mexican sugar-beet workers were paid a lower rate than non-Mexican workers due to their racial identity.

Los Braceros y Los Indocumentados: Negotiating Legal Status to Fill the Labor Pool

The Bracero Program was not administered continuously, nor did it follow the same course of action throughout its 22-year history. Garcia y Griego (1983) notes three main phases, which corresponded to the level of regulation to which growers would commit in order to ensure a labor pool to their liking. Labor demands by growers were met by a number of specific actions taken by the state or growers themselves.

The first phase, 1942-46, was marked by significant Mexican government input into the operations of the program and a true bargaining position between the national governments in the bilateral labor arrangement. As we saw above, Texas and some other states were banned from the program because of discriminatory practices. Garcia y Griego (1983) estimates that only 4 to 7 per cent of all Bracero contracts were signed during this time of wartime labor relief. Its greatest flaw was the automatic deduction of 10 per cent of the Braceros' wages for deposit in Mexican banks. Class action lawsuits have brought to light a persistent pattern. Growers appeared to be diligent in collecting the automatic paycheck deductions, which were then to be deposited into an account managed by Wells Fargo Bank. From there, monies were wired to the Mexican National Bank and *Banco Agricultura*, among others. However, many Braceros claimed that upon returning to Mexico to request their savings, local bank officials told them there was no money for them. Scruggs (1960, 149) says that the original intent of the savings deduction was that the money would "... be used to purchase for [the worker] agricultural implements which the [US] Farm Security Administration pledged the Mexican government it would try to obtain in the United States." Jones (1945) provides an account of the large sums of money involved but does not track the extent to which claims were made by Braceros and the eventual payout rate. The Mexican banks all filed for bankruptcy and were closed in the 1980s, so recent attempts to claim the funds that were automatically deducted from workers' wages have fallen on deaf ears. This era was certainly marked by a higher degree of cooperation between the federal governments of Mexico and the US, but the savings debacle sheds light on how the workers experienced the program.

The second phase, 1947-54, constituted a shift in policy from mass legalization to mass repatriation. The events that dramatized these coupled approaches were the El Paso Incident and Operation Wetback, which are discussed in more detail below. They represented a serious breakdown in bilateral relations and the extent to which the US government committed itself to both securing a workforce for US growers and dealing with the "illegal invasion." Rather than putting a stop to illegal migration, INS agents who found undocumented workers were authorized to contract or legalize them as Braceros at the US work sites where they were already working. The bureaucratic regulations of the Bracero Program were applied *ex post facto* to legalize illegal workers. Legalization was the process by which deportable Mexicans who had been in the US for a certain number of weeks were given Bracero contracts, usually to work for the same employer, without the laborer having to return to Mexico and undergo the screening process in the interior or the employer having to pay transportation to the US (Garcia y Griego 1983, 57).

Overall, it became obvious that South Texas growers were going to secure a Mexican labor force either through the Bracero Program's formal mechanisms or through informal recruitment of undocumented labor. In many ways, the US government and agribusiness created the illegal immigration "problem" as a way to undercut the Mexican government's bargaining power. The Mexican government's aim of protecting its citizens from Anglo discrimination was consistently eroded by an employment sector that directly recruited labor from Mexico through extra-legal means while the US government turned a blind eye. As the number of contracted Braceros increased during this period, the accompanying number of undocumented immigrants similarly rose. Because of this derisively dubbed "wetback invasion," the INS instituted a practice of forced mass repatriation that deported a total of 1.3 million Mexicans, most but not all undocumented, according to US estimates.

The final phase of the Bracero Program from 1955-64 represented both the program's mass scale as well as the contradictions that eventually led to its termination. The principal contradiction was between the desire for immigrants as a source of labor and the abhorrence of immigrants by the Anglo population. Though Public Law 78 was passed in 1951, at the behest of the Mexican government, to formalize the program through a US federal law, its provisions effectively favored US growers. It was designed to end the informal recruitment and *ex post facto* legalization process but

ended the restrictions on Texas and other blacklisted states. The overall number of Bracero contracts remained at 1954 levels and represented truly a mass recruitment. "Of the total 4.6 million contracts issued during the life of the program, about 72 per cent occurred between 1955 and 1964," according to Garcia y Griego (1983, 57-59).

