LOS BRACEROS
1942-1964

FIRST GENERATION

SECOND GENERATION

My Father: Luís Méndez G.

THIRD GENERATION

Myself: Luís Méndez M.

Michoacán

Luís Méndez M.
May 24, 2002

From Braceros to Amnesty Grantees: Three Generations of Immigration History

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Capstone Spring 2002
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Dedicación

Principalmente quiero dar las gracias a Diós nuestro señor por haberme dado las fuerzas para este logro. Con amor y cariño para mis padres, Luís y Isabel Méndez. Que gracias a ellos que han sido mi inspiración para poder dar lo mejor de mí, durante estos cuatro años de esfuerzo y dedicación. Hoy día su lucha, sudor y sacrificio tienen reconocimiento: el de su hijo que hoy día se está graduando. Gracias a mi esposa, María Guadalupe, por todo su apoyo y por haberme acompañado a través de ésta travecía. Para Cecilia y familia, Lorena y familia, Florencio, Carmelita, Miguel y Alejandro. Gracias a todos mis tíos, tías, familiares y amigos que cuando mis padres estaban lejos de mi ellos me brindaron su apoyo.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements……..IV

Part One

1. **Introduction. …….1**
2. **Historical Background: The Bracero Program…….….2**
3. **Family History……...7**
4. **Problems Facing Braceros……...20**
5. **The End of the Bracero Program……23**

Part Two

Title: A Creative Writing Response:

From La Jabonera, Michoacán, México to Salinas, California: One Writer's Creative Response to his Family's Immigration History

1. **Poem: El Norte……..28**
2. **My Father's Journey to El Norte……29**
3. **Poem: La Frontera / The Border……34**
4. **The Annual Journey to El Norte Took Both of my Parents…….35**
5. **It Was my Turn to Come…….38**
6. **Conclusion…….48**

Appendix A. Percentage of braceros from various states…….53

Appendix B. Mexican workers Admitted Under the Bracero Program……..54

Appendix C. México-U.S. Map……55

Appendix D. Michoacán Map……..56

Appendix E. Capstone Prospectus……57

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My capstone work is dedicated to all those people who scrub floors, work in the fields and especially those who at this time are trying to cross La Frontera, buscando un futuro mejor. Let's remember we are all immigrants. Now that we are on this side of the border, let us support those who continue to cross everyday.

The Immigration Legacy-From the Uprooted Bracero Program (Public Law 45, 1943, Public Law 78 1951). The immigration journey to EL Norte, crossing La Frontera illegally-1986 (IRCA). Kids and families follow the Journey and try to defeat El Rio Grande, the Deserts and La Sierra de Tijuana to cross La Frontera.

Introduction:

The purpose of this project is to document the immigration history of my own family over a period of three generations, starting with the Bracero Program. I analyze immigration history from 1943, starting with the Bracero Program and cover major immigration events, specifically Mexican immigration, up to today. This immigrant history documents our family's story from the state of Michoacán, México, to the United States through three different generations starting from the 1950s up to today. It examines the main reasons that force people to leave their home country. It explores what those interests and limitations are at particular historical junctures, and how they are connected to the contradictions of the political economy and how these interact with the interests of the Bracero Program (Public Law 45 of 1943 and Public Law 78 1951).

For the first part I will analyze the Bracero Program from an oral historical perspective including interviews from both of my grandfathers and also from family friends who are former braceros. The second part consists of a creative writing response to my family's immigration history from the 1970s to the present. I continue by examining the immigration flows from 1965 through 1985, including my father's personal experience, going through the illegal journey of crossing La Frontera to the United States every year. Furthermore, I include interviews from undocumented immigrants crossing the border every year during the 1970s and the 1980s. I follow with an analysis of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA, Public Law No. 99-

603). At this point in time thousands of Mexican immigrants became legal residents, including both of my parents.

In the early 1990s, I began my personal experience immigrating with my family to the United States and crossing La Frontera illegally. I became a legal resident during the 1990s through Act of November 29,1990: The Immigration Act of 1990, the family reunification Subtitle B-Preference System Part I-Family-Sponsored Immigrants Section 111 (a) (2): " Spouses …and unmarried sons and unmarried daughters of permanent resident aliens…shall be allocated visas" (Barkan, LeMay 290). Also immigration flows brought thousands of families to the United States, many who crossed illegally and others who waited in México for their green card (mica).

Historical Background: The Bracero Program

With the explosion of World War II, the United States entered the war. As a consequence, a labor shortage threatened agricultural production. The war took thousands of Chicanos from the fields and the railroad tracks. The United States Southwest was suffering from the need to replace farm workers who had gone to war. The labor shortage became more acute when the U.S rounded up Japanese-American farmers and workers and put them in concentration camps. "The United States had two alternatives to meet the labor shortage: simply open the border and allow Mexican workers to come into the United States unencumbered, or enter into an agreement with México for an agreed upon number of Mexican braceros (helping arms)"(Acuña 261). Growers themselves preferred the first alternative, since they could hire undocumented immigrants at the lowest possible wage. The Mexican government was concerned about the rights of braceros, however, and wanted to protect its citizens from abuse. "The two governments entered into an agreement in 1942, called the Emergency Labor Program, under which

both would supervise the recruitment of braceros" (Acuña 262). Thus the importation of laborers from México began.

> On September 29, 1942, five hundred farm workers from México arrived in Stockton, California. Transported by the United States government and delivered to California growers, these Mexican workers were the first installment of a wartime emergency program designed to fill the declared labor shortage in Agriculture. (Calavita1)

Thousands of campesinos in México from all over the country hungry to work to provide for their families left home and tried to sign contracts to become braceros under the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program was embraced by many of the Mexicans especially those surrounded by the devastated economy in Michoacán. The impoverished conditions under which people live in rural areas in Michoacán forced thousands to leave their homes. Formal passage of Public Law 45 approved on April 29, 1943, marked the birth of the Bracero Program. "The Bracero Program was born virtually overnight and with remarkably little fanfare. When Congress quietly authorized the program in 1943, the labor importation system had already been operating for seven months"(Calavita 18).

The term bracero comes from the Spanish word for arm, "brazo," and these were the helping laborers supplying the labor shortage in the United States for over two centuries. "Over the next twenty-two years, in what turned out to be the largest foreign worker program in U.S. history, five million "braceros" were contracted to growers and ranchers in twenty-four different states" (Calavita 1). Braceros from México were bused and delivered to agricultural growers in the United States.

Researchers of the Bracero Program argued that it benefited growers. According to Calavita, "For growers the program was a dream: a seemingly endless army of cheap,

unorganized workers brought to their doorstep by the government"(Calavita 3). The labor shortage problems opened the doors to thousands of Mexican campesinos who rushed to be contracted under the Bracero Program. The program became a great success and kept growers happy. For growers it became a dream of heavy cheap labor and profit. They enjoyed the cheapest and most abundant labor source, making profits from the work of braceros. "The Bracero Program is the most important case of guest workers policy-making in U.S. history, and widely considered to have been a grower's dream of heaven" (Roseblum12). Simultaneously, the Bracero Program was causing a revolution among farm workers in the southern states of México. Alternatives for campesinos were minimal in their homeland.

The Mexican economy provided few or no jobs. Campesinos had to depend on subsistence farming and grew corn and beans to support their families throughout the year. Working a full day in México in the 1950s only paid eight pesos, about 66 cents in U.S dollars. According to Mr. Edauto Rocha, a family friend:

> En los cincuentas uno trabajaba por ocho pesos al día y el dolar valía a doce. Así es que, que le pagaban a uno, menos de un dolar. Por eso cuando llegaron las contrataciónes la misma hambre nos hacía salir de nuestra tierra.
>
> [Around the fifties we would work for 8 pesos per day and the dollar value was 12 pesos. So we got paid less than a dollar. That's why when the contracts started hunger forced people to get out of our own land.]

From 1942 to 1964 the United States of America imported Mexican nationals to harvest crops; they were know as braceros. Close to five million Mexican braceros eased the U.S. labor shortage during the twenty-two years of the program. Among those five

million both of my grandfathers came along with other braceros who rushed to the recruiting centers established throughout México. Empalme, Sonora. Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. Piedras Negras, Chihuahua. Queretaro, México City, Mexicali, Tijuana. All over Mexico, hordes of campesinos from rural México gathered to be contracted to the United States as braceros during the labor shortage of World War II. The state of Michoacán, Mexico, was one of the states from which many braceros contracted with the program. Floods of campesinos from Michoacán fled to the U.S. trying to escape México's devastated economy. Lack of education and a devastated economy were the main factors that pushed campesinos to become braceros.

> The vast majority of braceros in this period came from the least developed, poorest, and most remote areas of México. As Gamboa explains, "This meant that in spite of the fact that the contract was explained to them before they affixed their signatures, most of the men did not have a rudimentary understanding of the terms and conditions. The whole idea that a young person from a tiny community in Michoacán could comprehend the meaning…was farfetched. In reality, the workers understood little beyond the fact that they were going to work in the United States." (Calavita 20)

Living on the edge of poverty forced thousands to leave. The Bracero Program was the chance for thousands of men to immigrate and earn some dollars to provide for their families left behind. In 1943, Michoacán contributed a total of 26% of all the braceros contracted to work in the U.S. (see Appendix A)

http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/images/1942bracero_recruitment.jpg

Hordes of bracero hopefuls or aspirantes gathered at the Zócalo in México City to sign contracts. Once the Department of Labor certified a grower's need for labor, México was given a notice as to how many laborers would be required.

> Aspiring braceros had to obtain a permit from municipal Mexican officials, for which they often had to pay a "mordida." Those who obtained these permits were sent to central recruiting centers, where there were sometimes ten workers for each vacancy. At the recruiting centers, workers frequently had to pay another bribe in order to be considered. It was from this pool that Department of Labor officials selected braceros to be sent to the border reception centers. (Calavita 62)

Once they arrived to the reception center and before crossing the border braceros were fumigated with insecticides. "A Border Patrol memo from Yuma, Arizona, told of braceros being 'fumigated prior to their departure to the United States…by spraying them by use of airplanes, much in the same manner as agricultural fields are sprayed'" (Calavita 63). Thousands of campesinos crossed the border every year through different entry points. An early newspaper account notes, "More than 80,000 braceros pass through the El Paso Center annually. They're part of an army of 350,000 or more that marches across the border each year to help plant, cultivate and harvest cotton and other crops throughout the United States" (El Paso Herald Post, April 28, 1956). The Bracero Program created a cheap labor force due to the influx and surplus of laborers.