The El Paso Incident

In October 1948, the Texas-Mexico border was opened by immigration officials to allow several thousand undocumented workers across the border and into the agricultural fields of Texas. In open defiance of bilateral agreements, what came to be known as the "El Paso Incident" created a political morass for the two governments while appeasing Texan growers by lifting the moratorium on allowing Braceros to receive contracts for work in the state. Most workers went directly to work in the cotton fields and were processed and often escorted by Border Patrol agents. This event formalized the informal practice of using undocumented Mexican labor to till Texan fields while the blacklist was in place. What made this particular incident problematic was the direct US state involvement in managing and controlling the migrant stream.

The most egregious aspect of the El Paso Incident was the direct role played by cabinet-level officials in the decision to open up the border in direct betrayal of the agreement with Mexico. The main source of contention was the prevailing wage standard as determined by the Texan cotton growers and Mexican federal government representatives. Agricultural wages in Texas were by far the lowest in the nation, and growers set the prevailing wage (the hourly rate that domestic laborers would supposedly accept as the lowest tolerable wage) at \$2.50 per 100 pounds of harvested cotton. This practice of growers setting their own wage rate was fully allowed by the US Department of Labor, and the growers' figures were neither verified nor examined by Labor officials. When Mexican officials set the prevailing wage at \$3.00, the growers were infuriated. The El Paso Growers' Association fought the challenge to their wage rate by the Mexican government's drafted contract (similar to the World War II Bracero contract), so "on Oct. 15, 1947 [Mexico] abrogated the Texas agreement" (Scruggs 1979, 95). The growers turned to the Border Patrol to open the border to illegal immigrants, and they did so under the direct supervision of Department of Labor officials.

Between October 13 and 18, 1947, some 6,000 Mexicans entered the

US. They glutted the Texas labor market so that, according to press reports, wages dropped to \$1.50. G.J. McBee, chief patrol inspector at El Paso, stated that 6,000 men had been arrested for illegal entry and had been paroled to the growers because the Border Patrol had been "unable to cope with the situation" (Galarza 1964, 49-50).

The director of the United States Employment Service (housed in the Department of Labor) took direct responsibility for opening the border and for the subsequent release of undocumented Mexican workers directly into the hands of Texas cotton growers. "[Director] Robert Goodwin claimed at hearings before the Bureau of the Budget that the 'El Paso Incident' was created by him on the allegation that the present treaty is not working in that we are not getting needed farm labor from Mexico." (Kirstein 1977, 69)

"Go Back!" The Repatriation Campaigns of Operation "Wetback"

The unending demand for labor, the US government support for growers to secure workers by legal or illegal means, and the lack of Mexican government bargaining power created a significant backlash against Mexican immigrants working and residing in the US. At the same time that the US government encouraged illegal immigration, government officials voiced mounting pressure to deal with the "wetback problem." Some were truly talking out of both sides of their mouths, but this contradiction also represented a bureaucratic struggle between the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, State, and INS (Calavita 1992; Cohen 2001; Garcia 1980; Kirstein 1977; Ngai 2004).

US Attorney General Howard Brownell was a vehement opponent of undocumented Mexican laborers, and he went to great lengths to formulate and seek congressional approval to use the US military to repatriate the undocumented. It was rumored that he sought support from organized labor to eliminate undocumented workers by any means. He was cited as saying that "one method of discouraging wetbacks would be to allow the border patrol to shoot some of them" (Garcia 1980, 172). He eventually hired former lieutenant general Joseph Swing, who had served in the punitive expedition against Pancho Villa in 1916, to carry out the repatriation campaign. Using a mobile task force deployed along strategic points on the border where illegal entry prevailed, his forces proceeded from west to east, then encircled and forced Mexicans, assumedly but not necessarily undocumented, over the border (see Table 2.1).

In 1954, Commissioner Swing mounted a mass repatriation campaign of illegal Mexican workers, dubbed "Operation Wetback," which resulted in what the INS estimated as a return of 1.3 million workers to Mexico.² The means of repatriation varied—some migrants were forced to return; some left voluntarily—but the effect was the same: "Operation Wetback did not bring an end to illegal immigration from Mexico. It did slow the influx for a short time, but it brought no permanent solution to the problem. It was a stop-gap measure" (Garcia 1980, 232). It sent a strong message not only to the Mexican people about their rights to live and work in the US but to Anglo growers as well: they would not be held responsible for the mass migration that they initiated and perpetuated by actively recruiting and employing undocumented labor. This mass repatriation occurred at the same time the Bracero Program was running at its peak. The contradiction was made manifest: Mexican immigrants were not wanted in the US if they came on their own, yet their labor would be remunerated and rights protected if they had a Bracero contract.

In what might have been possibly the first military-style public relations operation, Swing and his agents controlled media coverage, created press releases to tout the success of deportations, and crafted media relations in a manner conducive to INS interests. In contrast to the strongly controlled media campaign in the US, there was no INS attempt at coverage or commentary on Operation Wetback in Mexico. What the Mexican media covered were the deplorable working conditions that Braceros endured; the slow descent of a binational program into one decided unilaterally by the US; and events that epitomized the callousness of the operation, such as forced bus, train, and ship deportations.

Bus lifts often resulted in flooding Mexico's border cities with thousands of unemployed, displaced men who knew full well that jobs were waiting for them over the border. "Some 88 Braceros died of sunstroke as a result of a round-up that had taken place in 112-degree heat, and [labor official Milton Plumb] argued that more would have died had Red Cross not intervened" (Ngai 2004, 156). Train and air deportations were modeled after the Depression-era repatriation program. The main goal was to deposit men hundreds of miles south of the border to impede re-entry. "More than 25 per cent were removed on hired cargo ships that ran from Port Isabel, Texas, to Vera Cruz, on the Mexican Gulf Coast; a congressional investigation likened one vessel (where a riot took place on board) to an 'eighteenth-century slave ship' and a 'penal hell ship'" (Ngai 2004, 156).

Repatriation serves as a persistent reminder of the second-class citizenship status of Mexicans in the US. Xavier Castañeda, a Mexican public health officer, addressed a group of undocumented workers who were being returned to Mexico via the Rio Grande Valley International Airport with the following:

I am charged to tell you that you have committed a great sin in coming to this country without being asked for, without being needed here. The Government of Mexico is disgusted, fed up with this clandestine business of you, its citizens, going to the United States for the mirage of the dollar. But now it is all finished.... Now I beg you, in the name of our country, in the name of Mexico, I beg you not to return in this clandestine manner. In the name of Mexican Immigration, in the name of these American officers, I am charged with speaking to you in clear and simple Spanish, that you abstain. Your hands are needed in Mexico, and only the man who is worth nothing there, comes here in this manner. Do not continue to make yourselves warehouses full of cheap Indians.

You should be ashamed of yourselves, abandoning your homes, traitors to your Mexico. Mexico is esteemed and loved in the world, you are making a bad example with this situation.... So I, a Mexican among the rest of you, with all my soul, as the shield of the University of Mexico says, "My spirit speaks for my race," I am speaking for my race.... So I want you to tell me, boys, are you going to come back illegally? (All answer "No, no.") Louder, are you going to come back? ("No.") May God help you and the Fatherland reward you. Above all, Mexico is our country. Later, if they start contracting, everyone of you who comes here legally contracted will be received with open arms. You will bear the name of a true Mexican citizen, rather than as a wet-back, as you are now designated, a very sad thing for Mexico.... Finally, in the name of Mexico, I am going to repeat once more, are you going to come back without permits? (Answer: No.) We hope to God you don't. Go on back to your country. Your mothers, your daughters, the most precious treasures are awaiting you there. Viva Mexico! (Castañeda [1951] in Kiser and Kiser 1979, 164-66)