Left. This man's hands are being checked for signs of physical labor. Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Labor
The term bracero (from the Spanish brazo, which translates as "arm") applies to the temporary agricultural and railroad workers brought into the United States as an emergency measure to meet the labor shortage of World War II. The Bracero Program, also referred to as the Mexican Farm Labor Supply Program and the Mexican Labor Agreement, was sanctioned by Congress through Public Law 45 of 1943.

http://ccrh.org/comm/umatilla/primary/bracero.htm

Migration is the failure of roots. Displaced men are ecological victims. Between them and the sustaining earth a wedge has been driven. Eviction by droughts or dispossession by landlords, the impoverishment of the soil or conquest by arms nature and man separately or together lay down the choice: move or die. Ernesto Galarza

Family History

Among those braceros who participated during the Bracero Program were my grandfather Miguel Méndez, on my father's side of the family, and my grandfather David Montejano, on my mother's side of the family. My grandfather Miguel Méndez explains some of the reasons that forced him to become a bracero:

> *Para el campesino, el pobre la vida todo el tiempo va a ser dificil. La necesidad de ayudar a la familia era mas grande que cualquier otra cosa. Porque ni escuela había en el rancho y uno de pobre pues ni en eso*

pensaba. La pobresa en la que uno vivía lo orillaba a uno a buscar la vida y cuando escuché hablar de los contratos me fuí a contratar. Por que no había que comer, había días que llegaba a la casa y lo único que tenía tu abuelita para comer era un molcajete con chile y unas ojitas de limón. Comíamos tortillas con sal y chile. En las mañanas había veces que lo que almorsábamos era miel con tortillas recien echas.
[For the farm workers, the poor life would always be hard. The necessity to help my family was greater than anything else. There was not even a school in the small village we lived in and school is the last thing I would think about. The poverty in which we lived forced me to leave when I heard of the contracts. I went to get contracted because there was nothing to eat. There were days I would arrive home and the only thing your grandmother would have to eat was a molcajete with chile and lemon tea. We would eat tortillas with salt and chile. In the morning we would have breakfast with honey and freshly baked tortillas.]

My grandfather Miguel Méndez was born in 1913 in his house in a small village called La Jabonera in the state of Michoacán, México. He lived in the rural areas in a little ranchito surrounded by mountains three hours away from Guadalajara. His father worked in a hacienda where my grandfather grew up working as well. They lived in homes constructed of adobe mud, a straw thatched roof, and a dirt floor. In 1954 now with his own family to provide for my grandfather Méndez's financial situation pushed him to abandon his family. With the family savings he took the bus from Zamora, Michoacán, to Guadalajara, Jalisco, where he caught a train that would take him to Mexicali where one of the recruiting centers was situated.

Cuando llegué a Mexicali y miré todo ese mundo de gente esperando haciendo linea pare contratarse hasta miedo me dió. Había gente que hacía linea y cuando ya estaban cerca de su turno vendía las fichas que le daban a uno por veinte pesos. Esa gente nunca se contrataba la razón no la se.

[When I arrived in Mexicali and I saw a world of people waiting in line to be contracted it really scared me. There were people who would line up and when it was almost their turn they sold their number. Those people never contracted themselves and I do not know the reason why.]

1954 was the first year my grandfather Méndez crossed the border under the Bracero Program. Before signing the paper work to cross the border, he recalls that they had to be fingerprinted and their picture taken. Doctors draw blood from braceros and a complete medical examination was done. My grandfather Méndez recalls:

I remember everyone was sprayed with some kind of liquid and then we were to take a bath and we were sprayed with some kind of odor powder. ["Sprayed from head to foot with DDT powder" (War Brusa 17)]. After we were sprayed and we went through all the procedures we were bused to El Centro, California. When we arrived there, gringos who spoke perfect Spanish were waiting for our arrival at a reception center. There at the reception center one man stepped into the bus and said, "Alright fellows, you will be working in Brawley, California, not far away from here." In Brawley I worked sowing lettuce and cotton. We lived in shacks equipped with four sets of twin bunk beds.

Our day started at five in the morning when a bell rang. Everyone got in line to get breakfast and grab a lunch bag before going to work. We had to be

ready outside the camp to get on the bus that would take you to work and back to the camp. At 5:00 p.m. dinner was served and whoever came to the table ate. If not you had to wait until next day.

We would sign up if we wanted lunch from the camp every day of the week. I only ate lunch from the camp every working day except on Sundays. On Sunday, I woke up early to take a shower and went to church. When mass was over there were stands selling Mexican food and I liked eating there. We were charged for lunch and something I noticed when I was working in Brawley was that about every two weeks they gave us a great food plate but after a little while everyone had to line up to go to the bathroom. "Nos purgaban cada dos semanas." ["They purged us every two weeks with delicious foods."] Later my forty-five-day contract expired and I returned to Michoacán with my family.

The following year 1955, after taking the bus from Zamora to Guadalajara and the train to Enpalme, Sonora, when I arrived and followed all the procedures, I waited in line to see the doctor for my physical. It was my turn for the physical. Unfortunately I was turned down from the program due to a physical problem. The doctor discovered I had a hernia on my stomach on the left side of my abdomen. Only a few were sent back after failing to pass their physical examination at the Bracero centers. After I was rejected from the Bracero program I returned to Michoacán and sought medical attention. I was seen by a doctor and I was given medicine for the hernia (Miguel Méndez, Personal Interview).

That was the last time my grandfather Miguel Méndez tried coming to the United States. He stayed in Michoacán raising cattle and waiting for the rainy season

every year to sow corn and beans. My grandfather Méndez said he felt all right but it was not until forty years later when he felt the effects of the hernia. After forty-five years in 1995 he had surgery to correct the hernia. On the other hand, my maternal grandfather David Montejano, a former bracero, narrates his own experience of crossing illegally and then crossing the border legally under the Bracero Program. Farm workers from Michoacán had a history of illegally immigrating to the United State, and the Bracero Program gave the men an opportunity to seek work contracts as agriculture laborers.

My grandfather David Montejano, was born in the state of Michoacán, México, in a small town called San Antonio Ocampo in October 20, 1926. His story of immigrating to the U.S. began in his early 20s:

> I came to the state of Texas for the first time at the age of twenty. Prior to coming under the Bracero Program I had crossed the border illegally four times into the state of Texas. I crossed illegally from 1946 through 1949. I knew about the Bracero Program but when I arrived at the recruiting centers in Enpalme or Reynosa and I would not get contracted I would look for coyotes to cross over into Texas. Los polleros would charge me about 300 pesos to swim me across the Rio Grande. I kept coming and if there was no luck under the Bracero Program I would still come over anyway. During those years crossing illegally I worked picking cotton and sometimes driving a tractor, sowing oatmeal, potato, lettuce, and barley.
>
> In 1950 for the first time I was able to cross the border under the Bracero Program. I remember I went to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, where the recruiting center was. I went from Zamora, Michoacán, to San Luis Potosi, on the bus from San Luis Potosi to Monterrey on the train. Arriving to Monterrey, Mexican

officials were sharpening their teeth asking everyone who arrived for a bribe (mordida) if they wanted to be considered to be contracted. Later a doctor completed a physical examination that included blood analysis. From there we were sent via train straight to the border but before crossing the border we were asked to take our clothes off. Everyone was naked. We were lined up and we went through a canal similar to a car wash where we got sprayed. Full buses were done at once. We were told that this fumigation was to kill the lice. ["At the center, they were sprayed with a white powder in order, 'To kill the Mexican fleas,' or so they were told by a gringo."(Carlos Marentes)]

The first year in 1950 I was sent from the recruitment center to work in Crystal, Texas. I worked with five other braceros digging holes to set up a fence for two ranch owners. The forty-five-day contract expired and we returned to the reception center where soon we were contracted to a grower in Michigan. In Michigan I worked picking pickles for three months. When we finished the three months I was on the way to México with other braceros but we heard about work picking cotton in Arkansas and we decided to stop and work. Work there lasted for about one month. From there we returned to Michoacán.

My grandfather David Montejano said that when he was working for a grower and the harvest season was over, the employer would take the braceros to bracero centers that were established to assist unemployed braceros. These centers also served the growers to recruit labor workers whenever they need laborers. At the center my grandfather Montejano and other braceros waited for growers who recruited them to work. The U.S. government guaranteed work. That was one of the conditions in the agreement between México and the United States. If braceros were unemployed for more