Castañeda's message was clear and unequivocal. First, undocumented immigrants were to blame for their situation. Second, he presented a clear racial demarcation between his fellow Mexicans who were acceptable and to be honored and the "Indian" wetback who was a source of embarrassment, easily exploitable by greedy Americans. Third, all forms of social

control would be utilized to deter further undocumented immigration—forced repatriation, calls to Mexican patriotism, a sense of pride in self, invocations of God and sin, the law of the land in both Mexico and the US, intimidation, and a mix of guilt and patriarchy in the form of "precious treasures." Finally, the Bracero Program was the only viable means of migrating to the US. Even though the reasons for migration were the same (chasing the "mirage of the dollar") and the results were the same (abandoning homes, losing hands needed in Mexico, leaving families behind, etc.), somehow that would all be acceptable as long as the would-be migrant subjected himself to the US and Mexico state-sanctioned contracting process. Thus, this Mexican public health officer denigrated the deported in ways that fit both Mexican-based racializations of poor, indigenous, rural Mexicans and US racializations of Mexican immigrants as "wetbacks." In one speech, these two differing racialized definitions are closely articulated into a unified means for denigration, intimidation, and social control.

The specific principles that informed how Operation Wetback was conducted are now recognized as Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) doctrine. LIC is a military science concept developed in response to guerrilla tactics deployed by first Korean, then Vietnamese soldiers in response to US military aggression. Its general contours include: "(1) an emphasis on internal (rather than external) defense of a nation, (2) an emphasis on controlling targeted civilian populations rather than territory, and (3) the assumption by the military of police-like and other unconventional, typically non-military roles, along with the adoption by the police of military characteristics" (Dunn 1996, 21).

The US government deemed the border out of control, and Attorney General Brownell intentionally sought out a career military man to bring military knowledge and expertise to the issue of illegal immigration. Swing employed techniques with which he was most familiar to effectively militarize the US-Mexico border region. His mobile task force of agents were deployed in pre-specified positions along the border and in major cities that had a large undocumented Mexican labor force in order to round-up Mexicans and force them south. Quite literally, communities were encircled by several hundred border patrol agents. "Sweeps" and "operations" were used to contain the population and force them over the border by bus, boat, train, and air lifts. "Perhaps the most important principle evident in the Border Patrol's leading role in

Operation Wetback is that undocumented immigrants were treated in terms analogous to that of an 'enemy' to be repulsed and driven out" (Dunn 1996, 16).

Many of the physical markers that currently define the militarization of the US-Mexico border were either used or suggested during Operation Wetback. Swing urged the building of a chain-link fence at the major illegal crossing points, but this was not immediately constructed. Dunn (1996, 15) notes the use of aircraft to survey the region in subsequent "mop-up operations"; the use of military vehicles to hunt down and capture suspected illegal immigrants; and joint Border Patrol and local police "round-ups," which have been documented and critically analyzed by Romero and Serag (2005).

1965 Immigration and Nationality Act

In response to the Bracero Program and Operation Wetback, US legislators became much more aware of the need to address the immigration laws that determined who could legally enter the US and become permanent residents. The 1952 McCarran-Warren Act was basically an extension of the 1924 Quota Acts that severely restricted immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, barred Asian immigration, and left Western Hemisphere migration mostly unregulated except for establishing the Border Patrol. Due to the paternalistic character of the US state, quotas were never applied to nations of the Western Hemisphere, but the flat rate of admittance based on national origin was applied to Western Hemisphere nations in the new 1965 law.

There are currently two competing views on this readjustment of immigration law. On the one hand, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) is considered to be an advance in civil rights because it struck down the discriminatory quota system. Thus, it can be seen as part of the larger civil rights legislation that sought to remove *de jure* discrimination from the laws governing US society. On the other hand, the law continued the legacy of marginalizing temporary workers by extending the ability of agricultural firms to employ immigrant labor on a temporary contract basis. In some ways, the INA was a continuation of the Bracero Program that had officially expired a year earlier. What is not in dispute is that the emphasis on family reunification and skills-based criteria irrevocably changed the face of immigration, and Latin Americans and Asians were by far the major, yet unintended, benefactors of the shifting criteria for admission and citizenship.