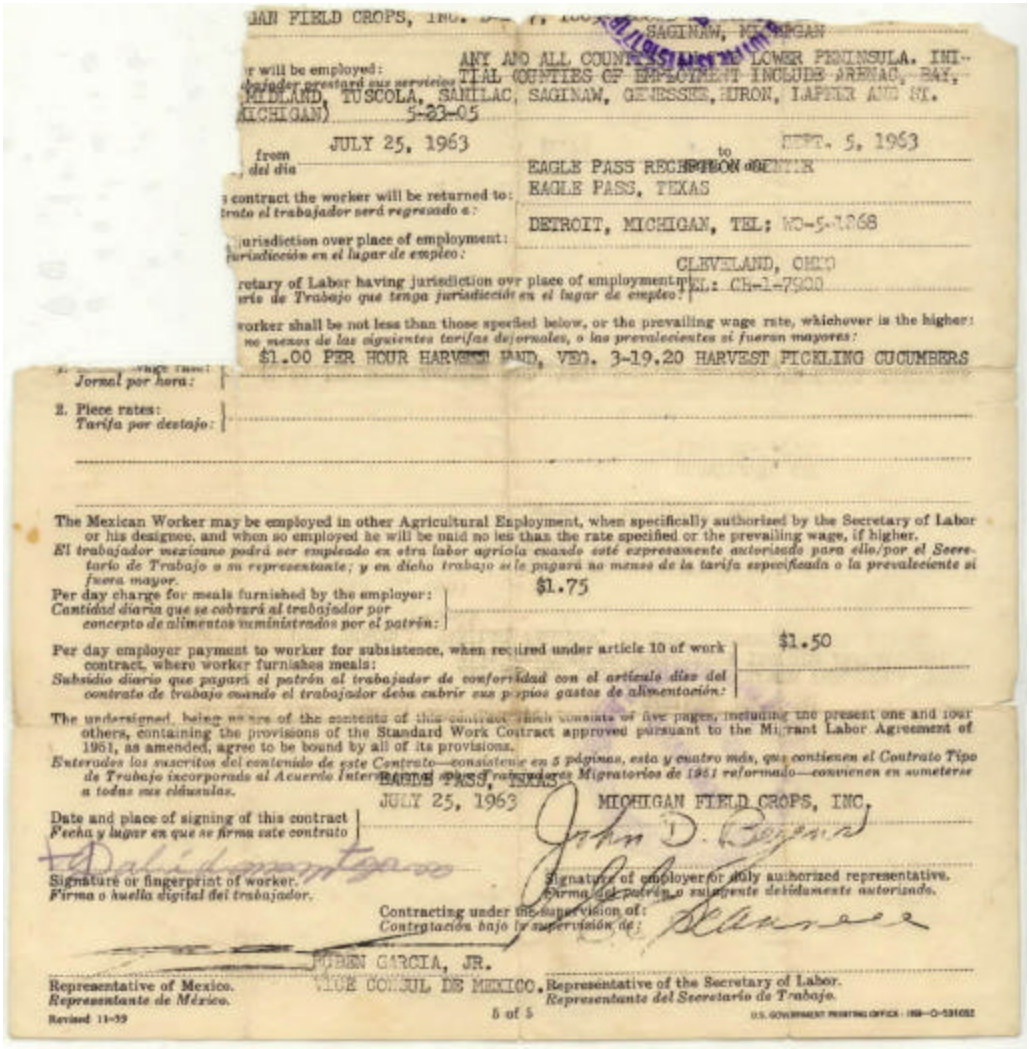
than 75% of the time they were contracted workers, they were entitled to receive a subsistence allowance at the rate of $3.00 per day**.** My grandfather David Montejano said: "When we arrived at the centers there were people who were there for as long as three weeks. When nothing happened after three weeks many would go back to México." My grandfather also worked in Arkansas and Michigan and one of the differences he noticed was the living conditions.

> In Arkansas and Michigan our living conditions were better than Texas. In Texas we would live in shacks or in camping houses. Working in the state of Texas everyone faced the same working conditions. Texas was known for poor living standards and the lack of sanitary conditions. In groups of three we would pitch in to buy our own food. We would gather firewood and build a fireplace to cook our own food and our own tortillas. My father, 'rest in peace,' Vicente was the one who would cook for my crony (Compadre) and myself. For showering ourselves I would bring water on barrels with a tractor and take a shower in the open fields. For toilets we dug a hole in the ground and that was our toilet. In Arkansas and Michigan housing and sanitation were better. We had our own bathrooms and houses where we lodged in groups of four. We slept in individual bunk beds.

The following document is an original contract issued to my grandfather, David Montejano, in 1963. This entire document consisted of a five-page contract agreement between the two countries' governments and the laborer. This contract was issued at Eagle Pass Reception Center in Eagle Pass, Texas. The contract was signed July 25, 1963, and expired September 5, 1963. During this period of time my grandfather was contracted to work in the surrounding areas of Detroit, Michigan, and Cleveland, Ohio.

The contract was in English and Spanish. The contact was signed or fingerprinted by the worker. It was also signed by a Mexican representative, who at the time was Ruben García, Vice Consul of México. The contract was also to be signed by the employer or authorized representative. A representative of the Secretary of Labor signed the contract as well. Unfortunately this contract is incomplete.

This section of the contract explains that my grandfather was assigned to work in any and all counties in the Lower Peninsula. Initial counties of employment include Arenac, Bay, Midland, Tuscola, Saginaw, Huron, Lapeer, Detroit, Michigan, and other counties that were lost with the missing part of the contract. The contracts states that my grandfather was to work for "$1.00 PER HOUR HARVEST HAND, VEG. 3-19.20 HARVEST PICKING CUCUMBERS."



JAN FIELD CROPS, INC. ... SAGINAW, MICHIGAN

r will be employed: ANY AND ALL COUNTIES IN LOWER PENINSULA. INI-
trabajador prestará sus servicios TIAL COUNTIES OF EMPLOYMENT INCLUDE ARENAC, BAY,
MIDLAND, TUSCOLA, SANILAC, SAGINAW, GENESSEE, HURON, IAPEER AND ST.
MICHIGAN) 5-23-05

from JULY 25, 1963 to SEPT. 5, 1963
del día al

s contract the worker will be returned to: EAGLE PASS RECEPTION CENTER
trato el trabajador será regresado a: EAGLE PASS, TEXAS

urisdiction over place of employment: DETROIT, MICHIGAN, TEL: WO-5-1068
jurisdicción en el lugar de empleo:

CLEVELAND, OHIO

retary of Labor having jurisdiction over place of employment: TEL.: CH-1-7900
rio de Trabajo que tenga jurisdicción en el lugar de empleo:

worker shall be not less than those specified below, or the prevailing wage rate, whichever is the higher:
no menos de las siguientes tarifas dejornales, o las prevalecientes si fueran mayores:

$1.00 PER HOUR HARVEST HAND, VEG. 3-19.20 HARVEST PICKLING CUCUMBERS

Jornal por hora:

2. Piece rates:
Tarifa por destajo:

The Mexican Worker may be employed in other Agricultural Employment, when specifically authorized by the Secretary of Labor or his designee, and when so employed he will be paid no less than the rate specified or the prevailing wage, if higher.
El trabajador mexicano podrá ser empleado en otra labor agrícola cuando esté expresamente autorizado para ello por el Secretario de Trabajo o su representante; y en dicho trabajo se le pagará no menos de la tarifa especificada o la prevaleciente si fuera mayor.

Per day charge for meals furnished by the employer: $1.75
Cantidad diaria que se cobrará al trabajador por concepto de alimentos suministrados por el patrón:

Per day employer payment to worker for subsistence, when required under article 10 of work contract, where worker furnishes meals: $1.50
Subsidio diario que pagará el patrón al trabajador de conformidad con el artículo diez del contrato de trabajo cuando el trabajador deba cubrir sus propios gastos de alimentación:

The undersigned, having notice of the contents of this contract which consists of five pages, including the present one and four others, containing the provisions of the Standard Work Contract approved pursuant to the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951, as amended, agree to be bound by all of its provisions.
Enterados los suscritos del contenido de este Contrato—consistente en 5 páginas, esta y cuatro más, que contienen el Contrato Tipo de Trabajo incorporado al Acuerdo Internacional sobre Trabajadores Migratorios de 1951 reformado—convienen en someterse a todas sus cláusulas.

Date and place of signing of this contract: EAGLE PASS, TEXAS JULY 25, 1963
Fecha y lugar en que se firma este contrato

Signature or fingerprint of worker.
Firma o huella digital del trabajador.

MICHIGAN FIELD CROPS, INC.
John D. Gregorio
Signature of employer or duly authorized representative.
Firma del patrón o su agente debidamente autorizado.

Contracting under the supervision of:
Contratación bajo la supervisión de:

RUBEN GARCIA, JR.
VICE CONSUL DE MEXICO.

Representative of Mexico.
Representante de México.

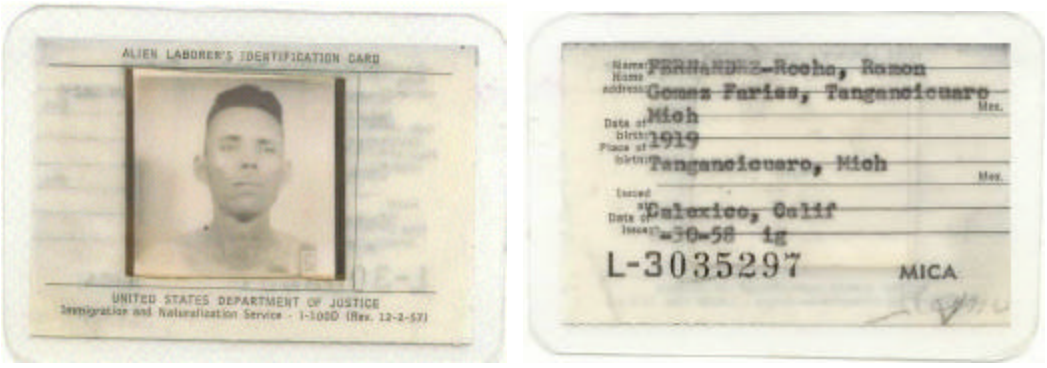
Representative of the Secretary of Labor.
Representante del Secretario de Trabajo.

Revised 11-59

5 of 5

When the Bracero Program was initiated many young boys like my grandfather Montejano were held back because of their age. While age requirements excluded teenagers, other Michaocanos like Ramón Fernandez became pioneers of the Bracero Program. Fernandez worked in the fields in California from 1943 until the program was terminated in 1964. Born in 1913, he was 30 years old in 1943, which was the year the Bracero Program was born. He was one of the first pioneers who were contracted from the surrounding areas of Gomez Farias, Michoacán. He was issued an I-100 card by the INS department, which characterized him as being an outstanding laborer. The following identification card served the purpose of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

agency and the Department of Labor to identify good workers. This permit allowed braceros to return the following year without going through the application procedures. Braceros who were given this permit arrived at the border and showed their I-100 cards. Then they could cross the border to the recruiting center. These braceros became known as the viseros.



Ramón Fernandez's I-100 Identification Card

The following account by Ramón Fernandez documents his immigrant experience under the Bracero Program.

> My name is Ramón Fernandez Rocha; I was born on November 25, 1913 in the state of Michoacán, México, in a little ranch near Zamora, called Gomez Farias. When you would hear people or friends talk about contracting to work in the United States all the men were happy because they wanted to come to work. I remember it was around 1943, when various men around my age and I left to contract. We went to Uruapan, Michaocán. It was where we signed up on the list posted for the braceros. After we signed up we were sent on the train to México City, where thousands of people waited to contract. Huge lines of men waited in line day and night for a chance to get contracts. But before you could be recruited you needed to be examined by a doctor. The doctor would do a complete physical exam and blood analysis, because they drew blood from us. Another thing before

you could see the doctor was to pay a bribe or mordida to the corrupt Mexican officials. Back then we would give them about 150 pesos. I came to California, where I worked in a lot of jobs: picking potatoes, melons, strawberries, broccoli, lettuce, and apples. I remember once working in San Jose picking tomato, cucumber and green beans.

It was when the United States was fighting against Japan. I remember many braceros were afraid and returned to México because they thought they would be taken to fight. My Compadre Jesus got really nervous and he returned to Michoacán.

Well, the camps where I stayed were clean because there were braceros who were in charge of the cooking, cleaning the bathrooms and the whole camp. These camps provided all the basic facilities and living standards. There were camps with up to 500 braceros living in it. The camps had bunk beds and one room accommodated up to eight people. At four in the morning a bell woke us up to have breakfast and then we picked up our lunch to go work. Inside the lunch bag there was a burrito or a sandwich including a snack like a banana or an apple and your soda. Then you had to be outside the camp to be picked up by a bus that would take you to work and bring you back. Sometimes the bus would take off leaving those who did not get up early. For the day they stayed at the camp not doing anything.

Fernandez was one of the first men who came to the United States under the Bracero Program. But behind him came a younger generation. These were anxious young boys dying from poverty but their age held them back. To qualify for the Bracero Program one of the main requirements was to be eighteen years old. Impatiently

awaiting his eighteenth birthday was a young boy who grew up without a father, who never had the chance to hug him, who grew up without a father's caress.

Edauto Rocha was left with his mother who struggled to feed him and three other children. For eight years she washed clothes for the rich hacendado to feed her children. Exhausted, she pushed herself to wash the last piece of cloth to earn a few pesos. She finally lost her strength and her life when Edauto was eight years old. After ten long suffering years of living on beans and nopales he turned eighteen. Working since eight years old when his mother passed away he had saved enough pesos to take him to the bracero recruitment center in Monterey, Nuevo Leon. Rocha narrates those vivid moments of his bracero journeys:

> I was born in 1940 and in 1958 is when I turned eighteen. I remember as soon as I turned eighteen and saw men who had been contracted previous years preparing to depart again I decided to take my chances and go with them. Three hundred and fifty pesos (29.16 U.S dollars) was all I had in my pocket. During those years the government would assist the poorest communities by facilitating things for those interested to be braceros. Local community officials would sign the names of those of us willing to go. Well, the first year I remember taking the bus from Zamora to Morelia, Michoacán. From Morelia we went to Abasolo, Guanajuato on the bus. From there we took the train to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. When we arrived in Monterrey there were thousands of campesinos concentrated waiting in lines for days. It was frightening when I realized how poverty was kicking us out of our own land. When we got off the train we were approached by a police officer who promised us if we gave him 150 pesos he would ensure

we would get contracted. One of the men of the group I came with asked the rest of us. We all agreed and we gave him 150 pesos each.

That was the last time we saw him. He disappeared stealing our 150 (12.50 U.S dollars) pesos each and who knows how many other people he robbed. The bribe we had paid was worthless and I was left with 100 pesos (8.33 U.S dollars). Fortunately my father-in-law sent me two hundred pesos with one of my wife's cousin who caught up with us in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. I felt my soul return to my body. With that money we tried again and this time we were lucky and we waited for two days before our names were called. They asked us for a birth certificate or a military card. They checked our hands for signs of physical labor. We were finger printed, our picture was taken and a physical and medical exam with blood drawn was done. After going through all these procedures and everything checked all right we were given our pass to board a train, which would take us from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, to Piedras Negras, Chihuahua. In Piedras Negras before crossing the border into Texas officers from the INS asked us to got off the train with all of our belongings on hand. All I was carrying was two pants and two shirts in a plastic rustic and what I had on, a wooden straw hat and a sarape across my left shoulder.

We got off the train and we all lined up and went through this inspection routine where they threw an odorless powder all over our clothes. Also everyone was sprayed with the powder from head to toe. We all came out like snow white covered with snow. From Piedras Negras we were bused to La Paz, Texas, where the reception center was situated. La Paz was the bracero distribution center where growers who needed labor came and chose the number of workers he

needed. Most of the men that came in the train we were on were sent to Crystal, Texas.

In Crystal, four individuals lived in a small shack in twin bunk beds. We all pitched in to buy our own food and we all shared different days when two of us would do the cooking and cleaning of the house. Everyone was responsible for their own bed. We worked picking cotton for 50 cents an hour. From 1958 to 1963 I came contracted to various states and worked doing different agricultural jobs. I remember once I was contracted in Arkansas for forty-five days weeding beans. From there I was contracted in Michigan for the same period of time. There I was picking pickles at one dollar per hour. In 1964 when the Bracero Program was officially terminated I returned to México. The following year after Lent I headed north aiming for California but this time with one goal in mind, to cross illegally.

Problems Facing Braceros

Although workers were exploited by growers and faced discrimination from society, braceros just wanted to escape the economic hardships in México. While all braceros faced discriminatory and abusive practices Gamboa claims that the experiences of Mexican contract laborers in the Pacific Northwest were unique.

> These braceros encountered more discriminatory wage systems, working conditions that "truly dehumanized' them, strong racial animosity, and little recognition for their role in keeping Northwest agriculture afloat during World War II. These braceros, the most militant of all such laborers, fought back with strikes (Gamboa 79).

Braceros did not stand there with their hands crossed; they supported each other and demanded better living conditions. Complaints included unsafe transportation and unsanitary toilets. When they faced unfair employment practices however, they went on strike “For example, in December 1943 they struck the southern Pacific at Live Oaks, California, over the dismissal of Anastacio B. Cortes and Manuel M. Rivas” (Acuña 263).

Despite their enormous contribution to the American economy, the braceros suffered harassment and oppression from extremist groups and racist authorities. “Department of Labor officer in charge of the program, Lee G. Williams, had described it as a system of ‘legalized slavery’ (Carlos Amarentes). This describes the treatment of braceros when they attempted to intermingle in communities in the state of Texas. On one occasion, a field man, one of the recruitment center agents was driving through the city of Ropesville along with three laborers and they decided to stop at the only café open in town.

> On the return trip, passing through Ropesville, the agent and the laborers stopped at the only cafe in town that was open. It was about eight o'clock on a cold night, and they wanted a cup of coffee. There was no one else in the cafe. The owner came up to them and said: "What do you want?" The Field Man responded: "I want a cup of coffee. I don't know what the other boys want. They may want sandwiches." The owner said: "I don't serve Mexicans." To which the agent replied: "Well, now, these boys are out here to help the farmers harvest their crops. They have just agreed to come out tomorrow to work for Mr. Blank. I don't see anything so elegant about your cafe, and I don't see why you can't serve us a cup of coffee." The

owner stated flatly: "I'll serve you, but I don't serve Mexicans." "No," the agent replied, "you can't serve me either," and they walked out. (Carlos Amerentes)

http://www.farmworkers.org/bracintx.html

Racism towards braceros in the State of Texas got to a point where the Mexican government threatened to stop issuing permits for the importation of braceros. Frequent racist violations by growers and community residents forced the Mexican government to exclude Texas from participating in the bracero laborer importation. From 1943 to 1947 Texas could not import braceros. The Mexican government "Considered intolerable the Anglo-Texans' racism and brutal transgressions against Mexican workers" (Acuña 263). México agreed to re-establish the bracero importation to Texas if racism declined.

> From 1943 to 1947 the Mexican government refused Texas's requests, since there was no evidence of any decline in its racist actions. Nevertheless, Texas growers continued to press for braceros. In October 1947 the Mexican government finally agreed to issue permits to Texas. (Acuña 263)

The End of the Bracero Program

Regardless of the many obstacles, the U.S. provided bracero hopefuls an opportunity for a better life. In 1945 the U.S. government gave a thirty-day grace period to end the Bracero Program. Agricultural growers lobbied Congress and an extension

gave life again to the Bracero Program until December 31, 1946. Then a second extension extended the program until August 30,1947. After four long years of debating on terms and conditions to reestablish the Bracero Program the two countries' governments signed a new agreement. On July 12, 1951, Public Law 78 renewed the Bracero Program. The agreement benefited both countries. In the U.S. domestic labor could not keep up with the increasing demand of the growing economy.

Renewing the Bracero agreement also benefited the Mexican government. Mexican farm workers were trying to escape the Mexican economic crisis and signing a new agreement to the Bracero Program would ease the high inflation rate. If unemployed Mexican nationals found jobs in the U.S., the inflation problem could be solved. Now those who immigrated sent money back to their families and that money fed the Mexican economy benefiting the country.

In 1964 the Bracero Program was officially terminated. Close to five million Mexican farmers returned home.

> With the crossing of 526 braceros through the Santa Fe Street Bridge Tuesday night, current contracting of Mexican laborers for work in U.S. farms ended, officials of the National Railways of México reported Wednesday. The railroad in charge of transporting the braceros to Juárez from all parts of the state, disclosed the total number of workers contracted amounted to 12,127. Of this number, only a few were sent back after failing to pass their physical examination at the Bracero Center. (The El Paso Times, May 30, 1963)

When braceros returned to their communities, they discovered they could not survive in the Mexican economy. They continue to cross the border illegally, as documentary producer Carlos Marentes notes:

> The braceros returned home. Unable to survive in their communities, however, they continue to cross the Río Bravo (or Río Grande) to work in the farms and ranches of this country. In the fields of West Texas and Southern New México, you will still find braceros. They are now known as chile pickers and continue to be one of the most exploited labor groups in the U.S. (Carlos Marentes)

U.S.-México Border

http://www.usda.gov/agency/oce/oce/labor-affairs/ircasumm.htm#Requirements

Beginning in 1964, following repeal of the Bracero Program, "the number of illegal labor migrants coming from México started to rise." (Bean, Et, al 2). Illegal immigration became one of the main concerns for the U.S. legislators. The presence of undocumented immigration was seen as a "serious danger" (Bean, Et, al 211). Others thought that the U.S. had "lost control of its borders" (Bean, Et, al 211).