Early support for the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was voiced during the Kennedy Administration. US Attorney General, Robert Kennedy testified in 1964 before Congress that the 1952 extension of the 1924 Quota Acts is a standing affront to many Americans and to many countries. It implies what we in the United States know from our own experience is false: that regardless of individual qualifications, a man or woman born in Italy, or Greece, or Poland, or Portugal, or Czechoslovakia, or the Ukraine, is not as good as someone born in Ireland, or England, or Germany, or Sweden. Everywhere else in our national life, we have eliminated discrimination based on national origins. Yet, this system is still the foundation of our immigration law. (Cited in Reimers 1985, 69)

Johnson's Secretary of State Dean Rusk argued that immigration law was discriminatory (Reimers 1985, 69), and the final version of the new law included a preference system that contained seven ranked criteria for admission: the first five operationalized the family reunification criteria, the sixth "skilled and unskilled workers in occupations for which labor is in short supply," and the seventh "refugees" defined as "conditional entrants." Of the seven preferences, four privileged family reunification as the basis for admission, two were based on employee skills and labor shortages, and one was designated for refugees. With the intention of ending racially discriminatory quotas, the major unintended consequence of the 1965 INA was that subsequent applicants for admission would be overwhelmingly non-European and predominately Latin American and Asian.

One little-known provision within the 1965 INA was an extension of a temporary visa program that brought farmworkers from the Caribbean to Florida and along the East Coast migrant stream. The H-2 Program was in many ways the East Coast equivalent of the Bracero Program but, instead of Mexican laborers, the vast majority of temporary contract workers were Haitian, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, and West Indian. On the books, growers were still accorded access to a temporary, foreign labor pool whenever domestic supply was deemed inadequate. The H-2 Program was expanded in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and in recent years has become a crucial aspect of labor recruitment for the dirty, dangerous, underpaid, and undesirable jobs that US citizens refuse to do.

Conclusion

The blacklisting of Texas from receiving Braceros between 1942 and 1947 demonstrates the deep-seated racism that prevailed in the state and

included growers, local community members, and Texas state government managers themselves. The formation of the Texas Good Neighbor Commission and the passage of the Caucasian Race Resolution did little to change racist attitudes and practices toward the Mexican population. These government initiatives were designed to ensure that Anglo growers had full access to Mexican immigrant labor. Also indicative of the racial climate were the repatriation campaigns that sent an estimated 1.3 million people of Mexican origin back to Mexico. This campaign, dubbed Operation Wetback, along with the 1948 El Paso Incident, served to solidify symbolically the definitions of citizenship, racial groups, and economic classes. The contradictory message that Mexicans received was that their labor was wanted but they were in no way welcome as citizens in the US.

One of the main results of the program was a steady increase in the number of Mexican undocumented workers. This influx was dealt with in three ways. The most common was to ignore them and allow them to seek work in the US. They were usually directly recruited in Mexico by farm labor contractors or other intermediaries on behalf of growers. In particular, growers near the border were able to recruit Mexican laborers directly and avoid the bureaucratic channels of the Bracero Program. The illegal status of undocumented farmworkers was an advantage to growers since the rights guaranteed to Braceros did not have to be met. At no time were growers held responsible for directly recruiting "illegal" labor. It was not until 1986 that growers could be held legally responsible for hiring undocumented workers.

The second effect was the increasing militarization of the border and the utilization of military-style roundups and LIC doctrine that in many ways set the stage for the current morass along the border. As much as the 1965 INA sought to rectify the discriminatory elements in immigration law, it also reproduced the marginal status of low-wage immigrant workers by including the H-2 temporary visa provisions so that growers would be assured that the US government would continue to guarantee their access to cheap, temporary, foreign labor.

The third result was the development of organized resistance by Mexican immigrant laborers to contest exploitation and racialization, even in later eras of backlash and retrenchment. We shall turn to these now in Part II.

Notes

1. In the Southwest and particularly along the border, Anglo is a non-pejorative identification of Euro-Americans and a term that Mexicans use with great frequency. White is really a term (there are Spanish equivalents like *guero*, *gabacho*, *gringo*) that is limited to refer to White racists or specifically those who intentionally marginalize Mexicans.
2. Garcia (1980, 227-28) notes that this number was greatly exaggerated by the INS. The campaign in Texas and California resulted in the repatriation of 80,127 and 84,278 undocumented immigrants, respectively. The INS claimed that the remainder of the 1.3 million left voluntarily before they were forcibly deported. Garcia finds little evidence of that number voluntarily returning to Mexico, but voluntary leave counts or even estimates seem to be non-existent, so we cite the INS number throughout.