Desperate to regain control of its borders the U.S. introduced the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 commonly know as the IRCA. IRCA's objective was to control illegal immigration. "It also suggested an amnesty program to provide

legalization--permanent resident alien status--to an estimated 3 million illegal aliens then in the country" (LeMay, Barkan 282).

Under amnesty provisions, illegal aliens who had lived continuously in the United States since before January 1, 1982, could apply to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for legal resident status. The cut off date for the application was May 4, 1988. In order to apply, applicants needed to show prove that they reside in the U.S. since 1982. The INS department would normally asked for employment history, like check stubs among other documents. Applicants required to provided, "An original or certified copy of a birth certificate issued by a State, county, municipal authority or outlying possession of the United States bearing an official seal**." (USDA)**

IRCA was the chance for thousands of Mexican undocumented immigrants to legalize their status. Another important provision under IRCA's legislation was a program called Special Agricultural Worker (SAW):

> This was open to foreigners who could prove that they had worked in perishable agriculture in the United States for a minimum of 90 days during each of the three years before the passage of the law, or a minimum of 90 days in agriculture during the 12 months proceeding May 12, 1986 (Bean, Edmonston, Passel 212).

Undocumented immigrants applying under the (SAW) program and complying with all the requirements were granted work authorizations for one year. Both of my parents benefited during the IRCA opportunity. They qualified to obtain authorization to work in the U.S. According to my father Luís Méndez G.:

> Tenias que haber trabajado en los Estados Unidos desde antes de 1982, y yo venia desde el 1973. A mi pronto me dieron mi primer permiso. En

1986, me dieron la mica roja que era por un año. En el 1986 como en Octubre antes de irme para México fuí a la oficina de Imigración en Salinas y me dieron la mica verde. Esta se la daban a uno por tres años. La que a mi me dieron era desde el 1987 hasta el 1990 se me vencía. En el 1990, fué cuando me dieron la color de rosa. Esta ya era por diez años. A tu mamá le dieron la mica roja en el 1987, la verde en el 1988 y la color de rosa en el 1991.

[You had to have worked in the U.S. since before 1982, and I had come since 1973. They gave me my first permit right away. In 1986 they gave me a red temporary card and this was good for one year. In 1986, around October before I went back to México I went to the Immigration office located in Salinas on Blanco road. This time they gave me the green card, which was valid for three years. Mine was issued in 1987 and it expired in 1990. In 1990 was when they gave me the pink one, which was for ten years. Your mother got the red card in 1987 and the green card in 1988. Three years later in 1991 is when she got the pink one, which is for ten years] (Personal Interview)

These are the temporary resident cards both of my parents were given after applying under the IRCA Act of 1986. This card was the second permit individuals applying for legal residency got. The first one they got was a red card similar to this one. My parents said that when they went back to get this card the INS officers shred the first permit (red mica). This one was good for three years. When this one expired after three years they went back and this time a pink colored card was issued to them. This pink card was good for ten years.

http://www.usda.gov/agency/oce/oce/labor-affairs/ircasumm.htm#Requirements

EL NORTE *April 22, 1987*

For my father, Luís Méndez Gonzalez
Luís Méndez II

I am seven years old
It is a sunny day,
The winds blow furiously.
I try to keep my straight hair from blowing over my eyes.
My mother carries my youngest sister,
her pupils full of tears,
Knowing that my father is leaving to El Norte
leaving us, a wife and three children for months,
My father carries a small gray suitcase.
When he approaches to kiss my mother
both their eyes fill with tears
and the sadness reflects through the tears running in their faces.
I am feeling deprived. My father kneels down
looks at me straight in the eyes.
He wipes his tears, pulls me towards his chest, hugging me
anxiously as if he doesn't want to leave.
With a knot in his throat he speaks in a deep voice.
"No mas lágrimas. Hijo, mientras yo esté en EL NORTE,
Tu eres el hombre de la casa.
Tienes que cuidar a tu Mamá y a tus hermanas."
Suddenly the winds carry him away through the journey of every year.
We are his family; we anxiously await his return.

My Father's Journey to El Norte

La Jabonera, Michoacán, México. A small town in the suburban areas of the State surrounded by mountains whose grasslands during the rainy season bloomed like emeralds. Birds intoned harmony and the sun rose, shining over the hill, its rays caressing men and women getting ready to start a new day. Inhabited by about one thousand people, they depended on the rainy season for sowing corn and beans, the main food for campesinos in this tiny village. Men immigrated to the United States to work in the endless strawberries fields in the Salinas valley of California, leaving their wives and children behind. Men would leave during spring and return late fall or early winter.

In the fall of 1987, my father had just arrived from the journey he would endure every year coming and going to El Norte. I was the second to my oldest sister, four children, two males and two females. "El Hombre de la casa," the man of the house, that's how my father used to called me every year he would leave to El Norte. I remembered seeing him when he arrived. I was waiting outside of the house on the side of the puddle on the muddy road. There I was standing proud of my father. The man of the house was ready to say I did a great job taking care of Mamá and my sisters. I was eight years old, straight hair, brown eyes. I wore a green shirt with a white stripe across my chest. I waited to be caught up in the arms of my hero who once again had defeated El Rio Grande crossing La Frontera to El Norte and now had made it back and reunited with his family. Full of joy my eyes flooded with tears that ran down my cheeks happy to see my father home.

Now my father would take over the responsibility as the man of the house, but I still needed to take care of my duties. At that age kids my age go to school and play with their friends, but things were a little different for me. At my age I had other

responsibilities. We had a few cows and somebody had to milk them. That was part of my contribution to the house. Every day before going to school I would wake up at 6:00 a.m, get the horse ready and head out to milk the cows. At the same time my mother would get ready to take the corn to be ground at the mill. The cold mornings would freeze my cheeks and dry my lips. Riding the horse, followed by my dog El Palomo, I listened to the morning sounds: the roosters' crows, the dogs barking, the birds chirping and the pigs grunting wanting to eat.

When I arrived at the barnyard gate, there were the cows waiting to be milked. As soon as I opened the gate one by one the cows came out happy to see their calves. It was time to squeeze their hard udders full of milk. It felt like squeezing honey from a hive. I had extracted the honey from the hive. Now I would take it home and eat breakfast and get ready for school.

When I arrived home with the milk my mama was baking the tortillas, their fresh smell welcome in the early morning. The frijoles' essence I could smell from outside the house awakened my appetite. Around 7:30 I was ready to challenge mathematics, sciences, social sciences and other subjects. I headed out for school. It was the beginning of my fourth grade. I remember riding my horse, El Cántaro, to school. The school was two brick buildings, one with three rooms and the other with four. Located in the center of the three tiny ranches all kids went there. School went from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. During this time El Cántaro waited tied to a pole outside my room close enough to keep an eye on him through the broken windows. I was short and every time I got on my horse I climbed on something that would raise me to jump on his back.

When I went home after school I would feed El Cántaro and eat before going and separating the calves from the cows. Riding my horse I would search the mountains and

hills for the cows even if it rained. In the rain wearing a yellow plastic hooded suit and raining I was on top of the world. The sun shined across a beautiful rainbow and I bravely kept riding through the hills. Galloping over the hills I viewed the three small ranchitos that surrounded the lake.

Living in rural areas in Michoacán, México, kids go to school only until sixth grade. After completing elementary school at the age of twelve, thirteen, pursuing an education was not a choice for these kids. Living in poverty forces kids to work and help to provide for the rest of the family. Now these young boys would be treated like man and dedicate themselves to full working days. In two or three years hunger and economic hardships forced fifteen year old kids to take the challenge to defeat El Rio Bravo to El Norte. A few of my cousins who were fifteen had already made it across the river and worked picking berries in the Salinas and Watsonville valleys.

In the summer of 1988, my father who had left to El Norte in early spring wrote a letter. He sent us 300 dollars earned in two weeks picking berries, ten hours a day. Briefly he addressed his letter saying, he was doing all right, he was working in the strawberry fields in Watsonville, California. For a few years I had asked my father to buy me a bike. At the end of the letter there were a few lines addressed to me. There he promised he would buy me a bike when he came back. I was so happy I hugged my mother and sisters. I couldn't wait for Papa to come home. Soon I shared the news with all my cousins and friends. The rainy season went by fast and autumn was just around the corner.

It was fall season and the men who left with my father had already come back. My uncles who worked with my father in El Norte were back and I anxiously waited for my father's return. Now it was corn season. One day I went to school and when I came

back I saw a gray suitcase in the entrance of one of the rooms. As I walked in I saw my father sitting in the table eating while talking to my mother. Dressed in black pants and a white shirt, his green blue eyes rejoiced as soon as they saw me. He stood up and we both ran towards each other and caught each other in a warm hug stretching my thin body. I was so happy that my eyes overflowed with tears running down my cheeks. I asked my dad, "Cuando me vas a comprar mi bicicleta?" [When are you buying me my new bike?] He answered, "Mañana vamos al pueblo a cambiar unos dolares y te la voy a comprar." [Tomorrow we will go and change some dollars and I will buy you your bike.]

Next morning we took our trip to buy my bike and everyone waited to see my new bike. We got to the store. I was blinded by all the bikes and I couldn't choose the one I liked. For a few minutes I looked across the big room trying to see one that would catch my eye. For a moment everything stayed quiet and across from where I was standing I saw this dark red cherry bike that read "BIMEX" across the frame. I knew this was the one I liked. Everyone loved my new bike. My older sister and I took turns riding my new bike.

It was Christmas Eve 1988 and the traditional festivities to honor Jesus's birth were being celebrated. Accompanying the big celebration was the traditional banquet food: tamales, posole, atole, ponche and tequila, all consumed against a background of music and a bonfire. Young people were dancing and having a great time. Everyone shared with neighbors, family members and friends. There everyone knew each other. We had a great time. The clock kept ticking. It was a day to have fun and celebrate a very important day in our history.

December and the lodgings or posadas make Christmas beautiful in México. It's a period of time when men who endure the annual journey to El Norte have a chance to

enjoy their loved ones and share the happy moments with their children. Swimming across the Rio Bravo, walking in the deserts of Arizona or across the Tijuana mountains does not guarantee their return. Soon spring arrived and it was time to depart. For the first time both of my parents prepared to take off. This was my mother's first time to embark on the journey. And it was our first time to be left behind to live with our grandmother.

LA FRONTERA-THE BORDER

Early in the year, we crossed the Mexican-American border
Our lives put in danger, many robbed, killed, and raped
Crossing rivers, mountains, and deserts.

Many of us lost our lives in search of the American dream.
Some of us left families behind

We crossed la Frontera, sleeping under trees.
We protected ourselves from below zero temperatures with tree leaves,

We died in the deserts of Arizona of dehydration.
We drowned in the Río Grande
And many of us froze in the mountains of Tijuana.

THE BORDER FENCE

http://www.usda.gov/agency/oce/oce/labor-affairs/ircasumm.htm#Requirements

The Annual Journey to El Norte Took My Parents

It was spring 1989. Christmas and the traditional Fiestas were gone. Lent was the last event that awaited my father and mother before their seasonal journey to El Norte. It was late April and the endless strawberry fields in Salinas and Watsonville, California, were flourishing. It was time for those who every year immigrated to the United States to start their journey in search of survival. I could feel my parents' departure.

I woke up one day, came out of my room and I saw my mother by the side of her bed, preparing a suitcase, gathering the clothes that would take them through the working season. Many thoughts crossed my mind. "Oh no, they are leaving again". Next thing I heard was my father telling my older sister, Cecilia, who was eleven years old. "*Ustedes se van a quedar en la casa de su abuelita. Les voy a llevar una cama para ustedes, como tu eres la mayor tu vas a cuidar de tus hermanos." [You guys will be staying at your grandmother's house. I will be taking a bed for you guys to sleep in. You are the oldest Cecilia, and you must take care of Luís, Lorena, and Florencio.]*

At the time I was nine, Lorena seven and Florencio five. I asked myself why we had to stay in México, why we had to separate. I thought a family always stayed together.

My father and mother both were carrying suitcases ready for the adios. My heart was broken to see them leave. As for us, we had to stay behind. I looked for an answer to my question of why we had to separate from our parents, why they were leaving. I did not understand hunger and I did not know what poverty was. I was happy I had a beautiful family. I could not understand why happy parents should leave their kids to live with their grandmother. I had a family, friends and my guitar to play with. I did not

need anything. For a kid my age, all that mattered was that I had something to eat and something to play with, but poverty was pushing my parents away from me.

When my father got home from work I would always run to the door and hug him. He would grab my cheeks and play with me. I could feel his rough hands and I thought, "Those are the hands of a man," strong as a roble. At the time I was too young to understand that those hands were the hands of the man who day after day worked hard to feed his wife and children. The corn sowing season and working as an albañil (bricklayer) the rest of the year did not pay enough to eat frijoles and tortillas every day. The only alternative and goal was to cross "La Frontera to El Norte" the border to the U.S.

I could see in my father's eyes, the hunger he felt to arise from the poverty we were living in. His rough hands felt the ambition to work hard to provide more for his children. My mother's eyes, full of tears reflected the pain she was feeling. Her eyes turned into a river of tears, her heart cried out the pain of leaving her four children. The cruel reality was pulling the love of our mother away. Suddenly she was surrounded by her four children all hugging tightly on to her legs, not wanting her to leave.

We were taken to my grandma's house. The winds anxiously blew and the birds stopped chirping and it started to rain. A rainbow crossed the blue skies and announced my parents' goodbye. The whole house was surrounded by a deep silence that reflected the sadness of my parents' departure. Lorena was crying, grabbing on to my father's legs, begging our parents to stay. Cecilia and I held on to my mother tightly, trying to clinch in to the deep hug that my mother secured us with. Florencio in his innocence could not understand why our parents were leaving us behind. It was sad knowing that

our parents would be departing from us, not knowing when they would return. Their journey of a few months for us seemed eternal.

Finally the moment had arrived for the last good-bye. I felt a knot in my throat and a deep tightness in my heart. I screamed my poor little heart out. I felt trapped in a cage where I did not have any control and could not hold my parents. I felt the necessity for an answer. I was trying to hold my parents from going away, but hunger and the necessity to survive were stronger than a nine-year-old boy. Suddenly the winds carried them away through the journey of the year. We, their four children, anxiously awaited their return.

It Was My Turn to Come

Birds migrate for better nesting and food and to look for better living conditions. Humans leave for a better way of living, survival and better opportunities. "Migration is an important movement of people in response to political situations, natural disasters, or other compelling factors" (Botkin & Keller 93). Humans immigrate to improve their living standards and their children's living conditions. For many immigrants the first place that comes to mind is undisputable: the United States of America. A great number of people might ask why the United States and not any other place. "There were probably as many reasons for coming to America as there were people who came. They were responding, in their own way, to the pledge of the Declaration of Independence: The promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Kennedy 6). People from Michoacan have a long history of immigrating to the United States.

Since the early 1900s men and entire families had immigrated to the United States. Immigration history in my family runs back three generations. My grandfathers came with the Bracero Program in the early 1950s. My father came in the 1970s and then both of my parents came in 1987. I came in 1991. Immigration awakened and opened new frontiers and new horizons for people in Michoacán to escape México's economic hardships. The new world beckoned to all of us, the land of liberty and freedom and justice for all. Another way to examine this migration, however, might be to say that the American Dream dragged Michoacanos from their land.

http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~amc/statue-of-liberty.jpg

"Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me.

I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

The Mexican economic crisis following the 1986 earthquake made the whole country shake. Small rural communities in the state of Michoacán suffered the consequences, forcing people to immigrate to the U.S. They started the immigration journey early in the year and returned in the fall after working eight months picking berries in California. They worked six days a week and sometimes even Sundays from sunrise until sunset.

My father, who is the second generation in his family to immigrate to the U.S., had gone through the journey to the United States for seventeen years since 1973. For thirteen years, he left for eight months every year. In 1987 both of my parents left. My

mother endured the journey to El Norte for four years, going back and forth leaving her four children to stay with our grandmother, Carmen.

My older sister was nine and my baby brother was two. My other sister was five and I was seven. For four years we watched my parents leave to a place called El Norte, while we stayed behind in México. We wondered how they could leave us in our little town of La Jabonera, Michoacán, and travel to a strange place called Salinas, California. Our innocence made us ignorant to the environment we lived in. A boy my age could not understand the poverty that we lived in. The arid roads and towns left behind by the wind looked sad and alone. Everyone left to El Norte except for the small children and older people who most of the time would take care of the children while their parents were gone.

In September 1990, after returning from their most recent journey to El Norte, my parents told us that this was the last year they would leave us behind to live with our grandmother in México.

> Este fue el último año que se quedaron con su abuelita por que su Mamá y Yo hemos pensado que los vamos a llevar con nosotros el próximo año. [This was the last year you guys stayed with your grandmother. Your Mother and I have talked and we have decided that you guys are coming with us next year.]

The following year it was my turn to come to El Norte. The arrangements were made for our departure to El Norte, but unfortunately my parents could not afford to bring the four of us at once. The decision was made. Florencio, now six, and I, at age ten, were coming because we were more naughty. My two sisters would stay with our grandma for the time being until our parents could bring them.

It was Christmas 1990 and less than two weeks before our departure. I could see this was a big step for my parents to make this decision. New Year's Eve and two days awaited our departure. The tension could be smelled in the air. The wind blew furiously in advance of our journey to El Norte.

My grandmother was concerned and asked my parents what if La Migra enforcement did not allow us to cross the border. What if something bad happened to the two boys. Other family members and neighbors who came to visit said, "You guys are the next family to leave and God knows when we will see you all again." My parents were determined to bring us.

My mother prepared our luggage in suitcases. One day before we left to El Norte I helped my mother pack, making sure she brought all my things. They told me I would go to school in El Norte. I made sure my mom brought my school papers, my birth certificate and the immunization card log. In small cardboard boxes we brought Mexican bread, cheese and a variety of candy. My mother brought her Mexican food specialty recipes and dried chiles for the mole, my father's favorite food. I felt happy because I was coming to El Norte. In the plastic bag where I carried my books to school I put my marbles and my slingshot but my mother told me I could not bring them. At that point I started crying. I thought I could bring anything I wanted including the marbles and the slingshot. My mother said, "No, para qué vas a llevar eso. Allá también hay, y más bonitas que las que tu tienes." [In El Norte you will find all of that and even more prettier than the ones you have]

January 2, 1991, my journey to California began. Coming to this country at a very young age my biggest fear was whether I would ever go back to my homeland. For me it was hard because I was blind to this new world and I did not know what to leave and

what to bring. I could not bring any of my animals, my horse El Cántaro, my dog El Palomo, my roosters. My treasures could not come along with me. A strong feeling for them had grown inside me because I saw them as part of my family. Coming to this country was hard. I wanted to bring everything.

I was ten years old and I was on my way to El Norte. Around 5:00 P.M. on a Wednesday my uncle Alberto drove us to the bus station in his 1973 blue Ford pick up. I perched happily sitting on the right side of the pick up bed anxious to depart. Earlier we had gone to our maternal grandmother's house to say goodbye and to leave Cecilia and Lorena, my two sisters. I was happy to know I would not be separated from Mom and Dad. As we drove away from the small community I said adiós to our neighbors who came out to see us leave. One more time they were witnessing another family leave, only this time we were the family leaving.

Our little ranchito of La Jabonera had about 70 houses. Of these, about 70% of the families had immigrated to El Norte. At night it was a ghost town, no one on the streets. The only sounds accompanying the night were the dogs barking and the coyotes howling. All the houses were empty and locked where families had left to California. Of the remaining 30% most of the men had immigrated leaving families behind. Now it was just women, small children and the older men staying to take care of the houses.

My uncle took us from La Jabonera, our tiny community, to the bus station at Purepero. The bus station read "Camiones Del Norte." My dad paid for the bus tickets for the coach that would take us. At 6:00 p.m. El Tres Estrellas de Oro idled outside the station waiting for us to board. From Purepero, we went to La Piedad and from La Piedad to Guadalajara, Jalisco. It took us two days and two nights to get to the border. From Guadalajara we took a bus that eventually would take us to La Frontera.

We were going to El Norte. At the Central in Tepic, Nayarit, the bus driver told us we had twenty minutes and then we would be on our way. Two boys, the older around my age and the other around seven or eight years old, came on board. One had a little guitar and the other had a box of gum. Each had a hat on and a little sarape across his shoulders. Their eyes looked tired as if they had not slept for two days. The dry sweat down their cheeks left spots of dirt on their poor faces. The older one started playing his little guitar while the small boy sang a song. "Te vas, angel mío, ya vas a partir, dejando mi alma herida y un corazón a sufrir. Te vas, y me dejas un inmenzo dolor."

When he finished the song everyone on the bus was happy and some one from the back of the bus screamed "Otra, otra, otra." This time they sang "Cruz de Olvido: "Con el atardecer me iré de aquí me iré sin ti, me alejaré de ti con un dolor dentro de mi." Everyone was cheered by the little boys. Now the small boy with his box of gum came to every passenger selling his gums. The older one with his hat asked for a few pesos for them to keep working.

On our way out of Tepic, I remembered it must have been around 1:00 A.M. and three small boys, naked and without shoes, played and ran on the street. For the first time I saw boys who were poorer than I was. As young as I was I could understand why so many of us made our way to El Norte. Other homeless people watched people come and leave the bus station, loitering hoping to get a few pesos to buy something to eat. In my ranchito in Michoacán I did not realize that we were poor because everyone was and worked the same. My journey to El Norte was opening my eyes to the reality of poverty in México. Every town we passed by was marked by poverty; people living in houses built of cardboard and plastic sacks. Poverty was the main reason everyone was coming to El Norte.

On Friday when we arrived at the Central bus station at the border in Mexicali, my father called my uncle Manuel, who was living in Mecca, California, a small community and hour and forty five minutes away from La Frontera. My uncle told my father to take a taxi to a hotel two blocks away from the border named "Hotel Plaza." We went to the hotel and waited for my uncle to come to meet us. After about three hours my uncle Manuel, my aunt Antonia, and their daughter Hilda along with three family friends arrived. Herlindo, Ricardo and Meño, my uncle's friends came to help in anything they could. My mother, Florencio and I waited in the hotel room, while my father and my uncle wonder looking for a coyote to cross Florencio and me over the border. My uncle was familiar with some of the coyotes and it was easy for them to find one. In less than an hour they came back and told us to get ready because we would try to cross La Frontera to El Norte that same day.

El Chino was the coyote who agreed to cross Florencio and me over the border for $ 75 dollars each. It was Friday afternoon. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people were going from one side of the border to the other. The plan was that my father would cross first. That way he could wait for us on the other side while he kept an eye on us. It was my turn to cross the border illegally. I remembered the stories my father once told me about crossing La Frontera illegally. Now it was my turn to defeat La Migra. I remembered I was wearing a green jacket my father had brought for me the previous year he came back from El Norte. El Chino said because my jacket had English words this could attract the attention of La Migra and they might talk to me and ask me questions. He took my jacket away. El Chino gave me a bunch of newspapers and told me to hold them under my arm. My role was to cross the border pretending I was selling newspapers.

As I walked between cars waiting to cross the border, cars idled waiting for the gate to open. I got confused. I had never been to a big city and I got intimidated by thousands of eyes staring at me. Suddenly I found myself right on the borderline where Immigration Officers checked people for their green card. An officer told me I could not sell my newspapers over the borderline and told me to go back. I walked back looking for Chino's eyes looking at me angrily as if I had done something wrong. When I walked back El Chino was pissed and all I remembered him telling me was, "Muchacho pendejo, hijo de tu pinche Madre, como eres menso." [You stupid dumb boy, you fool]. He was so angry that he probably felt like hitting me. He took me back where my mother and my aunt were waiting on the Mexican side of the border. Since I could not cross he would try crossing my brother first. El Chino would try to cross Florencio riding along with him on a bicycle. The sixth-year-old boy sat on the bike's bar frame crossing to Calexico, California.

On the other side my father watched Florencio enjoying the bike ride across La Frontera. El Chino took my brother where my father was waiting. Florencio had made it over. Now I would try to cross for the second time. This time we did it differently. This time El Chino gave me a gallon of water and a piece of cloth. I was to pretend I was washing windshields. I walked up towards the borderline checkpoints carrying a piece of cloth and the gallon of water. Hordes of people walked returning to México in massive numbers making two lines. I dropped the rug and the gallon of water and started to walk in the opposite direction in between the two lines of people exiting the U.S. I walked heading to the other side of the border where my father awaited me. Everyone returning to México did not notice the ten-year-old boy walking, crossing La Frontera to El Norte.

I managed to go through and on to other side of the border where my father and uncle waited for me.

January 5, 1991. I made it across. I was in Calexico, California. I got to a game arcade, trying not to be too obvious. My uncle Manuel changed a dollar and gave me four quarters to play while we all reunited. My mother and aunt were on the Mexican side of the border and they needed to come over. After they joined us, we went on our way to Mecca, California. About three miles from the border we ate at a McDonalds. This was the first time I ever ate a Big Mac.

We were only a few miles away from the border. I had won the first battle. Our next challenge was to defeat the INS revision point just past Niland, California. We headed towards our destination; Highway 111 would take us to Mecca if everything went all right. Seven of us rode in my uncle's 1973 blue coupe Buick LeSabre. My uncle Manuel drove and Hilda and my aunt were in the front seat. Both of my parents, Florencio and I were riding in the back seat.

While eating at McDonalds my father, my uncle and the three other friends planned everything. The plan was to wait until the INS agents at the revision at Niland were relieve by the next shift INS agents. Between the shifts there was a chance for us to deceive the agents and cross without getting caught. In order to make sure everything went as we planned the three friends drove in front of us about a mile or so. If they saw something wrong or if the red cones on the road narrowed the road off to the checkpoint they would pull over and open the hood.

This would be an indication warning us if the INS agents were at the revision station. It was about 5:00 P.M. and it was time for the day shift agents to be relieved. All of us in the car were praying, hoping there was no one at the revision. The straight

deserted road was quiet. It seemed that the only objects moving were my uncle's car and the car in front of us. Fifteen minutes past five and we could see the off ramp towards the checkpoint. There were no cones in the road directing traffic off the highway to the checkpoint ramp. The car in front of us sped up when they noticed it was clear and we could go through. We had almost passed the checkpoint when suddenly an INS van sped up and passed us to get ready to set up at the checkpoint. We made it before they could redirect traffic to the revision. We were an hour away from our destination.

Approximately 6:30 P.M January 5, 1991, we arrived in Mecca, California. My journey to El Norte and crossing La Frontera illegally had been a success. I had defeated La Migra. The border that once took my parents away from me now would no longer separate me from my parents.

Conclusion:

My grandfather came in the fifties not because he wanted to come but because of the situation he lived in. Living in poverty, in an adobe house he built, the ceiling almost falling on them. During the rainy season the house leak like a sieve. These living conditions forced people to come to El Norte. He lived day-to-day always worrying about having something to eat for the next day. When my grandfather had three or four children he had to choose among his children who could wear a shirt and no pants or pants and no shirt: Everyone went bare foot; he could not afford to buy shoes for them. The Mexican economic crisis pushed away my grandfather. The same economic reasons forced my father to endure the journey to El Norte. Soon after the same reasons pushed my entire family to come to the United States.

Coming to the United States was a successful victory for each generation. First it provided my grandfather a chance to come and work to earn money to go back to México and be able to build a new house. With his saving from working in the U.S. he could offer his family better living conditions. In one day he could earn what he would earn in México in one week. The Bracero Program brought other benefits to my grandfathers as well. Those included government benefits such as unemployment, retirement and health insurance benefits.

For my parents the most significant benefit was the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 through which they obtained legal status. Thanks to the IRCA, in 1986 my parents were granted legal residency. This gave them most of the rights U.S. citizens have and the right to government benefits. Most importantly, acquiring legal status for both of my parents gave their children the opportunity to immigrate to the U.S.

Immigrating with all my family brought many benefits to our lives. The most important benefit was access to an education that in México would have been impossible to obtain. For me, that also meant the opportunity to go to college and obtain a higher education.

The sacrifices my parents and both my grandfathers made were for the future of their children and generations to come. We may have lost the comfort of familiar surroundings and friendships that stretched back for generations, not to mention a language and a way of life unavailable in the U.S.

The gains, however outweigh those looses. We recognize the long-term advantages to living in a country that provides us with opportunities currently unavailable in our country of origin. Only when the day comes that Mexicans can obtain those same benefits in México will the tide of immigration slow.

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Appendix: A

The following graph substantiates the “migratory tradition” of certain states, among which stands out particularly Michoacan, Jalisco and Guanajuato. (Mraz, Velez 45)

States	1943 %	1944 %	1945 %	1946 %
Durango	0.73	2.19	2.56	11.44
Guanajuato	17.09	4.39	5.38	...
Guerrero	1.20	1.57	3.85	...
Hidalgo	1.40	1.48	1.65	3.83
Jalisco	5.34	...	0.87	8.70
Estado de México	0.96	2.03	1.00	...
Michocán	26.73	4.39	6.25	...
Morelos	0.64	1.10	0.45	1.85
Oaxaca	...	2.04	6.35	6.56
Querétaro	...	1.55	1.69	...
San Luis Potosí	4.07	1.98	...	3.81
Tabasco	0.63	1.32	2.56	4.19
Veracruz	...	2.16	3.93	...
Yucatán	...	...	0.25	...
Zacatecas	5.86	1.10	8.28	37.95

Number of men contracted in Mexico:			
1943	1944	1945	1946
76,181	118,182	104,487	26,214

Graph of the percentage of braceros from the various states between 1943 to 1949

Appendix: B

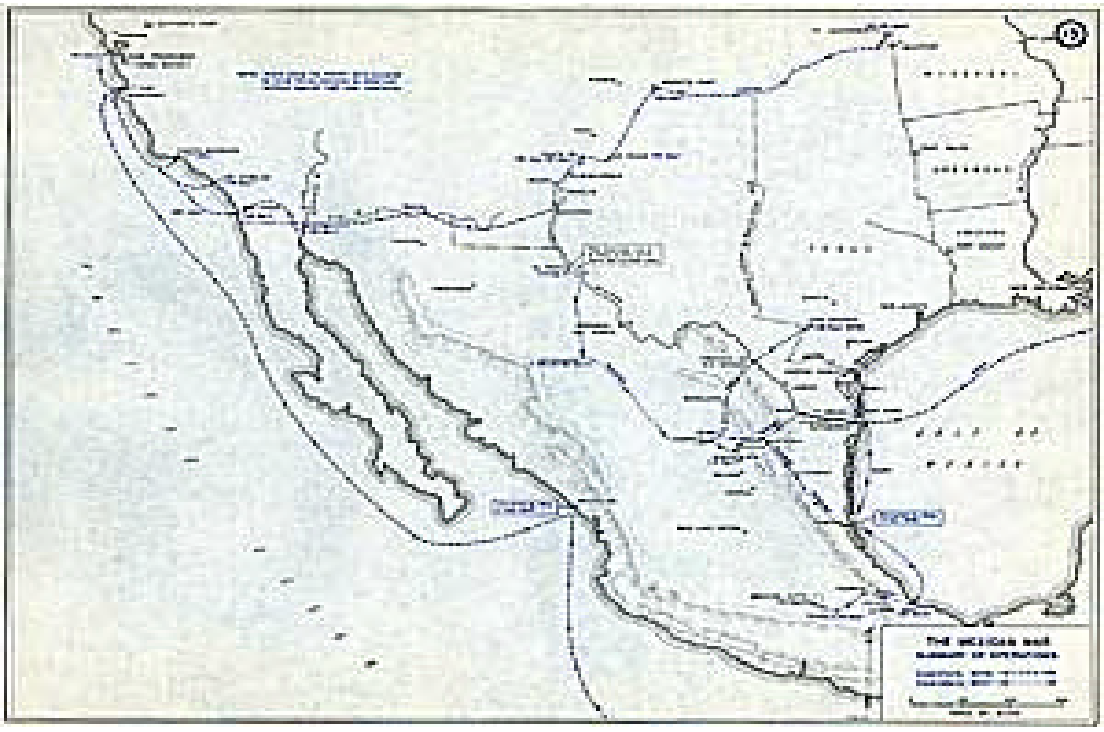
The following graph substantiates the number of Mexican Foreign Workers Admitted Under the Bracero Program, 1942-1964 (Calavita 218).

Appendix B. Mexican Foreign Workers Admitted Under the Bracero Program, 1942–1964

Year	No. Admitted	Year	No. Admitted
1942	4,203	1954	309,033
1943	52,098	1955	398,650
1944	62,170	1956	445,197
1945	49,454	1957	436,049
1946	32,043	1958	432,857
1947	19,632*	1959	437,643
1948	35,345*	1960	315,846
1949	107,000*	1961	291,420
1950	67,500*	1962	194,978
1951	192,000	1963	186,865
1952	197,100	1964	177,736
1953	201,380		

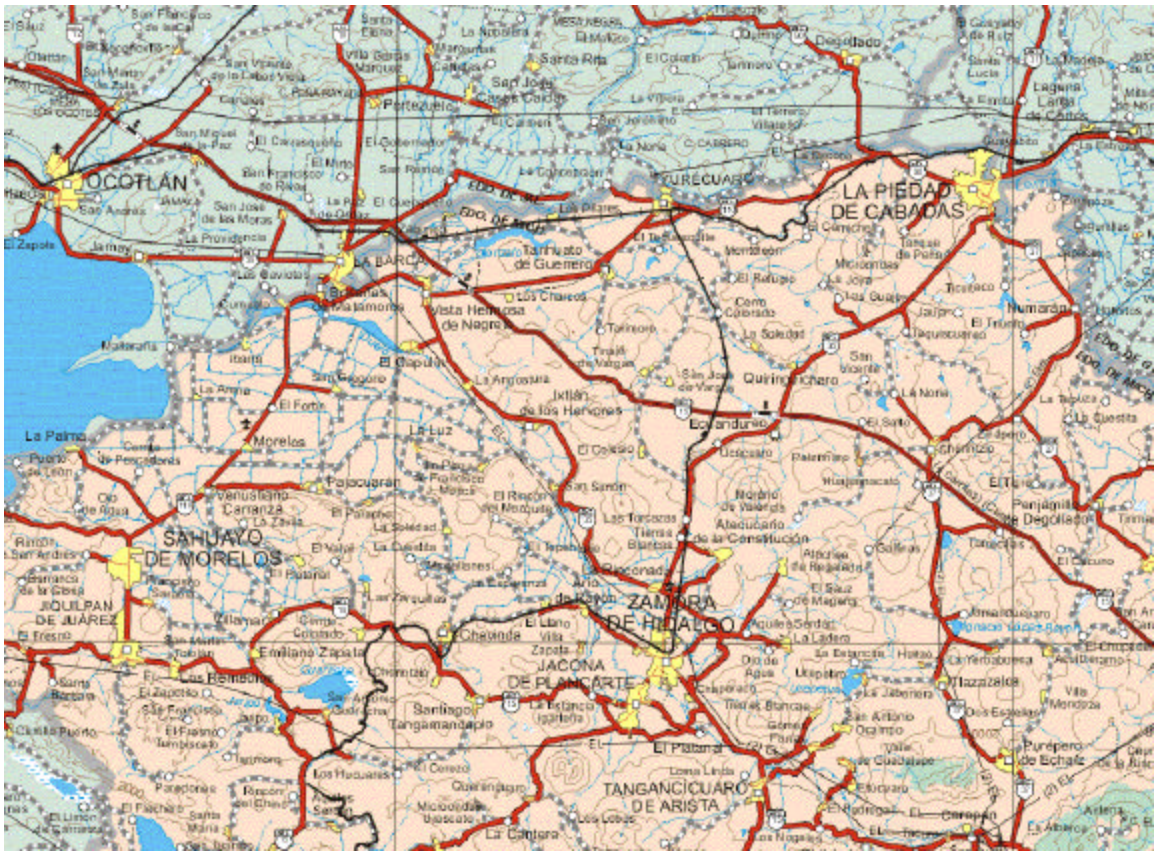
Source: Congressional Research Service, 1980a, p. 65.

Appendix: C



MEXICO-U.S. MAP

Appendix: D



MICHOACAN MAP

Prospectus

Sec. 1

Beginning from the 1950s the Bracero Program and the oral histories of illegal immigrants crossing La Frontera through the journey of every year. I will conduct a set of interviews with both of my grandfather who are former braceros and illegal immigrants who coma from the rural areas from the state of Michoacán, México. My research objective is to document my own family history. I will document the stories of illegal immigrants who every year risk their lives' crossing the border through El Rio Grande, the Arizona deserts and the mountains of Tijuana.

My research will focus on immigrants coming from the State of Michoacán, México. This research will provide an overview of the immigrant journey, starting with their departure from their little towns. Arriving to La Frontera and crossing it illegally and working in the Agriculture in the Salinas Valley, and the Watsonville surrounding agricultural areas.

The research will also be focus on a time frame that starts from the 1950s up to today. The reason for this is to analyze immigration cultural, social and political reasons that forces immigrants to leave their homeland. I will also examine the immigration laws and how these affect Mexican immigrants in the United States.

Sec. 2

In order to accomplish my research goal I intend to integrate the following MLOs to my research. The firsts MLO I will apply for my research is MLO 2; MLO 2, explores and examines the shape of historical events throughout different events in history. It presumes to have different abilities to acquire information on a question or problem and present it through the different informational methods. The second is MLO 5: relates to

find information for multicultural and diverse and ethical relations among a diverse society. This MLO provides the tools to investigate a specific cultural group and their identities to have a better understanding of their social and cultural values of immigrants coming to America. This was something that attracted me, to explore those reasons of why my own family immigration history. The third is MLO 8. This MLO has great attributes that I am looking for to explore and to put my creative writing skills into practice. Be creative with the involvement of the community and gather creative and artistic ways of presenting different materials scholastically and professionally.

Sec. 3

1). What are historical trends of immigration to the United States from Mexico.

2). Research the social, political and economic reasons why immigrants leave their homeland.

3). What are the immigrants living conditions in México.

4). Is there organizations that protect immigration rights.

5). What are both governments doing to protect the lives of immigrants crossing the border.

6). How immigration laws affect illegal immigrants.

7). Why illegal Mexican immigrants are blame every time something happens in the U.S.

8). What is the average day like for immigrants, specifically farm workers from Mexico

9). Why immigrants leave their home country and come to the United States.

10). Who is most affected when parents leave their families behind.

Sec. 4

Luis Mendez. Personal interview. 12-26-2001

Miguel Mendez. Personal interview. 12-27-2001

David Montejano. Personal interview. 01-08-2002

Ramón Fernandez. Personal interview. 01-12-2002

Edauto Rocha. Personal interview. 02-07-2002

Other sources are derived from personal experience and other primary sources, which include a set of poems.

Secondary materials are mainly books and some of these titles include:

1). The Fence and the River

2). U.S Immigration and Naturalization Laws and Issues

3). Crossing Over

4). Border People

5). Between the Lines

6). The debate in the United States over Immigration

7). Undocumented Immigration to California: 1980-1993

8). Children of Immigration

9). Dead in their Tracks

10). Debating American Immigration 1882- Present

11). Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant

12). Coyotes

Sec. 5

Research Plan

A). Statistics

B). Facts

C). News

D). Examples

E). Primary sources

F). A set of Personal Interviews.

G). A set of Poems.

Sec. 6

I have taking previous HCOM courses that have provided me with different skill on how to approach my capstone project. I had the opportunity of doing presentations using multimedia, video clips and other sorts of technology. My project will be a product of a documentary focusing on immigrants from Michoacán, México.